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체육학 박사학위 논문

**Branding through Athletes:
The Role of Athlete-Team Brand Personality
Alignment in Team Evaluation and Brand Equity**

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Abstract

Branding through Athletes: The Role of Athlete-Team Brand Personality Alignment in Team Evaluation and Brand Equity

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Branding, a popular marketing strategy, is also becoming highly important in sports contexts. Among various methods undertaken to brand teams, utilization of star athletes has been prevailing (i.e., star athletes have been at the forefront of team branding). However, the effect of star athletes on team branding is seldom team selected or controlled—more like ripple effects caused by star athletes permeated into teams. Consequently, it is largely unknown how teams (from their perspective) can use athletes (particularly non-superstar athletes) in team branding and what its consequences are.

Therefore, the aim of this dissertation was to investigate the role of athlete in team branding. Particularly, this research examined the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation and team brand equity. The current research conducted two 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental studies (Study 1 and 2: 2 x 2 between-subjects analyses) and a field study (Study 3) to explore the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on fan responses—overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity.

Study 1 empirically demonstrated that athlete-team brand personality alignment increases overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity, with more pronounced result for unfamiliar teams. Study 2 also showed the effect of brand personality alignment, while hypothesized interaction effect of alignment and athlete familiarity was not supported. Finally, Study 3 revealed that fans' perceived interaction quality positively moderates the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment. This research is one of the first to demonstrate how teams can leverage their most influential human brands (i.e., athletes) as a brand-building advantage, particularly for new or unfamiliar teams in their efforts to establish brand positioning in fans' minds. The result of the current research fills gaps in the literature and extend the body of knowledge in branding studies in general and sport team branding studies in particular. Furthermore, this dissertation yielded practical and managerial implications for understanding the role of athletes in team branding appeals.

Key Words: Team Branding, Brand Personality, Strategic Alignment, Team / Athlete Familiarity, Interaction Quality

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I . INTRODUCTION

1. Problem statement

Professional sport teams often operate as monopolies within their market (Quirk & Fort, 1992) as leagues generally grant exclusive territorial rights to franchises (Danielson, 2001). With this monopolistic power in hand and few substitutes available for professional sports (Nester, 1990), the teams were able to possess absolute authority within the given market—i.e., no direct competitors within the market. However, due to a blurring in the boundaries among industries resulting market convergence, professional sport teams no longer compete solely within a sport-specific market, but are now competing for people’s entertainment and leisure dollars against numerous alternatives in a broader entertainment market (Ahn & Kang, 2014; Buhler & Nufer, 2009; Mason, 1999; Ross, 2006; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008). In other words, teams now compete for people’s ‘time share’ rather than ‘market share’ (Yi, 2009).

Consequently, competition among firms, including professional sport teams, striving to acquire higher ‘time share’ is growing fiercer (Ginman, 2010; Keller & Richey, 2006; Yi, 2009). Given this reality, teams cannot obtain competitive edge over other entertainment options purely on the basis of what products or services they offer (Keller & Richey, 2006) as they are no longer the ultimate decisive factor that affect consumers’ purchase decisions (Ginman, 2010; Ueltschy & Laroche, 2004). Consequently, although the core services provided by professional sport teams (i.e., on-field performance) are still unquestionably crucial (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007; Zhang, Lam, &

Connaughton, 2003), other aspects, such as extrinsic cues (i.e., cues related to brand identity), have increased in relative importance in distinguishing professional sporting teams from other competing substitutes (Ginman, 2010; Jha, Deitz, Babakus, & Yavas, 2013; Keller & Richey, 2006).

Furthermore, these extrinsic aspects are key components of brand loyalty, brand positioning, and brand equity (Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009; Keller, 1998; Plummer, 2000). Consequently, as markets continue to converge and competition grows fiercer, the success of a professional sport team now equally relies on ‘who’ the team is as to ‘what’ the team does (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Further, the former (i.e., how a team displays itself to current and potential fans) is defined by brand personality (Keller & Richey, 2006) as it is a viable metaphor for understanding fan perceptions and for building a unique team brand (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002).

Brand personality, “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 346), has been studied extensively by many scholars who demonstrated positive effects of brand personality on brand-related outcomes; it influences consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), fosters trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998), evokes positive feelings and emotions (Biel, 1993), stimulates active information processing (Biel, 1992), provides a basis for product differentiation (Aaker, 1996), influences brand attitudes and cognitive associations (Freling & Forbes, 2005), and impacts customer purchase intentions (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2011). Based on these findings, many scholars argue that a well-established and managed brand personality can help generate a set of favorable associations in consumer memory, and thus build and enhance brand equity (Keller, 1993; Johnson, Soutar, & Sweeney, 2000).

In the similar vein, as brand personality increases consumer's brand association (Aaker, 1997), fans' attraction to a team may also be influenced by the team's brand personality (e.g. NBA fans are drawn to San Antonio Spurs because the team has successful and wholesome brand personality) (Carlson, Donovan, & Cumiskey, 2009). Due to aforementioned benefits, teams are investing significant time and effort to develop, manage, and strengthen team-selected brand personality—particularly using traditional advertising and other promotional messaging tools (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986).

According to prior researches, however, face-to-face (in person) communication is often more influential than impersonal media sources such as TV advertising (Cialdini, 1993; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Czepiel, 1990; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). Furthermore, customers' perceptions of face-to-face interaction with frontline employees have traditionally been considered one of the most important determinants for customer satisfaction and firm loyalty (Liljander & Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000). Therefore, although advertising is unquestionably still a crucial medium for conveying brand personality messages, personal interaction (such as those between employees and customers) has increased in relative importance as they are more influential in communicating branding appeals than mass-targeted messages (Sirianni, Bitner, Brown, & Mandel, 2013).

As mentioned above, frontline employees' face-to-face interaction with customers is a vital factor in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty and is a more appealing brand communication tool. In professional sports, athletes are key employees of the teams who produce the core service (i.e., the game) (Opie & Smith, 1991). In other words, although there are different types of

professional sport team employees who interact with fans (e.g., front office personnel, part-time and volunteer workers around the stadiums, etc.), it is fair to assume that the impact of face-to-face interaction on customer satisfaction would be greater when fans interact with athletes (the subject fans associate with the most) than when they interact with other employees of the team.

Furthermore, as professional sports have developed into a highly commercialized industry segment, athletes nowadays achieve individual celebrity status among fans (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). According to Gledhill (1991, p. 8), athletes—particularly star athletes—are more than just sport figures and are considered to be “a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which express the intimacies of individual personality.” In other words, they are multi-textual and multi-platform promotional entities who play variety of roles such as entertainers, role models, and even political figures (Andrews & Jackson, 2001). Consequently, in some cases, they are considered popular cultural products and due to these reasons, star athletes have become important human brands for teams, media, sponsors, and financial investors (L’Etang, 2006; Thomson, 2006).

One example frankly demonstrating the influence of athletes on teams is found in a former study that demonstrated fans’ identification with an athlete leading to their connection with the team (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Moreover, according to another extant research, authors mentioned that “a corporate brand personality can be defined in terms of the human characteristics or traits of the employees of a corporation as whole” (Keller & Richey, 2006, p. 75). Similarly, a team brand personality can also be defined in terms of athlete brand personality or traits and the effect would be much stronger as athletes’ power of appeal outweigh the ordinary employees’.

Moreover, professional athletes now interact with fans more frequently than ever before—both on-line (through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter) and off-line (through increased teams' CSR movements and/or multiple forms of marketing communication efforts—athletes and fans interact face-to-face).

As mentioned, athletes' face-to-face interactions with fans are more effective and are more frequently evident. Therefore, these interactions should be managed strategically in order to maximize the positive effects of the interactions. Appealing team brand personality to fans through athlete interaction is consistent with the notion of branded service encounters, which refers to the strategic alignment of employee behavior with the brand positioning (Sirianni et al., 2013). Building on this idea, the current study stresses the strategic alignment of athlete brand personality with that of the team as a powerful team brand personality communication tool. The objective of this branded athlete-fan interaction is to deliver evidence of the team brand personality at every athlete-fan interaction point. In other words, these interactions not only lead to positive team brand impressions, but also enable fans to process team brand information provided by the athletes more easily and thus help them develop a more coherent understanding of the team brand's overall meaning.

Due to their influential status, athletes have been at the forefront of team branding. These trends are supported by extant studies (Carlson & Donovan, 2008; Foster, O'Reilly, & Davila, 2016) which report the positive effect of star athletes on their respective teams' image (e.g., LeBron James for Cleveland Cavaliers). However, these effects are derived from star athletes and, therefore, are more like ripple effects permeated into teams rather than team

selected or controlled branding appeals. Furthermore, not many teams can afford such superstar athletes as they do not possess sufficient salary budgets. In other words, the role of athletes—particularly for non-superstar—in team branding is not fully examined. Furthermore, despite their role as human brands and ever increasing importance as a major marketing weapon for teams (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014), interaction between athletes and fans are not regularly managed as part of the team’s branding appeal—more specifically, the role of athletes in team brand communication. Moreover, to date, it is unclear how team marketing practitioners can leverage athlete-fan interaction to reinforce team brand communication.

2. Purpose of the study

In today’s competitive marketplace, team branding plays an integral part in professional sport teams’ off-field success (i.e., fans’ support). Although there exist multiple methods through which team branding can be realized and enhanced, athletes definitely are one of the most effective weapons teams can utilize. However, despite their power of appeal, athletes are relatively less considered and utilized in the entire procedure of team branding.

Hence, building on earlier works in the literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of athlete in team branding—through which team brand appeal and enhancement are sought—and, ultimately, in overall team evaluation. Specifically, the current study, building on the idea of ‘branded service encounters’, which refers to customer-employee interactions that are aligned with the firm’s brand positioning (Sirianni et al., 2013), argue that strategically aligning athlete brand personality with team brand personality

can reinforce team brand meaning during athletes' interaction with fans. In other words, alignment enables fans to process team brand information conveyed through athletes more easily and thus help them develop a more coherent understanding of the team's brand meaning. In sum, the current study sought to present empirical evidence of the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall evaluation and effects of three contextual factors (i.e., team / athlete familiarity and fans' perceived interaction quality).

In order to achieve aforementioned purposes, the current study sought to address the following research questions: (1) How do fans perceive utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding? (specifically athlete-team brand personality alignment as a strategic approach) (2) Does athlete-team brand personality alignment positively affect perceived team-related outcomes? (3) In which situation is the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment more powerful? (examining the moderating effects of aforementioned contextual factors).

3. Significance of the study

In the process of addressing these questions, the study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, the current study is one of the first studies empirically examined the role of athlete-fan interaction in reinforcing team brand personality communication—i.e., team branding—through the empirical investigation of the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment. This is a notable contribution because, despite the increasing importance of athletes and their power of appeal, extant studies have not examined the role of athletes in building favorable fan outcomes such as

overall team evaluation and team brand equity.

Moreover, the current study also partially addressed Keller's (2003) call for future research by offering a deeper understanding of the interaction between teams and athletes. Second, the study investigated conditions (team and athlete familiarity / fans' perceived interaction quality in the athlete-fan interacting situations) under which athlete-team brand personality alignment has stronger effect on team evaluation and team brand equity. This also is an important contribution to the existing literature because the result uncovered when the athlete-team brand personality alignment is most influential in reinforcing brand meaning and shaping affective brand evaluations and brand equity. Furthermore, the result provided guidance as to how the teams should educate athletes' attitude and behavior (in order to maximize fans' perceived interaction quality) and which athletes (familiar vs. unfamiliar) they should choose to interact with fans. Third, based on the findings of the study, the author provided guidance for successful adoption of brand personality alignment in sports, which should prove insightful for marketing managers and academics.

In the following sections, the literature on brand personality, interaction quality, familiarity, a preliminary study, conceptual development and research hypotheses are discussed. The methodology used to achieve study purposes is then described. Next, the data analyses procedures and results, including hypotheses testing, are reported. In the last section, implications, limitations, and direction of future research are discussed.

4. Definition of terms

Brand personality: “The set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 346). It includes five dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) and 15 facets (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful / daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date / reliable, intelligent, successful / upper class, charming / outdoorsy, tough).

Strategic alignment: The “degree to which the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structure of one component are consistent with the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structure of another component” (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, p. 43). The term is used to convey the meaning ‘strategic fit’ (Smaczny, 2001) or ‘strategic match’ (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998). This alignment can manifest along several dimensions, such as athletes’ appearance, manner, and personality. In the current research, the author restrict focus to the alignment of the athletes’ brand personality with the brand personality. Hereinafter, the term ‘athlete-team brand personality alignment’ refers to the level of congruence between the athlete’s and team’s brand personality.

Familiarity: A term defined as knowledge acquired through direct or indirect experiences with a subject (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994; Sirianni et al., 2013). It captures consumers’ knowledge structures, being more limited and weaker for unfamiliar subjects and stronger and more sophisticated and accessible for familiar ones (Campbell & Keller, 2003).

Interaction quality: One of primary dimensions of service quality along with physical environmental quality and outcome quality and is comprised of three sub-dimensions: attitude, behavior, and expertise (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Dissimilar to other dimensions, interaction quality focuses on actual moment the service is being delivered (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1984; Ko & Pastore, 2005). For the current study, it refers to customer experiences with athletes which encompasses the ‘relationship component’ of the service experience.

Overall brand evaluation: A variable which measures customers’ affective responses toward a brand, such as liking, trust, and desirability assessments (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000).

Customer-based brand equity: A term which more directly measures the managerial implications of brand building, including increased benefits of brand quality versus competitors, increased perceived value for the cost, increased brand uniqueness, and increased willingness to pay a price premium (Netemeyer et al., 2004).

Branded athlete-fan interaction: A term developed in the current study which is defined as athlete-fan interactions that are strategically aligned with the team’s brand positioning.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand personality is one of the most important terms discussed throughout the paper. Therefore, the author first discussed brand personality, the difference between brand personality and brand image and the reason for choosing brand personality over image. Next, the author presented an overview of team branding, athlete as a brand, and team branding through athletes and strategic alignment of athlete and team brand personality.

1. Brand personality

A brand is a name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to pinpoint and differentiate the products or services of an organization (Aaker, 2009). Therefore, a brand acts as a signal for customers informing them of what the product or service is, while protecting the value from the imitations manufactured by competitors (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2006). For the past few decades, brands have become more customized (Berry, 1988; Plummer, 2000), which resulted in human personality being transferred to brands (Achouri & Bouslama, 2010). This transfer relies on a metaphor whereby the brand is treated as a person, and is thus given personality attributes which are usually given to human beings (Viot, 2006). Although there is no universal agreement around the conceptualization, the measures, or the components of the construct (Achouri & Bouslama, 2010; Ambroise, Ferrandi, Valette-Florence, & Merunka, 2003), due to its effect as a marketing communication method, both researchers and practitioners have given considerable attention to the concept brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Azoulay

& Kapferer, 2003; Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993, 2003; Levy, 1959; Plummer, 2000; Sirgy, 1982). Similar to the very nature of human beings forming a relationship with others, consumers often develop relationships with brands they purchase or consume (Fournier, 1998). Then, when are consumers more likely to form these relationships with brands?

