The brand image of professional sport teams – an analysis of relevant brand benefits and the relevance of brand personality

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Abstract

Professional sports have emerged as a rewarding business with many opportunities to prosper. The aim of professional sport teams is to create a strong brand, which influences the behavioural intention of actual and potential fans. The image of a brand influences behavioural intentions. A brand image is the cumulative product of brand associations in consumers´ minds. There are four different types of brand associations: brand attributes, brand personality, brand benefits and attitudes. Benefits are essential for the success of a band. Nostalgia, escape, social interaction, emotions, team success, aesthetics, eustress and atmosphere are relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams. A research deficit in the field of brand personality of professional sport teams is identified. It can be assumed that the brand personality is of high relevance for the behavioural intention of actual and potential fans.

First of all this paper integrates the brand image in the identity-based brand management approach. Furthermore relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams are presented. Based on the self-congruity theory the relevance of brand personality is analysed.

1. Introduction

Professional sports have emerged as a rewarding business with many opportunities to prosper (Gladden and Funk 2002; Kaynak, Salman and Tatoglu 2008). Sport managers are beginning to view their teams as brands to be managed. The aim of professional sport teams is to create a strong brand, which influences the behaviour of actual and potential fans (Gladden and Funk 2001). A strong brand ensures the loyal behaviour of these groups even when the team has a losing season. As a result of such loyalty, a price premium can be charged (Aaker 1991). Furthermore a strong team sport brand creates opportunities for product extensions beyond the core product (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993). New products such as team related merchandise stores and restaurants in close proximity to the venue enable the team to create additional revenue. Strong brands also allow the team to offer brand extensions across geographic boundaries. For example, the German soccer team FC St. Pauli offered merchandising products at the Roskilde Festival in Denmark.

The image of a sport team brand influences the behavioural intention of actual and potential fans (Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Ross 2006, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). "Brand image is the cumulative product of brand associations in the consumers mind." (Keller 1993) Following the brand image conceptualization by Burmann and Stolle (2007) there are four different types of brand associations: brand attributes, brand personality, brand benefits and attitudes. Benefits are essential for the success of a brand (Keller 1993). Therefore the current research is extensively focussed on brand benefits of professional sport teams (e.g. Wann 1995, Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Trail and James 2001, Koo and Hardin 2008, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). However the relevance of brand personality is not evaluated in the current research (see chapter 3). The aim of this paper is a) to identify relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams and b) to analyse the relevance of brand personality for the behavioural intention of actual and potential sport team fans.

In the next chapter the brand image will be integrated in the identity-based brand management approach. Using a literature based analysis relevant benefits will be identified (chapter 3). Based on the self-congruity theory the relevance of brand personality for professional sport teams will be analyzed in chapter 4.

2. Identity-based brand management approach

A brand is defined as a "bundle of benefits, i.e. an object with other dimensions added in order to differentiate it sustainably in some way from another object designed to satisfy the same need." (Burmann, Hegner and Riley 2009)

Developing and implementing a brand identity is the key for building strong brands (Aaker 1996). The idea is that an external promise to the marketplace has little meaning if it is not based on shared values of internal stakeholders (like players, coaches, management) and if it is not lived out in the internal structures, processes and in the culture of the organization (Burmann and Riley 2008, de Chernatony and McDonald 2003). Therefore the identity-based brand management approach differentiates between brand image and brand identity. The meaning of brand identity is based on Erikson´s work (Erikson 1959). Erikson differentiates his identity research whether identity refers to the individual or to a social group (Erikson 1959). Brand identity is therefore considered as a form of group identity, which is expressed by a set of commonly shared values, competences, origin, vision, communication style and behaviour (Burmann and Meffert 2005).