According to Levy (1959), brand personality contains demographic features, such as gender, age and social class. For example, Marlboro, a cigarette brand, is famous for its 'tough guy masculine' image, whereas Mercedes cars have an image of 'upper class vehicle' with high quality and high efficiency. In other words, brands have their own personalities and consumers tend to choose brands that are in compliance with their own personalities (Lin, 2010). This is because consumers' information searching and relationship development with a brand are triggered when the brand has an 'appropriate' personality (Keller, 1998)—the 'appropriate' personality meaning brands with brand personality linked to consumers' own self-concept (usually one's desired self-concept rather than an actual self-concept) (Keller, 1998; Sirgy, 1982).

Thus, brands that possess a desirable personality (i.e., actual or ideal personality of consumers) will provide more meaning for the consumers, which in turn trigger them to form a stronger tie with the brand (Carlson & Donavan, 2013). This self-concept theory (Sirgy, 1982), to some degrees, explains consumers' symbolic purchases. Due to abovementioned reasons, brand personality plays a crucial role in understanding consumers' brand choice (Plummer, 2000) as it leads customers to develop and maintain a strong connection to the brand (Doyle, 1990). Indeed, at a time in which distinguishing product quality is equivocal, a strong brand personality is one of

the key factors that affects consumers' purchase decisions (Keller, 1998; Plummer, 2000). Besides, consumers tend to rely on the brand association developed in their minds through brand personality communication rather than on the inherent attributes and characteristics of the product (Dich, Chakravarti, & Biehal, 1990).

Furthermore, a distinctive and emotionally attractive brand personality is shown to leverage the perceived image of the brand and influence consumers' choice behavior (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). Therefore, a successful brand knows how to build its distinct brand personality, which facilitate consumers to develop a strong binding relationship with the brand (Doyle, 1990). According to Kumar, Luthra, and Datta (2006) having a clear differentiation in conveying brand personality appeal is a crucial element in achieving the intended brand personality. Furthermore, the personality message should be consistently and persistently cultivated in order to minimize consumers' feelings of chaos and inconsistency.

Defined by Aaker (1997) as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347), brand personality emotionally links brands and consumers with an aim to develop and maintain a strong tie (Landon, 1974). It also provides a tangible reference point which is more vivid than the sense communicated by a generic offering (Upshaw, 1995). Furthermore, in the recipients' perspectives, consumers can easily sense the personality conveyed by a brand as marketers continuously attempt to humanize and anthropomorphize the brand through various forms of advertising (Sweeney & Brandon, 2006).

The reasoning behind the positive effects driven by brand personality can be traced back to the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). It is, by definition, "individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of

their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 2010, p. 2), which posits that people tend to associate with entities that enhance their own identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Thus, based on the theory, when there is an overlap between the individuals’ actual or ideal self-schema and the brand personality, a perceived connection (i.e., identification) is formed and these connections not only provide psychological benefits, but also affect consumers’ purchase decisions (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). For example, an individual’s aspirational goals may be achieved through consuming products with ‘successful’ brand personality attribute (Aaker, 1997).

Another theory that provides the theoretical foundation for the effect of brand personality as a critical marketing method is the theory of symbolism (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006). It is argued that consumers look to brands to enhance their self-image and view products as an extension of themselves (Solomon, Polegato, & Zaichkowsky, 2009). Therefore, the symbolic value that products possess affects their purchasing decisions (Mowen, 1990). These symbolic purchases, in turn, enhance consumers’ self-consistency and self-esteem (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Keller, 1993) and offer the function of self-symbolization and self-expression (Keller, 1993).

In sum, according to aforementioned theories, when choosing among competing products, especially when nowadays product quality is not readily distinguishable, consumers assess the degree of similarity between the personality traits conveyed by the products (Plummer, 2000) and the personality they wish themselves to be projected of (Ponnam, 2007)—i.e., products with specific personality features allow the consumers to express their actual or ideal self, representing value-enhancing and symbolic benefits which are

acquired from a given consumption (Vermette, 2003).

1-1. Brand personality measurement

Early researchers were mainly interested in studying the relationship between product and self-concept and, therefore, adapted human personality scales to study the product personalities and their relationships with the consumers' actual and ideal self-image (Dolich, 1969). Goldberg's (1990) study provided a timely reinforcement of the broad consensus concerning the number of personality features, which have been conflated to five, labelled by Goldberg as the 'Big Five'. These dimensions are sometimes represented by the acronym OCEAN: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. However, the applicability of these human personality dimensions to brands remained unclear, due to the lack of a common theory and of a consensual taxonomy of personality traits to be used in describing products. The validity of the early product personality scales, based on human personality, was questioned because human and product personalities might have different antecedents.

On the basis of this premise, Aaker (1997), based on existing human personality researches, developed the brand personality scale (BPS) which consists of five dimensions (15 facets and 42 traits): sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Sincerity is represented by attributes such as down-to-earth, real, sincere, and honest. Excitement is illustrated by traits such as darling, exciting, imaginative, and contemporary. Competence is characterized by attributes such as intelligent, reliable, secure, and confident. Sophistication is personified by traits such as glamorous, upper class,

good-looking, and charming. Finally, ruggedness is represented by attributes such as tough, outdoorsy, masculine, and Western.

Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale has been not only replicated and extended across cultures but also applied to different settings. For example, Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera (2001) investigated the brand personality structures of commercial brands in Japan and Spain. For both countries, the five dimensions were found with some exceptions: the dimension peacefulness emerged in both cultures, and passion was specific to Spanish culture. Supphellen and Gronhaug's (2003) study undertaken in Russia provided another cross-cultural validation of the BPS. As in Aaker's (1997) findings, the authors found five dimensions, which they identified as successful and contemporary, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness. The first dimension consisted of traits from four different BPS dimensions, but the other four resembled Aaker's (1997) BPS. These studies, among many others, provide further evidence that brand personality adjectives may shift from one dimension to another depending on the culture. Although Aaker's (1997) BPS reveal the emergence of culturally specific dimensions, the BPS remains the most stable, reliable, and comprehensive measure to gauge brand personality (Ekinici & Hosany, 2006).

1-2. Brand personality versus brand image

Consumer researchers suggest that numerous benefits accrue to brands with strong and positive brand personality (Keller & Richey, 2006; Plummer, 2000)—e.g., differentiates a product from its competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008), reduces information searching costs (Assael, 2000), minimizes perceived risks

(Berthon, Hulbert, & Pitt, 1999), and represents high quality in consumer's perspective (Erdem, 1998). Due to these benefits, the importance of brand personality in the marketing literature has been frequently witnessed (Aaker, 1997; Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993, 2003; Levy, 1959; Plummer, 2000; Sirgy, 1982). However, despite the importance of brand personality in the realm of marketing, much ambiguity exists as to its relationship with brand image (Patterson, 1999)—the terms are closely related and have been used interchangeably in the literature (Smothers, 1993). Although several models exist to explain the two concepts, the majority of the attempts remaining only theoretical (e.g., Plummer, 2000) and a lack of empirical studies have hampered progress in understanding this relationship.

Some scholars conceptualized brand personality to be an important component of both brand identity and brand image (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2007; Kapferer, 2008), defined brand image in terms of brand personality (Hendon & Williams, 1985; Upshaw, 1995), and asserted brand personality and brand identity as two antecedents of brand image (Heylen, Dawson, & Sampson, 1995). Other researchers have also attempted to provide some theoretical explanations of the nature of the relationship between brand personality and brand image. For these authors the term brand image can be understood as a more encapsulating concept, whereas brand personality is more related to the affective components of brand image (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Plummer, 2000; Patterson, 1999).

Building on the constructivist school of theorizing about communications, Kapferer (2008) developed a brand identity prism in which he considers a brand as a speech flowing from a sender to a receiver. He argues that the brand identity dimensions of physique (i.e., physical features and

qualities) and personality (i.e., human personality traits) picture the sender, the identity dimensions of reflection (i.e., image of the target group) and self-image (i.e., how the brand makes consumers feel) depict the receiver, and the dimensions of culture (i.e., values) and relationship (i.e., mode of conduct) form a bridge between the sender and the receiver.

Following the Kapferer's (2008) 'Sender-Receiver model', despite the confusion and different conceptualizations, most researchers share the opinion that brand personality is the brand meaning conveyed from the sender-side (firms) and brand image is the perception and interpretation of the conveyed message from the receiver-side (customers) (Konecnik & Go, 2008)—in other words, brand personality can be seen as an antecedent of brand image (Hosany et al., 2006; Patterson, 1999). Therefore, although the clear delineation of the term brand personality remains vague (i.e., indistinguishable from constructs such as brand image or brand identity), as the main purpose of the current study is to investigate the effect of alignment from the sender-side perspective (i.e., in team's point of view), in the current study, the author restricts focus to the brand personality concept and the alignment of team brand personality and athlete brand personality.

2. Team branding

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one sellers or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Nowadays, more than ever, sport teams are being treated as brands and, therefore, the literature on brand management encompasses sports

team brands as well. Indeed, sports teams are viewed as true 'products', comprised of tangible dimensions, such as team merchandize and food and beverage sold in the stadiums, and intangible benefits, such as emotions experienced at the stadium and the feeling of pride when associating with a team (Burton & Howard, 1999). In professional sport, the emotional response from fans is stronger than in any other industry, with the exception of entertainment, religion and politics (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005).

The process of developing, managing, and maintaining a brand is known as 'branding' which has become one of the most important factors in strategic marketing (Shilbury, Quick, & Westerbeek, 2003). Branding can manifest their impact at three different levels—customer market, product market, and financial market—and the value accrued by these benefits is often called 'brand equity' (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Similar to any other service and entertainment industries which competes for and survives over customer loyalty, professional sport has a natural connection with branding (Bristow & Sebastian, 2001).

Due to its importance, there are several extant studies that dealt sport team branding. Specifically, the team sports brand association research by Gladden and Funk (2002) and Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) are the most frequently mentioned studies in the sport team branding literature and, therefore, can provide fruitful insight into the area of team branding. By adapting Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand associations, Gladden and Funk (2002) developed the team association model (TAM) to examine brand associations of sports teams. They identified four dimensions with 16 brand association sub-dimensions: attribute (i.e., success, head coach, star player, management, stadium, logo design, product delivery, and tradition), benefit (i.e.,

identification, nostalgia, pride in place, escape, and peer group acceptance), and attitude (i.e., importance, knowledge, and affect).

In a related study, Ross et al., (2006) developed the team brand association scale (TBAS) to examine brand associations in professional sports teams. Their study was triggered by them questioning the structure of the brand image dimensions proposed by Gladden and Funk (2002) by arguing that Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993) brand image dimensions may not reflect the consumers' image precisely because their models are not empirically tested. Therefore, in their study, Ross et al., (2006) identified brand association dimensions through a free-thought listing technique and strict psychometric analysis to confirm the dimensions' validity. The final scale identified 11 dimensions (i.e., success, history, stadium, team characteristics, logo, concessions, socialization, rivalry, commitment, organizational attribute, and non-player personnel) underlying professional sports team brand associations.

Some of the factors identified in the TAM (Gladden & Funk, 2002) and TBAS (Ross et al., 2006) were also supported by a qualitative study. Richelieu and Pons (2006) investigated how legendary sports teams with high brand equity (i.e., Toronto Maple Leafs and football club Barcelona) have built and leveraged their brand equity. They identified four common fundamental factors where two teams establish their brands: winning tradition, intense rivalry, longevity and tradition, and powerful fans. Based on the sports team branding literature, it is fair to argue that sport teams nowadays are deemed as a brand which needs to be developed and maintained. Moreover, factors that fans relate to teams demonstrate multiple forms marketing strategies can be undertaken in order to encourage fans' association with the teams.

As depicted in the literature, the importance of team branding is

needless to mention as a well-developed brand leads teams to diverse benefits (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005; Hill & Vincent, 2006). Consequently, professional sport teams nowadays, among many different methods, need to identify which marketing communication methods to undertake in order to successfully form a team brand within the limited budget and time frame.

3. Athletes as a human brand

Defining an athlete brand and providing theoretical foundation for using athletes to brand a team is a fundamental step prior to asserting the effect of utilizing athletes in team branding. Athletes can be thought of as core employees of professional sport teams, but more importantly, they are ‘human brands’ which fans associate with (Carlson & Donavan, 2013). Shank (1999) defined sport brand as “a name, design, symbol, or any combination that a sports organization uses to help differentiate its product from the competition” (p. 239).

Based on this definition, all individual athletes can be considered as brands because every athlete has a name, distinctive appearance, and a personality. Consistent with this view, the term ‘human brands’ has been used to describe “any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts” (Thomson, 2006, p. 104). On the other hand, however, Keller (2003) defined brand in a more limited sense and, based on his assertion, athletes who have created a certain amount of awareness, reputation, and prominence are the ones who can be considered as brands.

By applying abovementioned definitions, Arai et al., (2014) defined athlete brand as “a public persona of an individual athlete who has established

their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face or other brand elements in the market” (p. 98). Given the popularity of athletes among fans, numerous firms tie their brands to successful athletes as doing so is thought to trigger ‘image transfer’ (Gwinner, 1997)—transfer of the athlete’s positive attributes onto the brand. These athletes’ power of appeal originates from their strong connection with fans and this connection has been described as identification, or an overlap between the consumer’s schema and the athlete’s schema (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). In sum, athletes have their own symbolic meaning and value among fans, which allow athletes to possess power of appeal and, therefore, that is why athletes are deemed as ‘human brands’.

Due to their brand appeal, using athletes as credible spokesperson in the endorsement market is a noticeable trend (Ohanian, 1990). The effectiveness of athletes as spokesperson rest on two general models: the source-credibility model and the source-attractive model (Ohanian, 1990). The former model was developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953). They found spokesperson’s expertness and trustworthiness as the factors leading to the perceived credibility (i.e., source credibility) of the communicator. According to the authors, expertise refers to the extent to which the source of a communication is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions by virtue of having relevant skills, whereas trustworthiness refers to the degree to which an audience perceives that the communicator considers the assertions to be valid. The latter model has its origins in the social psychological research and is a component of the “source valence” model developed by McGuire (1985). The attractiveness model contends that the effectiveness of a message conveyed by the spokesperson depends on familiarity, likeability, similarity, and attractiveness of the source (Ohanian, 1990).

Although abovementioned two models provide foundation for the effect of an athlete as a spokesperson, the three celebrity endorsers' credibility dimensions (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness), based on aforementioned models, developed by Ohanian (1990) provide clear explanation as to why athletes, as human brands, are deemed as effective source in the endorsement market. The first dimension trustworthiness refers to the listener's degree of confidence in, and level of acceptance of, the speaker and the message. Numerous studies support the effect of trustworthiness on attitude change. For example, in the context of fear-arousing communications, Miller and Baseheart (1969) investigated the impact of source trustworthiness on the persuadability of the communication. They found that when the communicator was trustworthy, the message conveyed by him or her was more effective which, in turn, triggered attitude change.

Moreover, McGinnies and Ward (1980) also found that a source who was perceived to be both an expert and trustworthy generated the most opinion change. In fact, the trustworthy communicator was persuasive, whether an expert or not. The second dimension expertise, as mentioned before, refers to the extent to which the source of a communication is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions by virtue of having relevant skills. Several extant studies indicate the source's perceived expertise has a positive impact on attitude change. For instance, Crisci and Kassinove (1973) examined the effect of the level of communicator expertise on behavioral compliance and found that respondents' compliance with the source's recommendations directly varied with the perceived level of expertise. Similarly, Crano (1970) experimentally manipulated the level of expertise and found that subjects exposed to a high-expert source demonstrated more agreement with the advocated suggestion

than did those exposed to a low-expertise source. The last dimension attractiveness, which largely can be divided into facial and physical, refers to a quality that causes an interest or desire in someone.

A considerable body of research in advertising and communication suggests that physical attractiveness is an important cue in an individual's initial judgment of another person. For example, in an exhaustive review, Joseph (1982) summarized the experimental evidence in advertising and related disciplines regarding physically attractive communicators' impact on opinion change, product evaluation, and other dependent measures. He concluded that attractive communicators are consistently liked more and have a positive impact on products with which they are associated. In sum, trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of the communicator are important constructs in persuasion and attitude change. Therefore, based on the aforementioned factors, it is fair to argue that athletes, as human brands, are an effective tool in marketing communication efforts. Furthermore, these factors provide enough rationale as to why teams should utilize their athletes in team branding and brand personality communication.

4. Team branding through athletes

As having a well-developed brand is the most important asset for a sports team (Bauer et al., 2005), many teams have already implemented or are trying to implement various branding efforts. Although there are various methods in developing, managing and maintaining a brand, brand personality has been the center of attention as a tool for branding (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Keller, 1998; Plummer, 2000). Brand personality plays a vital role in

team branding as it not only provides direction and meaning (Hill & Vincent, 2006), but also increases consumer preference and usage, arouses emotions in consumers and boosts fans' level of trust and loyalty (Aaker, 1997).

The interest in brand personality as a tool for branding has pervaded into the field of sport management and has also become a hot topic (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Braunstein & Zhang, 2005; Carlson et al., 2009; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Heere, 2010; Parent & Seguin, 2008). Faced with growing competition in which professional sports are becoming highly substitutable, building a strong and differentiated brand personality (i.e., branding) can significantly enhance teams' success (Warlop, Ratneshwar, & van Osselaer, 2005). Brand personality can also play a key role in helping team marketing managers effectively market and position their team selected brand (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Moreover, as fans tend to identify with teams that have greater brand personality overlap between their self-schema and the teams' schema (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000), it is fair to argue that attraction to a team is influenced by the team's brand personality (Aaker, 1997).

Brand personality is typically formed by advertising the imagery associated to the brand, the people using it, and in which situation it is used (Kapferer, 2008; Solomon et al., 2009). It can be influential as people will make inferences about the user and the usage situation depicted in the advertising (Keller, 1998). In other words, both direct and indirect experiences with the brand will shape how the consumers interpret brand personality information conveyed by the firms (Aaker, 1997).

Among the existing methods used to create brand personality, one of the most frequently chosen and one of the easiest ways of conveying brand

personality is by giving the brand a famous spokesperson or figurehead (Kapferer, 2008). Celebrities are usually popular among consumers and have a strong connection with them (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Consequently, many firms utilize celebrity endorsers to appeal their desired brand personality to potential consumers with the expectation that doing so will transfer the endorsers' positive attributes and their connections with potential consumers onto the brand. In other words, it is the culturally derived meaning (i.e., brand personality attributes) conveyed by the celebrity endorsers that makes such associations effective as a marketing communication tool (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

Among many different celebrity endorsers, athletes are the most frequently selected endorsers compared to any other celebrities (i.e., musicians, actors, comedians, etc.) (Carlson & Donovan, 2008; Lake, Reece, & Rifon, 2010)—which clearly demonstrates the dominance of athletes as endorsers and firms' willingness to associate their brands with high profile athletes. Athlete endorsers contribute to brand recognition, generate positive associations conveying qualities such as physical appeal and likeability, and boost the development of distinct and credible brand personalities (Ohanian, 1990). In other words, fans' level of identification with an endorser athlete is positively transferred to their attitude toward the endorsed brands or products and, consequently, affects fans' tendency to purchase the endorsed products. These trends are supported by extant studies reporting positive effects of celebrity endorsers such as increased favorable attitudes toward the brand (Till & Busler, 2000) and purchase behaviors (Kahle & Homer, 1985).

Furthermore, another prevailing reason for the selection of celebrity athletes as the endorser over other famous names is due to the less risky

investment. Funk and Pritchard (2006) provided evidence that athletes' indiscretions are discounted because of fan commitment to the athletes, team or sport, thus making the marketing funds spent on athlete endorsers less risky investments. Moreover, along with the ever increasing athletes' value as endorsers, a marketing firm (Marketing Evaluations Inc.) has developed a rating system called 'Sport Q-ratings (www.qscores.com)'. This rating system evaluates and measures the familiarity and likeability of sport celebrities and their power of appeal as potential endorser (Costanzo & Goodnight, 2006).

As mentioned before, teams nowadays need to have a clear brand personality as the success of a team now as equally relies on 'who it is' as to 'what it does' (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Therefore, it seems wise for teams to appeal their team selected brand personality through their athletes since they are the most commonly utilized spokesperson when appealing brand personality (Carlson & Donovan, 2008) and since athletes nowadays are deemed as human brands which possess features of traditional brands (Thomson, 2006). In addition, Thomson (2006) suggested that human brands are powerful endorsers when consumers are strongly attached to him or her. Thus, athletes can act as direct endorsers of their respective teams.

The power of appeal athletes possess and them being direct endorsers of their teams provide enough reasons for teams to utilize athletes in their marketing communication campaigns. Moreover, athletes interact with fans (and even with the general public) more frequently than ever before through increased teams' CSR movement efforts and with the proliferation of media outlets such as diverse social media platforms. Consequently, athletes' role in team brand personality communication has become more important. Furthermore, fans' identification with an athlete leads to their connection with

a team (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). However, despite their star power and ever increasing importance as a major marketing weapon for teams, their role in team brand personality communication is not regularly managed.

4-1. Athlete brand personality as states

The key appeal of the current study is based on the idea that athletes brand personality can be developed/adjusted (aligned with team brand personality) and managed. Therefore, it is important to first understand the difference between human and brand personalities possessed by athletes (as they are both human and a brand). Considerable research dealing with human personality has converged on stable and robust traits of the human personality ‘Big Five’: extraversion, agreeability, openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002). These innate human personalities are universally defined as highly enduring traits which usually last over a person’s lifetime (Costa, McCrae, & Arenberg, 1980). Contrary to the human personality (traits), brand personality is a state rather than a trait—which, unlike trait, is temporary and brief (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). In other words, brand personality can be created, adjusted, and managed through marketing communication efforts.

Athlete brand personality states are usually formed through media depictions and sport associations (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). However, it is fair to argue that most fans acquire athletes’ brand personality through seeing them perform on the field. Therefore, one might argue the difficulties in adjusting the athlete brand personality (to align it with team brand personality) through marketing efforts due to the overwhelming effect of athletes’ on field

performance on brand personality formation. However, according to extant literatures, fans tend to deem athletes' on-field behaviors as 'part of the game' (Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Horrow, 1982); hence brand personality formed through on-field performance is not unchangeable.

As mentioned above, an athlete, as a human and a brand, possesses both human personality (trait) and brand personality (state). Although athletes have human personalities, it is their brand personality that actually influences consumers' attitudes and behaviors. This is because athletes' human personality generally is not evident to the public (Brown et al., 2002). Despite many professional athletes' frequent interaction with fans, as public figures, they do not entirely disclose who they really are (i.e., human personality traits), but rather appeal through their brand personality, which usually is positive. Thus, brand personality represents the characteristics that consumers associate with athletes (i.e., athletes' ability to persuade consumers). Therefore, in the current study, the author restricts the focus to the athletes' brand personality states rather than their human personality traits. Thus, the term 'athlete brand personality' used throughout this study refers to the brand personality states that can be generated, altered, and managed.

4-2. Team and athlete brand personality measures

Vast majority of the extant studies dealing with brand personality adopted the BPS developed by Aaker (1997). As mentioned before, due to its popularity in the brand personality literature, Aaker's (1997) BPS has been replicated and extended across cultures and has been applied to different settings (e.g., Aaker et al., 2001; Ekinici & Riley, 2003). However, despite the

prevailing adaptation of the BPS in brand personality literature, the BPS has often been criticized for the lack of conceptual completeness and validity (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

Moreover, multiple authors pointed out several limitations found in the BPS (Ambroise et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Heere, 2010; Viot, 2006). Although it is important to understand potential challenges associated with the BPS, it still remains the most widely used scale in brand personality literature. Moreover, the aim of the current study is to investigate the role of athlete in team branding—specifically through strategically aligning athlete and team brand personality—rather than to refine the measurement properties of the BPS. Therefore, the scale proposed by Aaker (1997) represents a useful and appropriate starting point for evaluating brand personality attributes applied to both teams and athletes.

The framework for team and athlete brand personality proposed by Carlson et al. (2009) and Carlson and Donovan (2013) serve as the basis for this study. According to these studies, the BPS developed by Aaker (1997) was meant for traditional, tangible product brands. However, sport teams and athletes are intangible brands to which the BPS is not applicable. In other words, some of the attributes in the BPS may not directly apply to sport context. Therefore, the authors identified one attribute from each dimension to be highly relevant in describing team and athlete brand personality (see Table 1 below).

Moreover, each of the brand personality attributes used in these studies demonstrated strong face validity and was representative of the original five dimensions of brand personality proposed by Aaker (1997). Consistent with former studies, the current study adopted the individual attributes identified by

Carlson et al. (2009) and Carlson and Donovan (2013). Thus, the current study utilized five brand personality attributes for teams and athletes: wholesome (sincerity dimension), imaginative (excitement dimension), successful (competence dimension), charming (sophistication dimension), and tough (ruggedness dimension).

Table 1. Brand personality framework (Aaker, 1997)

Dimensions	Facets
Sincerity	Down-to-earth
	Honest
	Wholesome
	Cheerful
Excitement	Daring
	Spirited
	Imaginative
	Up-to-date
Competence	Reliable
	Intelligent
	Successful
Sophistication	Upper-class
	Charming
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy
	Tough

**Highlighted attributes: Single-item measures implemented by Carlson et al. (2009) and Carlson and Donovan (2013)*

5. Alignment

5-1. The emergence of service-centricity

For modern firms, the business focus has shifted away from

goods-centered to service-centered paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and this shift in paradigm was reinforced by the transition of developed economies to being service-based (Giannakis & Harker, 2014). Therefore, the focus of many firms' business objectives have also shifting from 'only attracting consumers' to 'attracting and maintaining consumers (i.e., developing a long-term relationship)' (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994). In other words, new light is being shed on intangibles services such as skills, information, and knowledge, and interactivity, connectivity, and ongoing relationship is of the utmost importance (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

As firms started to pay more attention to service-focused marketing, frontline employees (people who directly interact and provide service to customers) have become important in respect to successful implementation of marketing strategy and, therefore, are key to the success of the organization as a whole (Giannakis & Harker, 2014). The frontline employees are critical in the mind of consumers when they are assessing the level of the service provided. Therefore, it is the frontline employees—not the abstract concept/entity/branding of the firm—whom the customers learn about the firm through (Giannakis & Harker, 2014). It can be argued, therefore, that a successful service organization must focus on firm-customer relationships and, therefore, have relationship management at the heart of tactical marketing processes and strategic corporate philosophy (Tzokas, Saren, & Kiziridis, 2001). That is, marketing success, to a great extent, will rely on the result of successful management of employees—especially the frontline staffs who directly interact with customers.

5-2. Strategic alignment

As mentioned above, the transition of goods-centered to service-centered paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) has shed light on the importance of frontline employees. As a result, the term ‘alignment’ has grown in use—especially in HRM literature—as a descriptive idiom to symbolize a range of management-driven processes towards the accomplishment of strategic goals (Short, 2009). Alignment between various organizational components has been seen as a key to improved organizational performance (Beer, Voelpel, Liebold, & Tekie, 2005). Consequently, over the years, strategic alignment grew in importance as companies continuously attempted to implement technologies into their businesses in light of dynamic business strategies and ever evolving technologies (Luftman, 1996).

Although the term ‘strategic alignment’ has become a topic of interest due to the emergence of IT as a key factor in many business sectors, the importance of strategic alignment has been well known and well documented since the late 1970’s (e.g., Dixon & John, 1989). The notion of strategic alignment, which is derived from the term alignment: “the degree to which the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structure of one component are consistent with the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structure of another component” (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, p. 43), emanates from strategic management and organization theory research whose fundamental proposition is that organizational performance is a consequence of the coherence or fit between two or more factors such as strategy, structure, and technology (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Similarly, in the business literature, the concept of alignment is used to convey the meaning ‘strategic fit’ (Smaczny, 2001) or ‘strategic

match' (Mintzberg et al., 1998). What these similarly named perspectives have in common is the idea that both internal and external alignment are likely to lead to greater quality and efficiency of operations than low alignment (Schneider et al., 2003).

Many extant studies in the strategic alignment literature support the positive effects of alignment by arguing business strategies being realized through increased coordination and cooperation (Bowman & Ambrosini, 1997; Lane & Wallis, 2009). In other words, for a strategy (or a marketing goal) to be achieved to its fullest extent, "a shared understanding of the direction of movement is required throughout the organizational hierarchy" (Andrews, Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2012, p. 78). Moreover, an empirical finding was evident in Pham and Muthukrishnan's (2002) study. They found that when the given information is aligned (in the current study's case, information conveyed by a team and an athlete), it is considered more diagnostic and is more heavily weighted in the judgment. In other word, aligning the brand personality message of the team and the athletes can appeal to fans at a greater level.