The second dimension of the proposed model is the brand image (see figure 1). It is established and held as a mental construct by members of the external target groups. Brand images results from processing brand relevant information emanating from the internal target groups of the brand (Kapferer 2004).
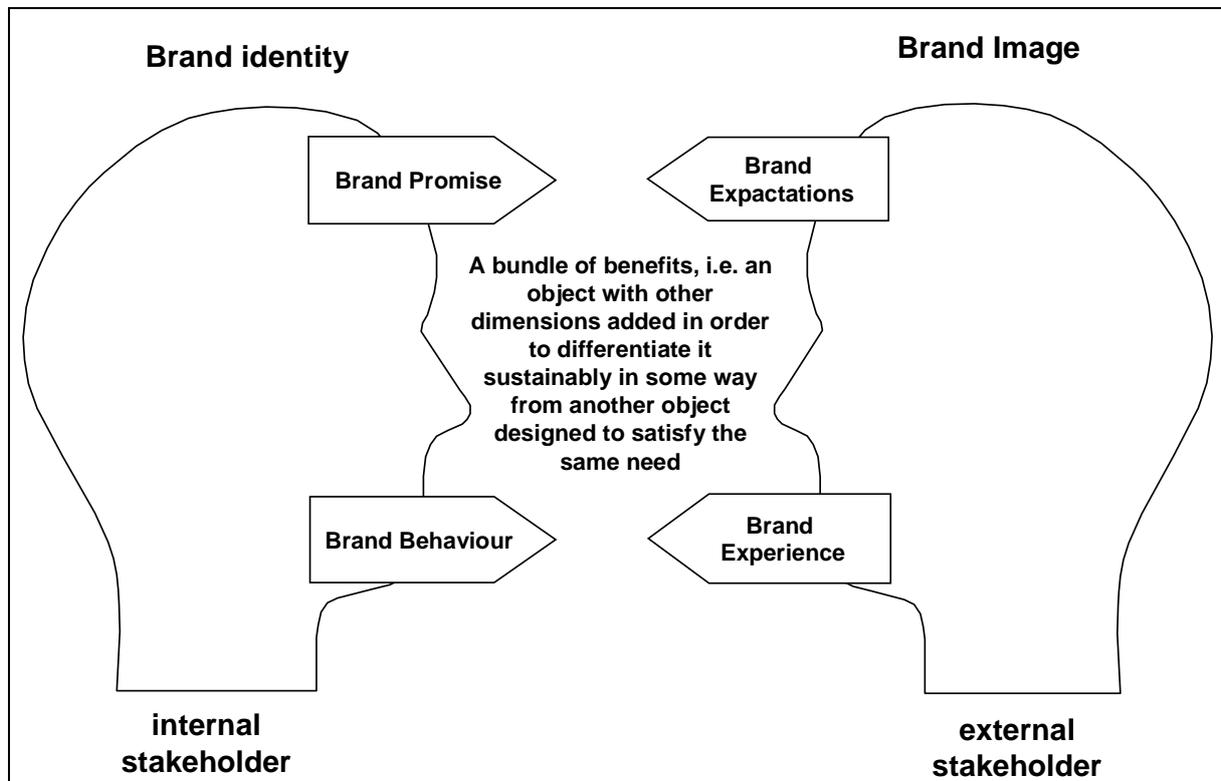

Figure 1: The fundamental understanding of identity based brand management

Source: Meffert, Burmann and Kirchgeorg 2008, p. 359.

The process of communicating the brand promise to external customers is called brand positioning. The brand promise determines the brand expectations held by external target groups. It must be kept by employees through consistent behaviour at all brand touch points to ensure that the brand experience of external target groups is in line with their brand expectations. For that reason the match of brand promise and brand behaviour has frequently been assumed in recent research (de Chernatony and Harris 2000, Dunn and Davis 2003).