Given the benefits, along with the notion of 'branded customer service'—which refers to the strategic alignment of customers' experiences with brand promises (Barlow & Stewart, 2004)—strategic alignment has also become an important area in service/entertainment industries. Building on this idea, Sirianni et al. (2013) developed 'branded service encounters' which asserts the positive effects of strategically aligning frontline employees' behavior with the brand positioning. In line with the aforementioned 'branded service encounters' (Sirianni et al., 2013), the objective of aligning athlete-team brand personality in marketing communication is not only to deliver evidence of the team

branding at every customer (either non-, casual-, or avid-fans) interaction, but also to enhance customers' development of a more coherent understanding of a team brand's overall meaning through athletes by conveying a unified message.

In the current study, athletes are strategically aligned when their brand personality (delivered through their attitudes and behaviors during their interaction with fans) correspond with that of the teams. For example, a team may require its athletes to support its fan service strategy by engaging in 'strategic supportive behaviors' (Gagnon, Jansen, & Michael, 2008). In this instance, athletes who are strategically aligned will engage in behaviors that proactively reach out to fans (e.g., promptly responding to requests). Similar to management by objective (Drucker, 1954), strategic alignment requires athletes to behave in a contributory manner in order to support the team selected brand personality.

Building on prior literature, the current study emphasizes the importance of athlete-team brand personality alignment as a marketing communication tool. As mentioned in the previous sections, fans tend to identify with teams more easily when the teams' brand personality is aligned with their actual or ideal personality (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). This is because if a consumer has a clear brand personality of an athlete, consistent with that of the team, this leads to a very clear marketing message (Braunstein & Ross, 2010). Therefore, in order to maximize brand personality overlap between consumers' schema and the teams' schema, it is important for teams to emanate congruent and clear signals (i.e., strategically aligning athlete-team brand personality), limiting the number of possible perceptions and interpretations, which in turn, prevents confusion (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007).

6. Moderating variables and control variables

6-1. Brand familiarity

Brand familiarity, one specific component of the brand name concept, affects various facets of consumer decision making and increased brand familiarity may be due to exposure to the brand in advertisements or in a store, recognition of the brand name, and prior purchase and/or usage of the brand. It has been found to affect information search process (Biswas, 1992), product evaluation and choice heuristics (Raju, 1977), advertising message processing (Kent & Allen, 1994), and ultimate brand choice (Hoyer & Brown, 1990).

Brand familiarity reflects the brand-related experiences accumulated by the consumer (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). It captures consumers' brand knowledge structures, being more limited and weaker for unfamiliar brands and stronger and more sophisticated and accessible for familiar ones (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Because of these knowledge differences, numerous studies have shown that familiar brands have major advantages over unfamiliar brands in terms of processing and attitudes.

Past research provides some insight into how brand familiarity affects consumer purchase decisions. For instance, Hoyer and Brown (1990) found that when consumers were asked to select a brand from a given choice set, those who were familiar with a brand tended to select the known brand although it was relatively lower in quality, while those who were unfamiliar with the brands in the given choice set sampled more brands and selected the higher-quality brand. Based on the findings of their study, the authors suggest

that brand familiarity influences consumers' information processing style and their ultimate brand choice.

Another study found that brand familiarity moderates the recall of advertising message (Kent & Allen, 1994). Lane and Jacobson (1995) found that brand familiarity also influences brand's performance in the stock market. An experimental study found that greater brand name familiarity enhanced purchase intentions of both automobile insurance and photocopying services (Arora & Stoner, 1996). Research evidence also indicates that brand familiarity moderates information search. For example, Biswas's (1992) study revealed that consumers intend to spend less time shopping for a familiar brand than they do for an unfamiliar brand. Moreover, familiar brands lead consumers to judge that the product or firm is trustworthy (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) and thereby serve as signals of quality in situations where it may not be possible to directly examine a product (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006; Hoeffler & Keller, 2003).

Viewed collectively, these studies suggest that consumers react more favorably toward a familiar brand than they do toward an unfamiliar brand. These aforementioned evidences lead to a conclusion that consumers usually have rather elaborate and sophisticated schemas for familiar brands stored in memory (Heckler & Childers, 1992; Kent & Allen, 1994). In other words, consumers are able to store multiple associations for a familiar brand but not for an unfamiliar brand. Furthermore, the stored brand information is more easily retrieved for familiar brands (Heckler & Childers, 1992) and new brand-related information is more easily stored (Kent & Allen, 1994).

Given that consumers exhibit purchase behavior variations depending on brand familiarity, it is only logical to suspect that athlete and team

familiarity may play a moderating role on the effects of athlete-team brand personality alignment. For example, when people are familiar with the team, as their level of information search is negatively moderated by their level of familiarity, the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment message (i.e., an information cue) on overall team evaluation will be weaker. Therefore, the current study formulates athlete and team brand familiarity as a moderator in the research model.

6-2. Interaction quality

Person-to-person interactions are an essential element in the realm of service marketing (Czepiel, 1990; Crosby et al., 1990; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). Customers' perceptions of face-to-face interaction with frontline service providers have traditionally been considered one of the most important determinants for customer satisfaction and company loyalty (Liljander & Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000). During the service encounter, or 'moment-of-truth', the formation of customer perceptions is often more largely based upon the emotional and intangible content of the encounter than on surroundings (Stauss & Mang, 1999). Indeed, "traditionally, service encounters have been characterized as low tech, high face-to-face contact" (Drennan & McColl-Kennedy, 2003, p. 296).

There are a number of distinguishing characteristics of service encounters (Czepiel, 1990). First, service encounters are purposeful. The contact takes place to achieve a specific goal. Second, service encounters are limited in scope, and restricted by the nature and content of the service to be delivered. Third, the roles played by the service provider and the customer in

the service encounter are generally well-defined and understood by both parties. This suggests that service encounters are shaped by individual behaviors and the nature and quality of customer and employee interactions (Bitner, 1990; Bitner et al., 1994). Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) refer to the strategic framework within which these interactions take place as the 'services triangle'. They show how the three interlinked groups (i.e., customers, company, and employees) work together to develop, promote, and deliver services.

In the current study, the author conceptualizes interaction quality as moderating the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation and team brand equity. The construct of interaction quality was introduced by scholars from the Nordic School (e.g., Gronroos, 1984) and is recognized as one of the key components of service quality (other components: physical quality and output quality). An extensive literature review by Brady and Cronin (2001) found that interaction quality is generic across service industries. Moreover, they identified three distinct attributes that contribute to customer perceptions of interaction quality: (1) employee behaviors (e.g., helpfulness); (2) employee attitudes (e.g., willingness to serve); and (3) employee expertise.

Importantly, a review of the literature supports these attributes as key determinants of interaction quality. Accordingly, researchers have identified employee-related aspects of a service as a key dimension in the customers' assessment of service quality. For example, Gronroos (1984) suggested that the perception of service quality is influenced by the employees' attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Finally, support for the determinants of interaction quality can be found in the customer orientation literature. As defined by Brown et al. (2002, p. 11), customer orientation is "an employee's tendency or

predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context". Further, customer orientation is an enduring disposition to meet customer needs, develop successful service interactions and is influenced by the employees' technical skills, social skills, commitment to serve, and empathy.

The current study focuses on interaction quality rather than the other two components of service quality because the interpersonal interactions that take place during service delivery often have the greatest effect on service quality perceptions. In short, these interactions have been identified as the employee–customer interface and are the key element in a service exchange (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

Finally, given the importance of interaction quality, the author posits that athlete-fan interaction quality can be conceived as a moderating variable. In author's view, this seems a reasonable assumption because fans' positive perception of their face-to-face interaction with athletes can enhance the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment (new information cue), while negative perception weakens the effect.

6-3. Involvement

In an attempt to better understand the complex and sophisticated purchase decision mind-set of consumers, researchers in the field have often invoked the construct of 'involvement' (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Involvement is defined as the importance of the purchase category to the consumers and is based on their inherent needs, values, and interest (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Depending on their level of involvement, individual consumers differ in the extent of their purchase decision process and

their search for information (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). One of the facets in the involvement profile is the “perceived importance of the product” (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). In terms of resource perspective, consumers, for high involvement product, go through complex and sophisticated decision process through intense information seeking because the product is important for them.

On the contrary, low involvement product usually, but not always, are less important product for consumers which leads to relatively less information seeking. Therefore, product involvement, which refers to a general level of interest in or concern about a product class (Hupfer & Gardner, 1971), is likely to moderate the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment. This is a reasonable assumption as fans’ involvement toward soccer in general affects their degree of information seeking, which in turn will affect the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment (i.e., an information cue). In other words, when people are exposed to the new information cue, depending on their level of involvement toward soccer, the level of information intake will differ. This difference will hinder to true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment as a marketing communication message. Therefore, the current study formulates involvement as a covariate and, therefore, controlled the variable in the following studies.

6-4. Likeability

Drawing from the psychology literature, likeability has been defined as a persuasion tactic and a scheme of self-presentation (Kenrick, Neuberg, & Cialdini, 2002; Reysen, 2005). In other words, it refers to the “presence or absence of feelings that the receiver of a message would have towards a

source of product information (O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1998, p. 17). Perceived likeability is a psychological factor that influences consumers' reactions to a source such as a firm, brand, price, or other marketing tactics (e.g. Reysen, 2005). Research suggests that consumers are concerned with the likeability of a brand, especially when they find it attractive, and that when they dislike a brand, they are often reluctant to purchase the perceived dislikeable brand (Cialdini, 1993).

In the context of celebrity endorsements, a research suggests using celebrities is a way for firms to induce likeability, aiming to create positive associations with a firm's services and that such a front figure would capture the customers' attention and create brand loyalty (McCracken, 1989). In the similar vein, as familiar athletes and teams are generally likeable, effect of brand personality alignment (i.e., brand information cue) can be affected by the degree of people's perceived likeability of the athletes and teams used in the current study. Therefore, given that consumers exhibit attitude and behavior variations depending on likeability of the teams and athletes, it is only logical to suspect that likeability may affect the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on dependent variables (i.e., overall team evaluation and team brand equity). Therefore, the author posits that fans' likeability of the teams and athletes can be conceived as covariates which need to be controlled in order to more clearly identify the true effect of the marketing stimulus (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment). Consequently, the current study formulates likeability of athletes and teams as covariates and controlled both variables in the following studies.

6-5. Perceived quality

Perceived quality has been defined as the consumer's judgment of the degree of a product's overall excellence or superiority, usually compared to other products or service in the same class (Tsiotsou, 2006). It is a subjective decision made by an individual which can be different to objective or actual quality (Mitra & Golder, 2006). However, extant studies report that it is the consumer's perception of the quality (i.e., perceived quality), and not the objective quality, that leads to preference and consequently satisfaction, loyalty, sales, and profitability (e.g., Mitra & Golder, 2006; Zeithaml, 1998).

In the current study's context, the perceived quality of teams and athletes can affect the true effect of brand personality alignment (i.e., brand information cue). For example, fans with positive perceived quality of teams are likely to evaluate team brand positively regardless of the brand information cue conveyed through strategic alignment. Therefore, given that consumers' perceived quality of teams and athletes lead to positive evaluations of the team brand, it is fair to argue that perceived quality of the team and the athletes may affect the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on dependent variables (i.e., overall team evaluation and team brand equity). Consequently, the current study formulates perceived quality of the teams and athletes as covariates and controlled both variables in the following studies.

7. Overview of the current research

In the following section, the current research reports a preliminary study and three studies that test research hypotheses. Preliminary study was

undertaken to explore fans' perceptions on utilizing athletes in team branding marketing communications. More specifically, fans' reactions to athlete-team brand personality alignment as a tool for team branding. Furthermore, the author discovered possible moderating factors that might influence the effect of team branding information cue (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment).

Study 1 and 2, both with an experimental design, empirically examined the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and moderating role of team familiarity and athlete familiarity respectively. A total of four different categories (brand personality alignment x team familiarity / brand personality alignment x athlete familiarity) for both studies were manipulated through different versions of stimulus materials. The author predicted that the team branding message, when aligned, will have a greater effect on team brand evaluation and customer-based team brand equity, while team and athlete familiarity will have moderating effects.

In Study 3 (a field study), in order to generalize the findings of Study 1 and 2, the author reinvestigated the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and moderating effects of team and athlete familiarity in a real life setting. Moreover, interaction quality was additionally tested as another moderating variable. The author predicted that the effect of team branding message (i.e., athlete-team brand personality) will be positively moderated in three situations: (1) for unfamiliar teams, (2) for unfamiliar athletes, and (3) for higher interaction quality (athlete attitude, behavior, and expertise).

III. PRELIMINARY STUDY

1. Overview of the study

Prior to undertaking Study 1, 2, and 3, a preliminary study was conducted in order to investigate fans' perceptions of utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding (specifically athlete-team brand personality alignment as a strategic approach) and to discover possible factors that might influence the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment (i.e., identifying possible moderators). Although testing the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment was an important contribution on its own, the author suspected that the effect will vary depending on contextual factors of the athlete-fan interactions. Therefore, to achieve aforementioned goals of the preliminary study, free-thought listing and focus group discussions methods were undertaken. All participants agreed to participate in the study via informed consent and permission for their quotes to be used in research publications.

A total of 60 respondents participated in the preliminary study, among which 50 were undergraduate students and 10 were graduate students (see Table 2 below). Graduate students were sport management majors and undergraduate students were selected from soccer classes at a large national university in Seoul, Korea. A student sample (with such majors and ones participating in sport classes) was chosen for the preliminary study because they have easy access to sport information on a regular basis, have interest in sports, and possess basic knowledge of sports. Furthermore, student samples have been shown to be acceptable for such studies due to the homogeneity nature of the sample (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1981).

Table 2. Demographics of respondents (Preliminary study)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	91.7
	Female	5	8.3
Age	20 ~ 22	23	38.3
	23 ~ 25	19	31.7
	26 ~ 28	11	18.3
	29 or higher	7	11.7

To ensure that the topic of interest was meaningful to the respondents and to the author, it was important that they had a supporting team. Through asking series of questions regarding the topic, it was found that all respondents were interested in sports and had a team or teams that they follow and support. For the purpose of the study, 60 respondents were divided into groups. According to a former research, focus group discussions should be continued until the author can anticipate what is going to be said in the group and this typically happens after third or fourth group interviews (Calder, 1977). Therefore, the participants were divided into groups of five (12 groups in total) and participated in the study separately—a group at a time. The 12 FGDs held were enough to reach saturation (a point at which all questions have been thoroughly explored in detail and no new information or ideas emerged in subsequent interviews) (Trotter, 2012).

2. Method

Upon arrival, participants were asked to read a brief cover story which was prepared to provide information about teams utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment). They then

engaged in a free-thought listing exercise designed to assess which particular cognitive responses were evoked by the information given in the cover story (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997) as it is the principal mean utilized for gathering observations of the participants' knowledge obtained or raised during information processing (Price et al., 1997). In addition, free-thought listing increased the likelihood that only those responses elicited by the stimulus (i.e., the cover story) and those associations that were readily accessible were measured (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981).