In the next step the brand image dimensions will be explained. Figure 2 shows the relation between brand attributes, brand personality, brand benefits and brand attitudes.
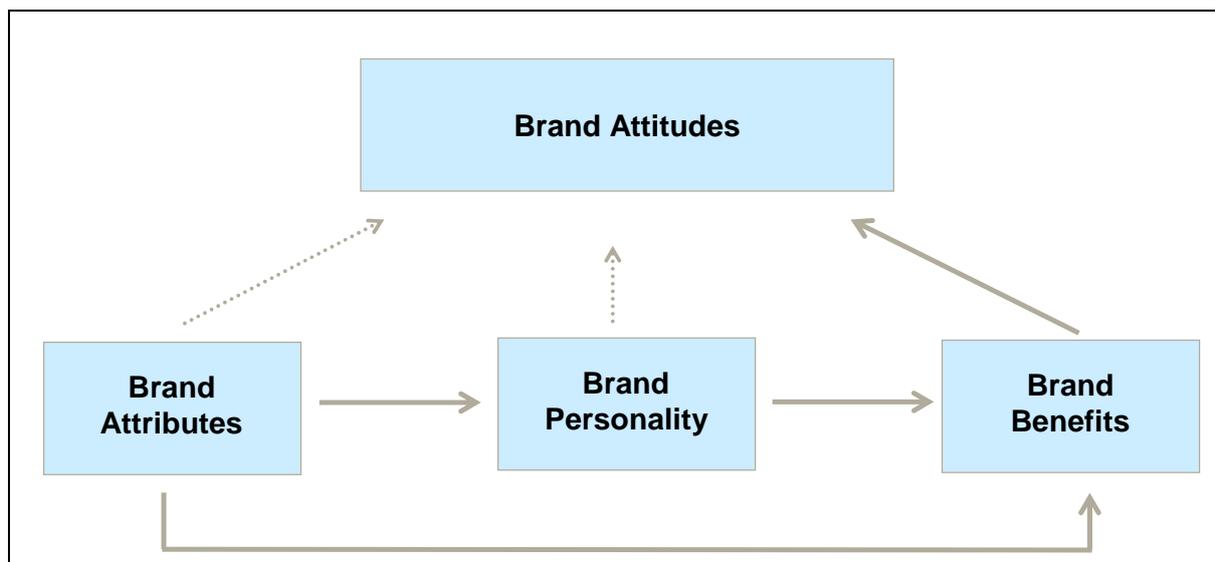
Figure 2: Brand Image Conceptualization

Source: modified from Burmann and Stolle 2007, p. 69

Brand associations take different forms. One way to distinguish among brand associations is by their level of abstraction (Keller 1993). Along this dimension brand associations can be classified into four major categories of increasing scope: attributes, personality, benefits and attitudes (Burmann and Stolle 2007). "Attributes are those descriptive features that characterize a product" (Keller 1993). Keller (1993) distinguishes between two types of attributes: product-related and non-product-related. Product-related attributes are seen as the components necessary for the functions expected by consumers. In contrast, non-product-related are defined as external aspects of the product that relate to its purchase or consumption. Brand attributes determine the brand personality and the brand benefits (Burmann and Stolle 2007). Brand personality is defined as a "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker 1997). Benefits "are the personal value consumers attach to the product or service attributes – that is, what consumers think the product or service can do for them" (Keller 1993). So benefits are essential for the success of a brand. "Brand attitudes are defined as consumers overall evaluations of a brand." (Keller 1993)

3. Relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams

Two studies that conceptualized and operationalized brand image in the team-sport industry are important here: Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002) developed the team association model (TAM). This model was enhanced by Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008). The TAM considers brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitudes.

The product-related brand attributes represent the core product: So all the people and outcomes that are directly related to the actual games are labelled as product-related attributes. Success, team performance, star player, team members, and head coach are defined as product related attributes (Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). Non product related attributes are external aspects of the core product that are relevant to its consumption and, consequently, influence perceptions of the sport-team brand. These are management, logo and club colours, stadium, club history and tradition, club culture and values, fans, sponsors, and regional provenance (Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008).

Three types of benefits are suggested by the literature: functional, symbolic and experiential benefits (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986). Functional benefits are motivating the search for products that solve consumption related problems. Because sport spectatorship is not related to solving consumption related problems, functional benefits are not included in the TAM (Gladden and Funk 2001, 2002, Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler 2008). Symbolic benefits derive from products that fulfil internally generated needs like self-enhancement or group membership (Keller 1993). Experiential benefits are obtained from products that provide sensory and emotional pleasure or cognitive stimulation (Keller 1993). The TAM is focussed on symbolic and experiential benefits.

Gladden and Funk (2001, 2002) and Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008) identified four relevant benefits: nostalgia, escape, social interaction and emotions. Furthermore they investigated pride in place, peer group acceptance, identification and entertainment.

"Pride in place", or fans affiliation with a hometown team due to its ability to represent that city, have a weak relationship with brand attitude (Gladden and Funk 2002). "Peer group acceptance" has a weak relationship, too (Gladden and Funk 2002). Following Sloan (1989) "identification" is a result of brand benefits and not a brand benefit. "Entertainment" is a generic benefit, which contains other benefits, like "escape" or "emotions" (Trail and James 2001, Sloan 1989). Therefore the benefits mentioned above are not considered in this study.

The benefit "nostalgia" refers to a "longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with the days of yore" (Holbrook, 1993). People tend to use sport as an "escape" from their daily troubles and routines (Wann 1995). Gladden and Funk (2002) observed a strong relationship between these two benefits and brand attitude.

"Social interaction" refers to developing and maintaining relations with other fans (Swanson et al. 2003). Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008) observed a strong relationship between "social interaction" and brand attitude.

Sport elicits strong "emotions". Sport fans regularly experience joy, pride as well as anger, frustration or worry. Moreover, fans act out these emotions with less restraint in comparison with other social settings. A strong relationship between the benefit "emotions" and brand attitude is identified by Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008). The TAM does not consider other relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams. So in the next step the TAM will be enhanced by other relevant brand benefits.

Greenstein and Marcum (1981) found that 25% of variance in attendance could be attributed to team performance in major league baseball. In explaining consumption behaviour, winning can relate to an internalized positive self definition by the fans (Campbell, Aiken and Kent, 2004). This phenomenon is called basking in reflected glory (BIRG) (Sloan 1989; Cialdini et al. 1976). Spectators, whose loyalty depends on BIRGing are called "fair weather-fans" (Trail et al., 2003). In contrast the loyalty of so called "die-hard fans" does not depend on team success and the BIRGing-effect (Branscombe and Wann, 1991). To increase the loyalty of "fair weather-fans" even when the team has a losing season, other relevant brand benefits should be communicated.

"Aesthetics" indicates appreciation for the beauty, grace and skill associated with the sport team (Koo and Hardin 2008). Trail and James (2001) found, that "aesthetics" significantly correlated with the number major league baseball games attended. Wann (1995) identified a

significant positive correlation between "aesthetics" and the enjoyment for watching basketball games.

Following the "stress and stimulation seeking theory" some level of stress is sought by the organism (Sloan 1989). The modern society has not enough exciting variability and watching sport allows people to experience "eustress". "Eustress is a positive form of stress that stimulates and energizes an individual" (Wann, Schrader and Wilson, 1999). Koo and Hardin (2008) identified a positive correlation between "eustress" and behavioural intentions in college basketball.

The "atmosphere" in the stadium is also a relevant brand benefit. Uhrich (2008) found that 25% of variance in attendance could be attributed to the "atmosphere" in German Fußball Bundesliga. Figure 3 shows the identified brand attributes and relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams.
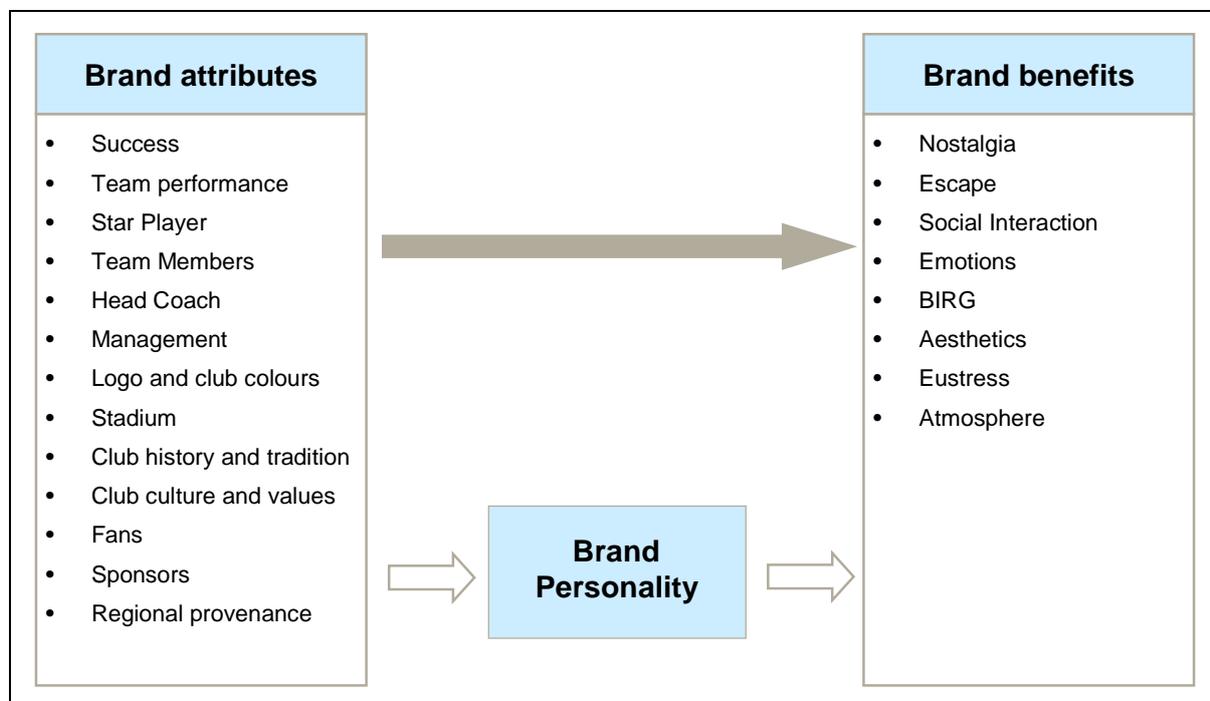