Moreover, the exercise also has a brainstorming effect which would be useful in enriching the following focus group sessions. Therefore, the participants were asked to list what they thought of the information given in the cover story. In addition, they were asked to list possible factors that might influence the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment (i.e., identifying possible moderators). After three minutes of thought-listing exercise, the participants were instructed to review their listed thoughts and rate them in terms of importance:

We are now interested in everything that went through your mind about the cover story you just read. More specifically, try to picture the situation depicted in the cover story and tell us your thoughts regarding the proposed marketing strategy and please mention any possible factors that might affect the effect of newly proposed marketing strategy. Please list these thoughts, whether they are positive, neutral, and/or negative. Any case is fine. Ignore spelling, grammar, and punctuation. You will have three minutes to write. We have deliberately provided more space than we think people will need to ensure that everyone would have plenty of room.

Please be completely honest. Your responses will be anonymous. Once the three minutes of the exercise is over, please rate the listed thoughts in terms of importance (Cacioppo, Glass, & Merluzzi, 1979).

Several stages of pretesting were necessary to develop the cover story. For example, pretests were necessary to come up with most appropriate, succinct, and precise wording of the story which would facilitate the participants' understanding of the given material. The cover story included information explaining the idea of athlete-team brand personality alignment (see Appendix A). Although the participants were fans of sports, there was high chance that they might not be aware of the new marketing idea of athlete-team brand personality alignment. Therefore, the information in the cover story was precise and detailed and if the participants were unclear or did not fully understand the material, the author, verbally provided follow up information until the full understanding of the material was reached.

Immediately following the thought-listing exercise, participants engaged in focus group discussions (FGDs). A total of 12 FGDs were conducted (each lasted for 30 minutes to an hour)—ten conducted with undergraduate students and two with graduate students. Discussion groups were stratified by age, gender, and education level to construct homogeneous groups of participants which encouraged participants to feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts. To ensure a similar interview technique for each FGDs, all the FGDs were moderated by the author using a FGD guide (with context specific modifications) which was developed to ensure that issues were discussed consistently across groups (Berg, Lune, & Lune, 2004; Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998). The interview guide was developed based on the procedures

given in the extant literatures (Berg et al., 2004; Morgan et al., 1998) and was pilot-tested in the first FGDs and, because no modifications were necessary, the same guide was used throughout the rest of the FGDs (see Table 3).

At the start of every FGD session, participants were welcomed by the author (the moderator) and were provided with purpose and ground rules of the FGD. During the FGDs, the participants were asked for their opinion (based on experiences if possible) about the athlete-team brand personality alignment as a tool for team branding. Additionally, they were asked for their ideas about the possible factors which might hinder or facilitate the effect of alignment. The moderator made sure that every participant was involved in the discussion and actively generated interaction and discussion among participants. All FGDs were conducted in Korean and audio-recorded using a digital recorder. All audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim and translated into English. Great caution was taken during translation to ensure that no data was lost in the process. In order to maximize the validity of the FGDs, the author implemented verifying methods suggested by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002).

Peer debriefing and member check methods were utilized to maximize credibility of the study. Furthermore, the transcripts were sent to the participants in order for them to verify their comments and suggest any alterations to the content (but no changes were required by the participants). As suggested by Sandelowski (2001), the qualitative data are reinforced by quantitative counts of the participants discussing the topic interested in the current study. Thus, when a factor was discussed by 0%, the author called it 'nobody', for less than 50%, called it 'some', for between 50% and 80%, called it 'almost all' and for 100%, called it 'all' in the following section.

Table 3. Focus group discussion guide

Question type	Content
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcoming: providing basic information about the FGD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduces the author (the moderator) - What this FGD is about - What will be done with the collected information 2. Explanation of the process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not trying to achieve consensus (gathering information) - Looking for priorities - FGD will last about an hour - Feel free to move around (comfortable atmosphere) - Help yourselves to refreshments 3. Ground rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone should participate - Information provided in the FGD must be kept confidential - Stay with the group and do not have side conversation - Put the cell phone on silence or turn it off if possible - Actively participate in the discussion (no right or wrong) 4. Ask the group if there are any questions before FGD starts 5. FGD starts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Discussion begins, make sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and do not move too quickly. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when hear repetitive information.</i>
Discussion question	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think of team branding? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think it is necessary for professional sport teams? - How vital do you think team branding is for teams? 2. What do you think about utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you think aligning athlete and team brand personality would be a tool for team branding? 3. What factors might affect the influence of the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment?

3. Findings

3-1. Perceptions of utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding

First, all participants agreed with the idea that teams need branding. Professional sport teams are brands and it is necessary for them to build and enhance their brand through marketing communication efforts. Some participants said: “*Branding is what makes teams stand out from the crowd. Unfortunately, I do not see teams with clear brand and brand positioning*”, “*I think team branding is a must. To be honest, many teams in Korea do not have unique color*” and almost all co-participants agreed with the assertion.

For the one of the main purposes of the FGDs, the moderator asked the questions regarding the utilization of athletes as a tool for team branding and alignment of brand personality. Due to the preceding thought-listing exercise, participants already had thoughts or impressions about the idea of alignment, which became a foundation for fruitful discussions. All participants expressed positive reactions toward whole idea of brand personality alignment as a tool for branding. This finding was consistent with the participants’ ratings of their self-statements (thought-listing) as well. Some participants indicated: “*Since many people follow athletes rather than teams, it sounds like an idea*”, “*My first impression with the idea was ‘reasonable’ and ‘appealing’*”, “*Aligning their brand personality shall convey a unified message which would reduce confusion*”, “*Athletes can be a powerful medium for team brand messaging. After all, we like teams because certain athletes play for them. Especially in a culture of ‘star celebrities’, it would be more effective.*”

Although overall evaluations and impressions of branding through

athletes (brand personality alignment) were positive, some of the participants expressed concerns regarding how the alignment would be implemented: *“I feel like it would be difficult to align athlete brand personality and team brand personality because two might be very different”, “Athletes already has predetermined brand personality which may be dissimilar to the team brand”, “It seems to me that athletes’ already developed brand personality is something that is difficult to alter.”*

3-2. Contextual factors with moderating effect

In order to help the participants’ understanding of the situation and to extract fruitful information for the FGDs, the participants were asked to imagine a situation—a fan meeting with the athletes. While the participants were imaging the situation, the moderator provided information regarding the situation to provide a clearer picture. Participants provided potential moderators and shared the following: *“I think the effect of alignment will depend on how much the fans know the athletes. If they know the athletes, then they will pay more attention to what the athletes do and say”, “It would also depend on the attitudes of the athletes. Some athletes express the feeling that they would rather be at home resting”, “How about people’s interest in the sport and the team. If they are not interested at all, people will not pay any attention what so ever”.*

4. Discussion

The preliminary study provides foundation for the current study

through thought-listing exercise and 12 FGDs with undergraduate and graduate students. The findings demonstrated participants viewed utilizing athletes as a tool for team branding as positive. Moreover, the idea of athlete-team brand personality alignment deemed effective. However, there also were some concerns regarding the difficulties in altering already existing athlete brand personality to make it align with that of the team. As mentioned in the <Athlete brand personality as states> section above, brand personality is a state—which is temporary and brief (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). Moreover, former studies found that fans even deem athletes' on-field outrageous behaviors as 'part of the game' rather than immoral (Fink et al., 2009; Horrow, 1982); hence the athletes' predetermined brand personality built based upon on-field performance is changeable. In other words, athlete brand personality can be generated, altered, enhanced, and maintained through consistent marketing communication.

The preliminary study also demonstrated potential contextual factors. These findings are supported by the extant literature in marketing and sport management as brand familiarity (e.g., Campbell & Keller, 2003; Keller, 1991; Sirianni et al., 2013; Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, & Thorson, 2005), service interaction quality (e.g., Brady & Cronin, 2001; Ekinci, Dawes, & Massey, 2008), and involvement (e.g., Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985) are deemed as important contextual factors due to their influence on customers' perceptions and behaviors.

These qualitative evidences found above provide preliminary base to support the current study's contention that using athlete in a team branding marketing would be an effective method and athlete-team brand personality alignment can be an effect marketing communication tool. The contextual

factors found in the preliminary study (i.e., familiarity, interaction quality, and involvement), in line with the effects of the factors reported in the literatures and factors identified through expert discussion, provided the author with enough rationale to utilize those factors as either moderating variable or control variable. Athlete and team familiarity was utilized as a moderator as it was deemed to be a factor that affects the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment. Interaction quality was also chosen as a moderator as fans' interaction quality perceived through actual face-to-face meeting with the athletes is a vital moderating factor. Finally, involvement, team/athlete likeability, and team/athlete perceived quality were controlled due to their role in information seeking and intake, and attitudes. Therefore, based on the findings above and on the existing literature, the current study posits that the team/athlete familiarity and athlete-customer interaction quality as major contextual factors that might moderate the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment.

IV. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES

1. The effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment

Professional sport teams undertake various marketing communication efforts to influence customer brand knowledge and position their brand. As mentioned before, appealing the brand with a specific brand personality can be influential as what a team is (who) and how it displays itself to current and potential fans are defined by the team brand personality (Keller & Richey, 2006). Brand personality is a set of associated human characteristics that convey the brand's symbolic identity which can shape fans' team brand knowledge around a strong and positive personality image.

Information about a brand's personality is not typical sensory information and, therefore, an individual cannot readily see, hear, taste, smell, or feel it. However, most psycho-physiologists concede that one's perceptions have qualities that are not present in the physical attributes of the stimulus (Sekuler & Blake, 1994). In other words, brand personality can be seen as a nonphysical piece of product/service knowledge that shapes perceptions in consumers' minds.

Furthermore, social identity theory posits that people tend to associate with entities that enhance their own identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Thus, individuals may be attracted to brands with positive brand personalities as they seek psychological benefits that may be accrued through associating themselves with specific brand personalities (Carlson & Donovan, 2013). As previously

mentioned, brand personality plays a pivotal role in team branding as teams can transmit the 'who we are (i.e., identity)' message through brand personality appeal (Keller & Aaker, 1998). Among various marketing communication methods utilized to generate and/or appeal team selected brand personality, athletes can be one of the most powerful and influential mediums (Carlson & Donovan, 2008, 2013; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kapferer, 2008; Till & Busler, 2000).

Therefore, it is fair to argue that implementing team branding communication by strategically aligning athlete brand personality with that of the team is an effective method since it offers marketing managers a cohesive approach to convey team brand as a unified whole (i.e. minimizing confusion). The current study postulates that the alignment shall serve as a congruent and clear marketing message which will increase the brand-related congruity (limiting the number of possible perceptions and interpretations), thereby facilitating fans' understanding of the conveyed team brand's meaning. To conceptualize the positive effect of brand personality alignment, congruence theory and match-up hypothesis are cited.

Congruence has been defined as the degree to which the direct or indirect relevance between the two entities exists (McDonald, 1991). Previous studies, especially in the field of sponsorship and endorsement, suggest that consumers' perceived congruence between the two related entities (i.e., sponsor and sponsored entity / endorser and endorsed entity) positively affects desired outcomes such as favorable attitudes and higher intention to purchase (e.g., Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; McDaniel, 1999). The positive effects of congruence are evident as highly congruent stimuli are easier to process and understand which, in turn, leads to conceptual fluency and increased preference

(Lee & Labroo, 2004; Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). Conceptual fluency means the degree to which customers can process and understand information, such as brand personality appeal, easily.

Moreover, according to a former study, people tend to evaluate brand related stimuli more positively when they are exposed to conceptually fluent stimuli, even under conditions of a single exposure (Lee & Labroo, 2004). Furthermore, congruence theory also suggests that congruent information is more clearly remembered in the consumers' mindset (Lee & Cho, 2009). That is, when a stimulus and its context are aligned, the conveyed information (i.e., brand meaning) is more easily grasped and, therefore, is more accessible in memory relative to misaligned stimulus and context (Sirianni et al., 2013).

In line with the congruence theory, the match-up hypothesis suggests that endorsement will be more effective when consumers see an appropriate fit (e.g., fit based on usage, expertise, or image) between the endorser and the product being advertised (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; McDaniel, 1999; Till & Busler, 2000). Higher fit increases the likelihood of consumers believing in the endorsers' motive for the endorsement to be based on product performance rather than financial inducements (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000). Although some might argue that endorsers' display of their liking of the endorsee product is due to the large endorsement fee, there is a phenomenon called "correspondence bias" which suggests that people tend to attribute endorsers' behavior to personal characteristics of the endorser despite the existence of situational factors (e.g., endorsement fees) (Gilbert & Malone, 1995).

Therefore, extending the concept of congruence theory and match-up hypothesis, when athlete brand personality is aligned with the team brand

personality, the congruent marketing communication will enable fans to experience the team brand as a more consistent, unified whole (which would simplify the decision-making process by reducing cognitive dissonance). This process shall have a significant influence on increased preference (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Reber et al., 2004) and, thus, more favorable overall brand evaluations and customer-based brand equity (Sirianni et al., 2013).

Overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity are the two dependent measures chosen for the current study. The former measures customers' affective responses toward the team brand (such as liking, trust, and desirability), while the latter measures managerial implications of brand building (such as degree of brand equity benefits compared to competitors, perceived value for the cost, brand uniqueness, and willingness to pay premium price) (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Therefore, by measuring both distinct, yet related, scales, the results of the study provided a more detailed and profound implications for team marketing managers.

H_{1a}: Overall team evaluation will be more favorable when the athlete brand personality is aligned with the team brand personality than when misaligned.

H_{1b}: Customer-based team brand equity will be more favorable when the athlete brand personality is aligned with the team brand personality than when misaligned.

2. The moderating role of team and athlete familiarity

Brand familiarity is defined as knowledge acquired through direct or indirect experiences with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994; Sirianni et al., 2013). Due to its role in determining the degree of information processing motivation, brand familiarity affects customer's degree of intake of new brand-related information (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Keller, 1991; Stammerjohan et al., 2005). The difference in customers' information processing reactions based on the degree of brand familiarity can be explained through top-down and bottom-up information processing employed by customers. According to an extant study, when customers encounter familiar brands, they tend to use less extensive and more confirmation-based information processing (Keller, 1991).

In other words, customers will likely employ top-down information processing when they encounter a new marketing message (in the current case, aligned brand personality of an athlete and a team) conveyed by a familiar brand (in the current case, familiar team and athlete) (Schwarz, 2002). This type of information processing relies on prior knowledge (or even bias) of the brand rather than the newly given brand information cues. Thus, new marketing messages transmitted by a team shall be relatively less effective as customers will likely judge a team brand based on information accumulated through past experiences with the team and the athletes (i.e., prior knowledge) rather than the team aligned athlete brand personality marketing messages.

On the other hand, however, when customers are exposed to marketing communication regarding unfamiliar brands, they tend to undertake more extensive processing (Hilton & Darley, 1991). Contrary to the familiar brand

case, customers will likely engage in bottom-up information processing (Schwarz, 2002). This processing style is more systematic and characterized by focused attention to new brand information cues. Therefore, unfamiliar brands are at a disadvantage because they lack the knowledge in customers' minds to become established and thereby preferred (Campbell & Keller, 2003). The current research aims to understand how unfamiliar brands can leverage brand personality alignment as a brand-building advantage during customers' extensive processing of their initial team brand encounters.

Therefore, building on prior literature on brand familiarity (due to the increased cognitive processing when encountering unfamiliar brands), the current study posits that athlete-team brand personality alignment (brand information cue) will have a stronger positive effect on fans' team brand-related judgments of unfamiliar teams and athletes compared with familiar teams and athletes. Figure 1 below shows the visual description of the hypothesized research model.

H_{2a}: Positive effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation will be stronger for unfamiliar teams than for familiar teams.

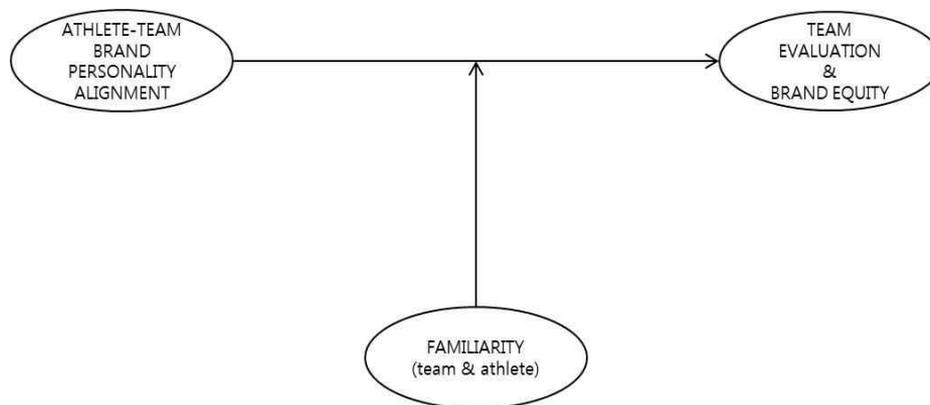
H_{2b}: Positive effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on customer-based team brand equity will be stronger for unfamiliar teams than for familiar teams.

H_{3a}: Positive effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation will be stronger for unfamiliar athletes than for

familiar athletes.

H_{3b}: Positive effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on customer-based team brand equity will be stronger for unfamiliar athletes than for familiar athletes.

Figure 1. Team and athlete familiarity as a moderator in the relationship between alignment and team evaluation/brand equity



3. The moderating role of interaction quality

Interaction quality is one of primary dimensions of service quality along with physical environmental quality and outcome quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Interaction quality is comprised of three distinct attributes: employee attitude (e.g., willingness to serve), employee behavior (e.g., helpfulness), and expertise (Brady & Cronin, 2001). These attributes are all related to employees as employee-customer interface is a key element in a service exchange (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Accordingly, researchers have

identified employee-related aspects of a service as a key dimension in the customers' assessment of service quality. For example, Bitner (1990) demonstrated that employees' service behaviors affected the customers' perception toward the service. Moreover, Gronroos (1984) also suggested that the perception of service quality is influenced by the employees' attitudes, behaviors, and skills.

Dissimilar to other dimensions, interaction quality focuses on actual moment the service is being delivered (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1984; Ko & Pastore, 2005) and, therefore, plays an important role in developing a strong brand in service firms as attitudes, skills, behaviors, and personalities of frontline employees can influence customer perceptions of service quality, corporate image, and consumer loyalty (Ekinci et al., 2008). Furthermore, findings from the extant literatures demonstrate interaction quality being a major driver of positive service quality perceptions (Bitner et al., 1994; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987; Wright, Duray, & Goodale, 1992). Therefore, the current study focuses on interaction quality rather than the other components of service quality because the interpersonal interactions that take place during service delivery often have the greatest effect on service quality perceptions (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

The importance of interaction quality is also evident in the field of sports—especially in fitness and recreational sport where service providers and customers frequently interact. Several researchers have identified staff members' attitudes (Kim & Kim, 1995; Wright et al., 1992) and expertise (Wright et al., 1992) as important factors that can positively shift customers' service perception. These extant studies also provide evidence that the attitude, expertise, and behavior of a service employee in sport industry is a vital factor

in the mind of consumers' service assessment.

In the current study, the author views athlete and fan interaction in professional sport as one form of employee-customer interface because athletes are employees of the teams and fans are customers of the teams. Therefore, in line with the effects of employee attitudes and behaviors on customer perceptions of the service mentioned above, athletes' interpersonal interactions with fans can have a powerful effect on service quality perceptions (Bitner et al., 1994; Gronroos, 1984; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987).

Following the line of reasoning, the author proposes that the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment (team brand information cue) on dependent variable (i.e., overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity) will be strengthened for teams with more favorable interaction quality, while the effect of alignment will be diminished for less favorable interaction quality. For example, those who are relatively satisfied with their interaction with athletes (e.g., perceived interaction quality at a marketing event where athletes sign autographs), the marketing communication message conveyed by teams through athletes by aligning their brand personality, are bound to be more likely to positively evaluate team brand related response measures.

Theoretical support for this positive moderating effect can be drawn from Oliver's (1980) expectation-disconfirmation paradigm. This theory posits that consumers learn from experiences of product/service consumption and forms new or adjusted expectations (Hoch & Deighton, 1989), which in the future serve as an anchor in evaluating future experience. This learning and adjusting is continually taking place in the market in through the process of 'anchoring and adjusting' (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In other words, consumers' prior expectation (i.e. anchor) is adjusted through new consumption

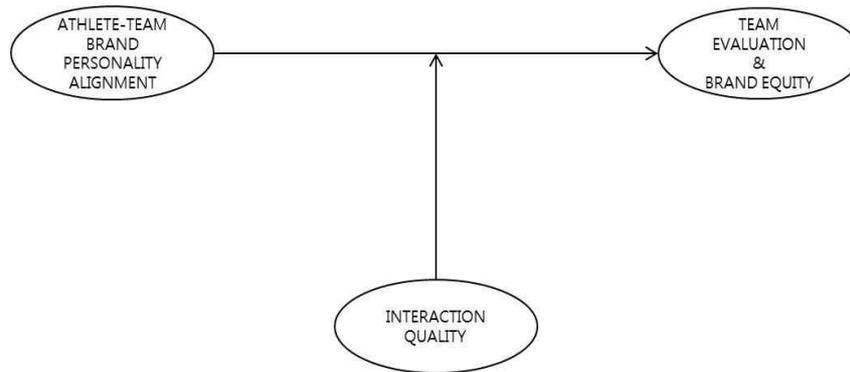
experience to form adjusted expectations for the future consumption.

In the current study's case, the author argue that fans use athlete-team brand personality alignment (i.e., team branding appeal information cue) to form expectation for the future consumption. This, then, will act as an anchor for evaluating the team brand and adjust based on the new consumption experience (i.e., fans' perceived interaction quality with athletes at events). In other words, the impact of the new branding appeal will be buffered by consumers' perception of interaction quality. Therefore, the author propose that the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment will be enhanced as fans' perceived interaction quality is more favorable. Figure 2 below depicts the visual description of the hypothesized research model.

H_{4a}: Interaction quality will positively moderate the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation.

H_{4b}: Interaction quality will positively moderate the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on customer-based team brand equity.

Figure 2. Fans' perceived interaction quality as a moderator in the relationship between alignment and team evaluation/brand equity



The author tested H₁-H₄ in a series of controlled experiments and a field study. To gain a deeper understanding and to provide empirical evidence of the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on fans' responses to team brands, the current study employed Study 1 and 2 (an experimental study), through which effect of alignment on dependent variables (H_{1a} and H_{1b}) and moderating effects of team familiarity (H_{2a} and H_{2b}) and athlete familiarity (H_{3a} and H_{3b}) were empirically examined. In order to provide greater generalizability of the results of Study 1 and 2, Study 3 was employed in a field setting—a more realistic experience of the respondents—to test the effect of alignment (H_{1a} and H_{1b}) and moderating effects of team and athlete familiarity (H_{2a}, H_{2b}, H_{3a}, H_{3b}), and interaction quality (H_{4a}, H_{4b}).

V. STUDY 1

The Effect of Strategic Alignment on Team Evaluation: The Moderating Role of Team Familiarity

In the introduction section, the author asserted the necessity of branding professional sport teams and rationalized the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment through in-depth literature review. However, notwithstanding the intuition, it has first to be shown the existence of the effect of strategic alignment and the moderating effect of team familiarity. Study 1 sought to examine the aforementioned effects. To do so, the author, in an experimental study, empirically examined the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and the moderating role of team familiarity. A total of four different scenarios—a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design (alignment: aligned vs. misaligned / team familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) were manipulated through different versions of stimulus materials.

1. Overview of the study

In study 1, the author, empirically examined H₁ and H₂—effect of alignment and moderating effect of team familiarity—with two different brand personality attributes (imaginative and tough). The author purposefully selected these two brand personality attributes over others because these two successfully manipulated the misaligned situation in a former study (see Sirianni et al., 2013). Some respondents were exposed to an athlete-team brand personality aligned scenario (imaginative team / imaginative athlete), whereas

others were exposed to an athlete-team brand personality misaligned scenario (imaginative team / tough athlete). In a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design, the author manipulated athlete and team brand personality (aligned vs. misaligned) and team familiarity (familiar vs. unfamiliar).

A total of 121 undergraduate students at three national universities in Korea participated in the study. Undergraduate students were recruited via their enrollment in sport related courses. The samples were purposefully selected because the stimuli provided in the study were likely to be relevant to aforementioned students as they have interest in sports. Moreover, student samples have been shown to be acceptable for such studies due to the homogeneity nature of the sample (Calder et al., 1981).

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (i.e., randomly provided different stimulus materials). All study respondents voluntarily participated and received neither credits nor any other type of compensations for their participation. Among the total of 121 respondents, after data screening, 112 survey data were deemed usable for further data analysis. The final respondents were consisted of 95 males (84.8%) and 17 females (15.2%) with average age of 23.1 years (SD = 2.17)—respondents' detailed demographic information is provided in the Table 4 below. As part of their participation, they read the given material (one of four different stimulus materials) and provided their evaluations.

After data screening process, there were an unequal number of cases in each scenario. To be specific, there were 28 samples in [aligned / familiar team] scenario, 29 samples in [aligned / unfamiliar team] scenario, 26 samples in [misaligned / familiar team] scenario, and 29 samples in [misaligned / unfamiliar team] scenario. To make sure all scenarios were equally represented

in the sample, the author conducted a chi-square test, considering the expected value of 25% for each scenario. Results of the test demonstrated that observed frequencies did not differ from expected frequencies ($\chi^2 = .21$; $df = 3$; $p = .975$), indicating that no scenario was underrepresented in the final sample.

Table 4. Demographics of respondents (Study 1)

Design	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Alignment	Gender	Male	95	84.8
		Female	17	15.2
Team Familiarity	Age	20 ~ 22	50	44.6
		23 ~ 25	44	39.3
		26 ~ 28	18	16.1

2. Method

2-1. Pretesting and contents of the stimulus material

Several stages of pretesting were necessary to develop stimulus materials manipulating athlete-team brand personality alignment (aligned vs. misaligned: utilizing team with imaginative brand personality and athletes with imaginative and tough brand personality) and team familiarity (familiar vs. unfamiliar)—total of four different scenarios. The main aim of the pretest was (1) to identify teams with imaginative brand personality and athletes with either imaginative or tough brand personality, and (2) to verify familiar and unfamiliar teams and unfamiliar athletes. Through several pretests and multiple sessions of expert discussions, along with the findings from the preliminary study, the materials for the current study was constructed.

Four versions of the same materials with different degree of presented information were generated: 2 (athlete-team brand personality alignment: aligned vs. misaligned) x 2 (team familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar). The stimulus materials contained general information of the team's imaginative and athlete's imaginative or tough brand personality positioning (Aaker, 1997; Sirianni et al., 2013: see Appendix B). The words used to offer a signal of the team's and athlete's brand personality were carefully selected from a 'imaginative' measurement tool developed by Cho, Lee, and Kim (2015) and from a thesaurus dictionary. Although the author adapted the aforementioned two brand personality attributes from former studies (Carlson et al., 2009; Carlson & Donavan, 2013), all 15 of the original items from Aaker's (1997) BPS were initially tested for their relevance to the current study. Specifically, a pretest was conducted to ensure that each attribute was appropriate for the professional soccer context. 63 respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which each of the original 15 brand personality attributes was appropriate for describing professional soccer teams and athletes (very inappropriate - very appropriate).

Consistent with the findings of former studies, the five brand personality attributes of tough, charming, wholesome, imaginative, and successful were deemed appropriate markers of brand personality within the context of professional soccer teams and athletes. For example, no respondents evaluated intelligent as being appropriate. Those attributes that were evaluated as "inappropriate" by at least 10% of the respondents and evaluated as "very inappropriate" by any respondent were deemed inappropriate for further consideration in the following studies. This resulted in a total of five remaining brand personality attributes (i.e., imaginative, wholesome, successful, charming, and tough). It is worth noting that this investigation focuses on

specific brand personality attributes rather than general dimensions.

One of the most important steps in generating stimulus materials was identifying the appropriate teams and athletes. Therefore, several pretests were necessary to correctly select the teams for the stimulus materials. Prior to pretests, the author, through extensive literature review and investigation of online materials (especially news articles), generated a list of teams (five teams for 'familiar' category) and selected an unfamiliar team and unfamiliar athletes. Those familiar teams were chosen based on their popularity and their overall image was a factor of consideration for deciding their imaginative brand personality. The team and athletes under 'unfamiliar' category were carefully chosen to manipulate unfamiliarity—i.e., one relatively unknown actual team and two relatively unknown athletes. Unfamiliar athletes were purposefully used in all four categories to minimize any potential confounding effect of athlete familiarity.