Figure 3: Components of the image of professional sport teams

Source: modified from Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008), p. 211.

Practitioners view the brand personality as a key way to differentiate a brand (McCracken 1989, Aaker 1997, Plummer 2000, Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf 2009) and as a central driver of consumer preference and usage (Biel 1993). Furthermore a brand personality enables a consumer to express his or her own self or ideal self through the use of a brand (Graeff 1996, Batra, Lehmann and Singh 1993, Malhotra 1988, Sirgy 1982, 1986). The brand personality is not considered in the TAM and the current research of professional sport team brands. Exceptions are the studies by Ross (2008) and Carlson, Donavan and Cumsikey (2009). Ross (2008) examined the applicability of Aaker´s brand personality scale (BPS) (1997) in the context of professional team sport. The BPS contains five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The results of Ross´ study suggest that the BPS is not fully applicable to the area of sport. Carlson, Donavan and Cumsikey (2009) developed an own brand personality for professional sport teams. This

scale contains five dimensions: wholesome, charming, successful, imaginative and tough. However the validity of this scale is not empirically checked. In the current research a valid brand personality scale for professional sport teams does not exist. Beyond that finding the relevance of brand personality for the behavioural intention of actual and potential fans is not empirically examined. This paper focuses on the second research deficit. In the next chapter the relevance of brand personality for professional sport teams will be derived from self-congruity theory by Sirgy (1982, 1986).

4. The self-congruity effect by professional sport teams

Self-concept is defined as "the totality of an individuals feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). Self-congruity is made up of two components, namely brand personality and self-concept. It can be defined as the perceived match between brand personality and self-concept. (Sirgy 1986). The self-concept is extremely important and valuable to individuals, and they are expected to behave in ways that protect and enhance their self-concept (Sirgy 1982, Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto 2009). So consumers are able to strengthen their self-concept by buying and using brands whose brand personality is congruent with important aspects of one´s own self-concept.