The first pretest (N = 62) was conducted to ensure that teams initially selected for 'familiar' category were appropriate for investigation within the current study's context (i.e., appropriately manipulating the intended brand personality). Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which each of the five brand personality attributes was appropriate for describing the familiar teams (1 = very inappropriate, 5 = very appropriate) provided in the initial list. While most respondents rated the intended brand personality 'very appropriate', the result also revealed that some teams were perceived as being comprised of more than one personality attribute (e.g., they were all rated either 'appropriate' or 'very appropriate' on 'successful' brand personality attribute). This result was rather anticipated as the teams initially chosen for 'familiar' category are well-known for their success among soccer fans. The

team rated the highest for ‘imaginative’, while scoring relatively low on other brand personality attributes was selected for the stimulus scenarios. Teams and athletes chosen for the stimulus materials are highlighted in the Table 5 below.

Table 5. Athletes and teams used in the stimulus materials (Study 1)

Familiarity	Team / Athlete	Brand Personality	Selected Team / Athlete
Familiar	Team	Imaginative	Barcelona (Spain)
			Real Madrid (Spain)
			Atletico Madrid (Spain)
			Valencia (Spain)
			Villarreal (Spain)
Unfamiliar	Athlete	Imaginative	Robbie Rogers
		Tough	Oguchi Onyewu
	Team	Imaginative	Tonbridge Angels

The author manipulated athlete-team brand personality alignment within a ‘team signing an athlete’ context by either aligning or misaligning the team and athlete brand personality. This was intentionally set as athletes are human brands and they affect the collective branding of the teams—distinguishing teams from one another (Pifer, Mak, Bae, & Zhang, 2015). Furthermore, a team signing an athlete is one of the most common branding information fans are exposed to in real life (Pifer et al., 2015). Information given in each material was purposefully crafted to clearly reflect one particular category (e.g., a stimulus material for one of the aligned scenarios contained a familiar team with an imaginative brand personality attribute and an unfamiliar athlete with an imaginative brand personality attribute—pictures were also added to the stimulus materials in order to emphasize the intended brand personality, especially for athletes). Care was taken to ensure that each version of stimulus

material had approximately equal amounts of text to increase the likelihood that responses would be a function of information content rather than information quantity. A panel of expert judges initially examined the stimulus materials for content validity and the presence of any potential covariates.

In the next pretest (N = 37), respondents were asked to evaluate, using a five-point scale (anchored by 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely), how the athletes and teams rated on each of the brand personality attributes. Brand personality was measured using the single-item measures implemented by Carlson et al. (2009) and Carlson and Donovan (2013) in a professional sport context. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test manipulated brand personality attributes. The results revealed that respondents rated the manipulated brand personality attributes of each team and athlete significantly higher than other brand personality attributes. For example, Barcelona, the familiar 'imaginative' team chosen for the current study, was rated significantly higher on 'imaginative' ($M_{\text{imaginative}} = 4.78$) than other brand personality attributes ($M_{\text{wholesome}} = 3.19$, $M_{\text{successful}} = 3.97$, $M_{\text{charming}} = 3.24$, $M_{\text{tough}} = 3.19$; $F(4, 180) = 16.672$, $p < .001$).

In the following pretest (N = 60), respondents were asked to evaluate, using a five-point scale (anchored by 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely), the degree of brand personality alignment (team and athlete brand personality), the degree of their familiarity with the teams and athletes, and their degree of likeability and perceived quality of the teams and athletes. A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test manipulated brand personality alignment, familiarity, and potential covariates (likeability and perceived quality). First, respondents rated aligned scenarios as more aligned than misaligned scenarios ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 3.82$ vs. $M_{\text{misaligned}} = 2.24$; $F(1, 58) =$

91.373, $p < .001$). Second, the familiarity of familiar team was significantly different from that of unfamiliar team ($M_{\text{familiar team}} = 4.13$ vs. $M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 1.83$; $F(1, 58) = 176.484$, $p < .001$), whereas athlete familiarity did not differ among the four groups ($F(3, 56) = .921$, $p > .05$). Taken together, the results of these pretests provided evidence that selected teams and athletes convey aligned brand personality and familiarity. Therefore, they were used in the manipulation scenarios for the current study.

Potential covariates were also tested through pretest. The result of one-way ANOVAs revealed that likeability and perceived quality of familiar team were not significantly different from that of unfamiliar team ($M_{\text{familiar_likeability}} = 3.37$, $M_{\text{unfamiliar_likeability}} = 3.00$; $F(1, 58) = 2.346$, $p > .05$; $M_{\text{familiar_quality}} = 3.43$, $M_{\text{unfamiliar_quality}} = 3.23$; $F(1, 58) = .619$, $p > .05$). Likewise, athlete likeability and perceived quality did not differ among the four groups (Likeability: $F(3, 56) = 1.217$, $p > .05$; Perceived quality: $F(3, 56) = 2.038$, $p > .05$). Taken together, the results of these pretests for likeability and perceived quality revealed insignificance of the potential covariates. However, despite the insignificance of those variables, literatures and the preliminary study posit the possibility of confounding effects of the variables. Therefore, those variables were measured as covariates in the following study.

Finally, through a pilot test, the materials were pretested to ensure that they were reliably rated as descriptive, realistic, useful, and favorable, and to ensure that no one material was significantly different from the others on these criteria. The results of this final pilot test also revealed that respondents could correctly identify the intended manipulations (brand personality alignment and familiarity depicted by the information in the stimulus materials).

2-2. Procedure

The experiment took place in a classroom setting, wherein the respondents were randomly assigned to one of four different treatment conditions (care was taken to ensure that each cell contained approximately equal number of respondents). Prior to undertaking the experimental study, the author greeted respondents and informed them the study's purpose, basic instructions, the stimulus material, and related measures. To control for demand effects, respondents were informed that the author had no association with the teams (nor the athletes) and were asked to provide honest answers. The respondents were specifically instructed not to communicate with or observe the work of others. Further, respondents in the classroom received identical materials and questionnaires, in other words, respondents in the same class were assigned to a same cell. The author also instructed respondents not to page ahead in the stimulus material or go back and change responses.

Following the initial greetings, respondents were given the materials which oriented them to the task. The material was in a fictitious newspaper article format which was made to appeal to the respondents in a more realistic manner (see Appendix B). Respondents had enough time (approx. two minutes) to read the given material. After reviewing the material, respondents completed the questionnaire that measured dependent variables of interest and series of manipulation check questions. The author was present at all times to provide answers to any questions raised by the respondents throughout the experiment. Number of samples (minimum of 20 samples per cell: total of 80 samples) in each sell was determined using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), a stand-alone power analysis program for many statistical tests

commonly used in the social, behavioral, and biochemical sciences.

2-3. Covariates

Involvement is one of the most frequently controlled variables as it affects people's cognition, attitude, and behaviors. In the similar vein, sport involvement can influence the manner in which respondents process information conveyed through aligned brand personality. For example, according to former studies, involvement affects attention to ads (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984), cognitive effort during the comprehension of the ads (Woodside, 1983), elaboration of product-related aspects of the ads (Batra, 1985), and brand recall (Gardner, 1983; Gardner, Mitchell, & Russo, 1985; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983).

In other words, when people are exposed to the new information cue (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment), depending on their level of involvement toward soccer, it is fair to argue that their level of information intake will be different. This difference, in turn, will hinder to true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment as a marketing communication message. Therefore, sport (i.e., professional soccer) involvement was included in the questionnaire to control for individual differences in sport involvement which can be a covariate.

Another important covariate measured in the current study was respondents' perceived likeability of the athletes and teams. Drawing from the psychology literature, likeability has been defined as a persuasion tactic and a scheme of self-presentation (Kenrick et al., 2002; Reysen, 2005). In the context of celebrity endorsements, a research suggests using celebrities is a way for

firms to induce likeability, aiming to create positive associations with a firm's services and that such a front figure would capture the customers' attention and create brand loyalty (McCracken, 1989). In the similar vein, as familiar athletes and teams are generally likeable, effect of brand personality alignment (i.e., brand information cue) can be affected by the degree of people's likeability of the athletes and teams used in the stimulus materials. Therefore, as the current study employed actual (and familiar) athletes and teams in stimulus materials, it was necessary to control 'likeability' in order to examine the true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and moderating effect of familiarity.

The last covariate controlled in the current study was respondents' perceived quality of the teams and the athletes. Perceived quality, consumer's judgment of the degree of a product's overall excellence or superiority (Tsiotsou, 2006), is a subjective decision made by an individual which leads to preference and consequently satisfaction, loyalty, sales, and profitability (e.g., Mitra & Golder, 2006; Zeithaml, 1998). Therefore, the author posits that perceived quality of the teams and the athletes can affect the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on dependent variables (i.e., overall team evaluation and team brand equity). Consequently, in order to examine the true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and moderating effect of familiarity, it was necessary to formulate perceived quality of the teams and athletes as covariates and control both variables in the study.

Building on these extant studies and reasoning, it is fair to argue that respondents' involvement in soccer, likeability and perceived quality of the athletes and teams may interfere with the effect of the new team branding information (i.e., aligned athlete-team brand personality). Therefore, in order to

investigate the true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment, aforementioned three variables were included in the questionnaire to control the potential effect of those variables.

2-4. Measurement

The author developed a questionnaire to capture the respondents' overall team evaluation, customer-based team brand equity, soccer involvement, team and athlete likeability and perceived quality, the degree of athlete-team brand personality alignment, and athlete and team familiarity. The questionnaire items were firstly retrieved from former studies. Then, the items were revised and modified (when necessary) through expert review to make it conform to the current study's context and purpose. In addition, the contents of the questionnaire were reviewed by sport marketing and English literature experts for correct translation and deliverance of the questions in the original studies. All items were presented on a seven-point scale as it is recommended by a former study for minimizing the response error (Krosnick & Fabrigar, 1997).

Immediately after finished reading the stimulus material, respondents completed a questionnaire that measured dependent variables and covariates of interest as well as questions consistent with the manipulation. First, respondents' overall team evaluation was measured by five scale items to capture perceptions of team liking, team trust, team quality, team desirability, and team related purchase likelihood (Aaker 1991; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Sirianni et al., 2013): (1) Overall, how do you feel about the team? (dislike - like / not at all trustworthy - very trustworthy / very low quality - very high quality / not at all desirable - very desirable); (2) If you have the chance,

how likely are you to visit or watch the team's match? (not at all likely - very likely). For hypotheses testing purposes, an overall team brand evaluation index was created by averaging the five measures ($\alpha = .91$).

Another dependent measure of the current study, customer-based team brand equity was assessed by four seven-point Likert scale items (very strongly disagree – very strongly agree) capturing perceptions of quality versus competitors, value for the cost, team brand uniqueness, and willingness to pay a premium for the team brand (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Sirianni et al., 2013): (1) The team brand is one of the best brand in professional soccer; (2) The team brand really 'stands out' from other professional soccer teams; (3) I am willing to pay more for the team's match ticket than other professional soccer team matches; (4) Compared with other professional soccer teams, the team's brand value is a good value for the money. For the same purpose, a customer-based team brand equity index was created by averaging these four measures ($\alpha = .90$).

Next, the covariates (involvement, likeability, and perceived quality) were measured. Soccer Involvement was measured using 'Sport Involvement Scale' developed by Shank and Beasley (1998) and the items in this scale were combined to form the involvement index ($\alpha = .75$). The scale, four seven-point Likert scale items, measured both cognitive and affective dimensions of sport involvement (very strongly disagree – very strongly agree): To me professional soccer is (1) exciting; (2) interesting; (3) valuable; (4) important.

Respondents' likeability of the teams and athletes used in the stimulus materials were measured by three seven-point Likert scale (very strongly disagree - very strongly agree): (1) I like the team (actual name) / athlete

(actual name) more than other teams / athletes; (2) I am more interested in the team / athlete than other teams / athletes; (3) If I have the chance, I would like to see the team / athlete in person (Bristow & Sebastian, 2001; Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004). These items were combined to form the likeability index ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .83$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .88$).

Respondents' perceived quality of the athletes and teams were measured by two items each, selected (and modified) from Zeithaml's (1998) perceived quality scales and Ross et al.'s (2006) TBAS. The items were combined to form the perceived quality index ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .89$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .81$). Respondents responded to the following questions on a seven-point Likert scale (very strongly disagree - very strongly agree): (1) The team (athlete) is a great team (athlete); (2) The team's (athlete's) performance is of high quality.

After completing the dependent and covariate measures, respondents answered manipulation check questions, which included their perceived degree of athlete-team brand personality alignment and athlete and team familiarity. Respondents' perceived team and athlete brand personality alignment was assessed by three seven-point Likert scale items (very strongly disagree – very strongly agree) and the three measures were: (1) The team and the athlete have a similar brand personality; (2) the personality I associate with the team is related to the personality of the athlete; (3) my personality of the team is very different from the personality I have of the athlete (the third item was reverse coded). These items were modified from a previous study on matching effect of brand and sporting event personality (Lee & Cho, 2009) and were combined to form the alignment index ($\alpha = .97$).

Respondents' perceived team and athlete familiarity included three items each, measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale adopted from

Simonin and Ruth (1998): Please tell us how familiar you are with the team/athlete: (1) not familiar – very familiar, (2) do not recognize – do recognize, (3) have not heard of before – have heard of before. For hypotheses testing purposes, familiarity index for both team and athlete was created by averaging the three measures ($\alpha_{team} = .98$, $\alpha_{athlete} = .85$). For the summary of the measurements, see Table 6 below.

Table 6. Summary of measurement for Study 1

Items	Source
Overall team evaluation	Aaker (1991), Dawar & Pillutla (2000), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Customer-based team brand equity	Netemeyer et al. (2004), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Involvement	Shank & Beasley (1998)
Likeability	Bristow & Sebastian (2001), Jones et al. (2004)
Perceived quality	Ross et al. (2006), Zeithaml (1998)
Athlete-team brand personality alignment	Lee & Cho (2009)
Familiarity	Simonin & Ruth (1998)

Finally, once the measurement items were formed, all the items in the questionnaire were reviewed through Graesser, Kennedy, Wiemer-Hastings, and Ottati's (1999) comments on 'common problems associated with survey questionnaire': complex syntax, working memory overload, vague noun phrases, unfamiliar terms, imprecise terms, misleading presupposition, unclear question category and amalgamation of more than one question category, mismatch between the question category and the answer options, difficulty associated with information recall which respondents are unlikely to answer, and unclear question purpose. Furthermore, a panel of scholars who have expertise on research method and sport management reviewed the items—specifically the

appropriateness of the items in measuring intended constructs. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted in order to revise the measurement items, identify and correct wording of the items, and to discover potential problems associated with conducting the study and survey.

2-5. Data analysis

A statistical package (SPSS 20.0) was used to analyze the validation of measurement items and to test hypotheses. Reliability test was undertaken to test the validity of the measures, while a 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with the overall brand evaluation index and the customer-based brand equity index as dependent variables was conducted to test research hypotheses.