Rosenberg (1979) distinguishes between four self concepts: a) actual self-concept is an image an individual has of himself or herself; b) ideal self-concept is an image one aspires to have; c) social self-concept is an image involving beliefs how one is viewed by others; and d) ideal social self-concept is an image one aspires others to have of himself or herself. According to the four self-concepts, four self-congruence motives exist (see figure 4). The first is the need for self-consistency as a motivational tendency serving to ensure consistency between one´s actual self-concept and related attitudes or behaviours (Johar and Sirgy 1991). This motive contains a social facet. The need for social consistency can be defined as a motive to develop or maintain attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with the social self-concept. The greater the congruence between the brand personality and the ideal self-concept, the greater the satisfaction of self-esteem needs (Higgins 1987, Johar and Sirgy 1991). The last motive is the need for social approval. The greater the congruence between the brand personality and the ideal self-concept, the greater the satisfaction of social approval needs.
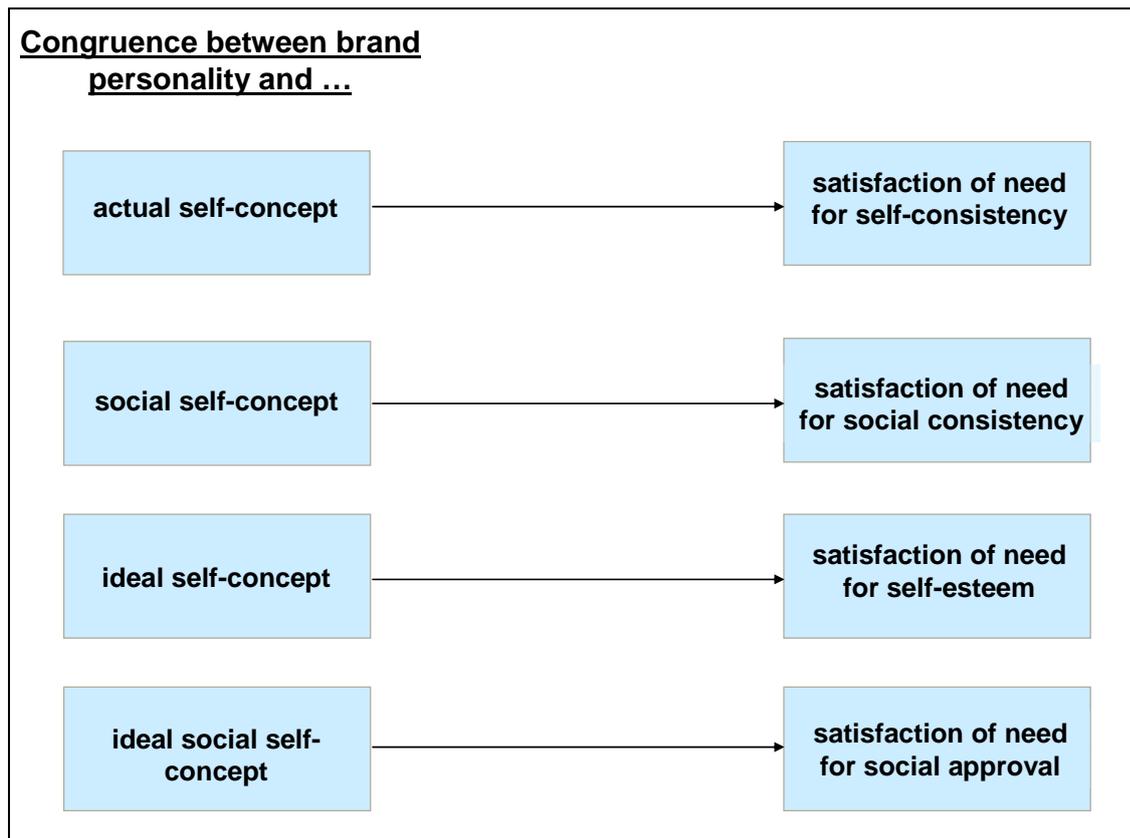
Congruence between brand personality and …

actual self-concept	satisfaction of need for self-consistency
social self-concept	satisfaction of need for social consistency
ideal self-concept	satisfaction of need for self-esteem
ideal social self-concept	satisfaction of need for social approval

Figure 4: Self-congruence motives

Source: modified from Johar and Sirgy (1991), p. 25.

Much of the consumer behaviour research in self-congruity has proved the relevance for consumer behaviour (e.g. Sirgy and Samli 1985, Govers and Schoormanns 2005, Kressmann et al. 2006). Fan behaviour is most intense when fans believe that the team represent important facets of their own self-concept (Bee and Kahle 2006). So it can be assumed that the self-congruity effect has a high relevance for the behavioural intention of actual and potential fans. However the relevance of the self-congruity effect is not empirically investigated in the context of professional sport teams.

So the aim of this study is an empirical investigation of the relevance of the self-congruence motives in comparison with other relevant brand benefits of professional sport teams. In the next step a structural model of the relations among self-congruity effect, relevant brand benefits and behaviour intentions will be developed. This structural model will be empirically tested. The respondents for the study will be actual and potential fans of four professional sport teams in the German "Fußball Bundesliga" and "Basketball Bundesliga". Overall 800 actual and 800 potential fans will be interviewed. Data will be collected using an online survey. For the data analysis a confirmatory factor analysis will be conducted and the structural equation model will be estimated using LISREL 8.8. On the basis of this empirical study managerial implications for the positioning of professional sport team brands can be developed. The results will be available for the Thought Leaders International Conference on Brand Management in April 2010.

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