Reliability means that a scale should consistently reflect the construct it is measuring (Field, 2005). In other words, it assesses whether a set of variables is consistent in what it measures. The current study adapted Cronbach's alpha method to evaluate reliability. This method measures every possible way of splitting data into two and computes the correlation coefficient for each split (Field, 2005) and Cronbach's alpha is then computed by averaging these values.

According to Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2009) and Bae (2002), although other measures exist (e.g., test-retest reliability, alternate forms reliability, inter-rater reliability, and split-half reliability), Cronbach's alpha, which overcame problems identified in other measures, is the most commonly used measure of scale reliability. Therefore, the internal consistencies of the constructs were measured through Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Nunnally &

Bernstein, 1994).

Prior to undertaking MANCOVA, number of assumptions needed to be satisfied. Therefore, prior tests for assumptions were conducted—i.e., (1) existence of univariate or multivariate outliers, (2) multivariate normality, (3) linear relationship between each pair of dependent variables for all combinations of groups of the two independent variables, (4) homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and (5) multicollinearity (Mayers, 2013).

Finally, a 2 x 2 MANCOVA was conducted to test the study hypotheses. This method was chosen as it was an appropriate statistical technique for the current study: (1) two or more interval or ratio level dependent variables, (2) two independent variables with two or more categorical, independent groups, (3) one or more interval or ratio level covariate variables, and (4) independence of observations. For the current study, there were two independent variables (alignment x team familiarity), two dependent variables (overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity), and five covariate variables (soccer involvement, team/athlete likeability and perceived quality). All statistical significance was assumed at a .05 level.

3. Results

3-1. Internal consistency (scale reliability)

Cronbach's alpha coefficient were all above the recommended .70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), ranging from .75 to .98, indicating that the constructs were internally consistent. Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and complete Cronbach's alpha coefficient values are depicted in the

Table 7 below. The correlations between the two dependent variables were statistically significant at $p < .001$ level (indicating linear relationships between the variables), while not exceeding the upper limit of $r = .90$ (which can cause multicollinearity) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), satisfying one of the assumptions of MANCOVA.

3-2. Manipulation check

A series of One-way ANOVAs were conducted to demonstrate whether the two manipulated athlete-team brand personality alignment levels differed significantly from one another; and whether the two operationalized conditions of team familiarity differed significantly from each other. First, ANOVA with alignment as the dependent variable revealed statistically significant difference between aligned groups and misaligned groups ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 5.84$ vs. $M_{\text{misaligned}} = 1.86$ [out of 7]; $F(1, 110) = 1151.194$, $p < .001$). Second, ANOVA with team familiarity as the dependent variable also revealed statistically significant difference ($M_{\text{familiar team}} = 6.31$ vs. $M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 1.55$ [out of 7]; $F(1, 110) = 1797.674$, $p < .001$). Taken together, the results provided evidence that intended alignment and familiarity were successfully manipulated.

Table 7. Correlation matrix (Study 1)

Design	Variables	TE	BE	IN	TL	AL	TQ	AQ	BP	TF	AF	M	SD	α
Alignment x Team Familiarity	Team evaluation (TE)	1										4.37	.78	.91
	Team brand equity (BE)	.64**	1									4.34	.78	.90
	Involvement (IN)	-.03	-.06	1								6.20	.68	.75
	Team likeability (TL)	.12	-.05	.15	1							5.62	1.09	.83
	Athlete likeability (AL)	-.01	.08	-.03	-.21*	1						2.36	1.10	.88
	Team perceived quality (TQ)	.15	.03	.05	.02	.01	1					5.12	1.26	.89
	Athlete perceived quality (AQ)	-.01	.18	.01	-.08	.67**	.11	1				2.98	1.12	.81
	BP alignment (BP)	.35**	.28**	.07	.13	.04	.05	.01	1			3.89	2.09	.97
	Team familiarity (TF)	-.18	-.15	.01	.06	-.05	-.09	-.08	.20*	1		3.85	2.47	.98
	Athlete familiarity (AF)	-.03	.01	-.08	.11	.17	-.05	.15	-.09	-.24**	1	1.55	.52	.85

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α : Cronbach's alpha

3-3. Preliminary analysis

Data for the four experimentally manipulated groups are displayed in the Table 8 below. Confounding check was conducted as there were five potential covariates measured in the current study. The results of a series of ANOVAs conducted are depicted in the Table 9 below. Respondents' soccer involvement, team/athlete likeability, and team/athlete perceived quality did not differ among the four manipulated groups under consideration.

Table 8. Distribution, means, and standard deviations for four experimental conditions: Overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity (Study 1)

Groups	n	Overall team evaluation		Customer-based team brand equity	
		M	SD	M	SD
Aligned-familiar team	28	4.29	.75	4.33	.76
Aligned-unfamiliar team	29	4.97	.67	4.86	.74
Misaligned-familiar team	26	4.19	.68	4.13	.73
Misaligned-unfamiliar team	29	4.01	.78	4.03	.64

Table 9. Confounding check on differences between groups (Study 1)

Design	Groups*	INV**	LT**	LA**	TP**	AP**
	1	6.28	5.68	2.21	5.21	2.89
Alignment	2	6.25	5.76	2.61	5.10	3.14
^x Team	3	6.13	5.68	2.40	4.90	2.87
Familiarity	4	6.17	5.36	2.21	5.24	3.00
n.s.***						

*aligned-familiar(1)/unfamiliar(2), misaligned-familiar(3)/unfamiliar(4)

**INV: involvement, LT: team likeability, LA: athlete likeability, TP: team perceived quality, AP: athlete perceived quality

***n.s.: not significant between any of the groups

Soccer involvement did not differ among the four groups as the purposely selected samples were relatively highly involved in sports. Furthermore, athlete likeability and perceived quality were also not significantly different as athletes used in the fictitious scenarios were unfamiliar. Lastly, the insignificant differences of team likeability and perceived quality may be due to alignment information complementing the difference occurred from familiarity. Although confounding check tests found no statistical difference among the groups, literatures and the preliminary study posit the possibility of confounding effects of the variables. The current study, therefore, included those covariate variables in the following MANOVA—computed MANCOVA for hypotheses testing.

A 2 x 2 MANCOVA with the overall team brand evaluation index and the customer-based team brand equity index as dependent variables, soccer involvement, team/athlete likeability and team/athlete perceived quality as covariates (demographic variables such as age, gender, and income level were not included in the analyses as they did not have significant impacts on the dependent variables when analyzed as covariates), and alignment and team familiarity as independent categorical variables was conducted. Levene's tests for each dependent variable were statistically insignificant (all values $p > .05$), indicating equality of error variances across the treatment groups on each dependent variable. In addition, Box's M test was statistically insignificant (all values $p > .001$), indicating equality of variance-covariance matrices of the multiple dependent variables across the treatment groups. These results illustrated that the current study satisfied the assumptions for MANCOVA test.

The two-way MANCOVA interaction between alignment and team familiarity was statistically significant [Wilks' λ (Lambda) = .896, $F(2, 102) =$

5.948, $p = .004$; for full results, see Table 10], allowing separate use of ANOVAs for the two dependent variables with the protection of the Type 1 error rate. In support of H_{1a} and H_{1b} , there was a significant main effect of alignment on overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 103) = 15.917, p < .001$] and customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 103) = 15.510, p < .001$]. Meanwhile, partially consistent with the results of confounding check, athlete quality was the only covariate variable which yielded significant main effect on team brand equity. The detailed results are further discussed in the following sections.

Table 10. Full MANCOVA results (Study 1)

DVs	Sum of Squares	F	P <	Partial η^2
Overall team brand evaluation				
Involvement	.35	(1, 103) = .74	n.s.	.01
Team likeability	.27	(1, 103) = .57	n.s.	.01
Athlete likeability	.10	(1, 103) = .20	n.s.	.00
Team perceived quality	1.82	(1, 103) = 3.78	n.s.	.04
Athlete perceived quality	.01	(1, 103) = .01	n.s.	.00
Alignment	7.66	(1, 103) = 15.92	.001	.13
Team familiarity	1.69	(1, 103) = 3.51	n.s.	.03
Alignment x Team familiarity	5.49	(1, 103) = 11.41	.01	.10
Customer-based team brand equity				
Involvement	.38	(1, 103) = .75	n.s.	.01
Team likeability	.57	(1, 103) = 1.11	n.s.	.01
Athlete likeability	.88	(1, 103) = 1.74	n.s.	.02
Team perceived quality	.02	(1, 103) = .04	n.s.	.00
Athlete perceived quality	2.21	(1, 103) = 4.35	.05	.04
Alignment	7.90	(1, 103) = 15.51	.001	.13
Team familiarity	.91	(1, 103) = 1.79	n.s.	.02
Alignment x Team familiarity	3.39	(1, 103) = 6.66	.05	.06

3-4. Effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team brand evaluation and customer-based team brand equity

Respondents gave higher overall team brand evaluations when athlete-team brand personality was aligned ($M = 4.63$) than when misaligned ($M = 4.10$; $F(1, 103) = 15.917, p < .001$), in support of H_{1a} . Furthermore, respondents also gave higher customer-based team brand equity ratings to aligned groups ($M = 4.61$) than to misaligned groups ($M = 4.10$; $F(1, 103) = 15.510, p < .001$), in support of H_{1b} .

Moreover, team familiarity did not exert a significant main effect on overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 103) = 3.511, p > .05$] nor on customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 103) = 1.785, p > .05$]. These results are notable because they indicate that the team familiarity did not significantly influence respondents' responses to team brands independent of athlete-team brand personality alignment manipulation.

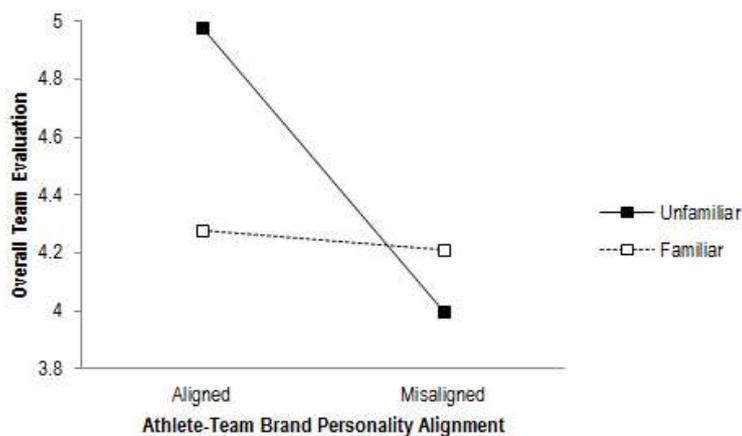
3-5. Athlete-team brand personality alignment x team familiarity interaction

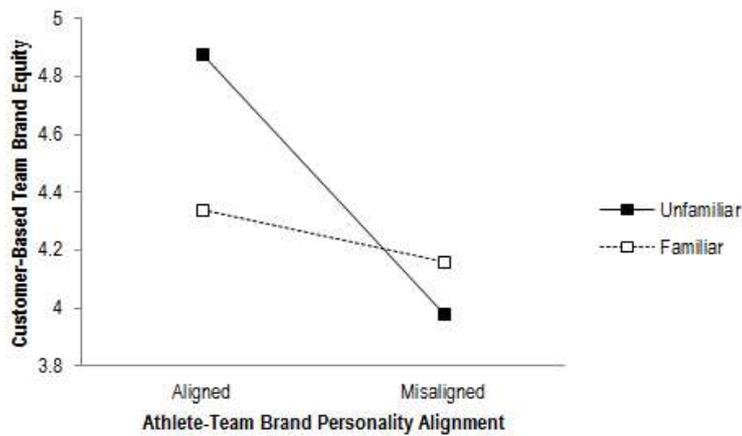
As mentioned above, a two-way MANCOVA using the overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 103) = 11.409, p < .01$] and customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 103) = 6.661, p < .05$] as the dependent variables and athlete-team brand personality alignment and team familiarity as independent variables revealed a significant two-way interaction. This statistically significant interaction effect was examined further by splitting the dataset by alignment and performing MANCOVAs for aligned and misaligned data sets separately. In support of H_{2a} , alignment had a significantly stronger effect on overall team

brand evaluation for respondents in the unfamiliar team group than in the familiar team group ($M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 4.98$ vs. $M_{\text{familiar team}} = 4.28$; $F(1, 50) = 15.814$, $p < .001$; see Figure 3); it was also found that overall team evaluation did not differ across familiar and unfamiliar teams for respondents in the misaligned conditions ($M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 4.00$ vs. $M_{\text{familiar team}} = 4.21$; $F(1, 48) = .583$, $p > .05$).

Similarly, consistent with H_{2b} , for aligned conditions, customer-based team brand equity was significantly higher when the team was unfamiliar than familiar ($M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 4.88$ vs. $M_{\text{familiar team}} = 4.34$; $F(1, 50) = 7.937$, $p = .007$; see Figure 3). Meanwhile, for misaligned conditions, there was no significant difference in customer-based team brand equity due to team familiarity ($M_{\text{unfamiliar team}} = 3.98$ vs. $M_{\text{familiar team}} = 4.16$; $F(1, 48) = .832$, $p > .05$).

Figure 3. Effects of alignment and team familiarity on overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity





4. Discussion

Study 1 provides support for H₁ and H₂ through a 2 x 2 (alignment x team familiarity) between-subjects factorial design. The results demonstrated that aligning athlete brand personality with the team brand personality leads to higher overall team brand evaluation and higher customer-based team brand equity evaluation. Moreover, the moderating effect of team familiarity was evident as athlete-team brand personality alignment was particularly appealing for teams that are relatively unfamiliar to fans. This is an important finding because the results demonstrated how unfamiliar teams (or new teams in the league) can leverage their human brands (i.e., athletes) when they build their positioning in both current and potential fans' minds.

These findings not only established the vital role of athletes in teams' branding strategies, but also uncovered when strategically aligned brand personality appeal is more influential in reinforcing team brand meaning and shaping team brand evaluations. Furthermore, the results can explain how athletes may enhance team brand positioning by conveying a more consistent

and unified brand information during their encounters with fans both on- and off-line.

Athletes are intangible human brands (Thomson, 2006) who often have a strong connection with fans. Therefore, teams' branding efforts conducted through athletes can be one of the most influential appeals. Specifically, teams can convey their brand information by strategically aligning athlete brand personality with that of the team. In sum, teams need to truly realize their most influential 'living brand' as a powerful brand-building asset, particularly for newly inaugurated teams or otherwise unfamiliar teams.

When fans (or potential fans) are initially exposed to an unfamiliar team's branding appeal, it is critically important for athletes to convey team brand personality aligned branding appeal. Notably, when this occurs during athlete-fan interaction, unfamiliar teams have the potential to match—or even surpass—their familiar counterparts in terms of overall team evaluation. This finding also provides an idea of how relatively more familiar teams should undertake their branding appeal as their athletes-team brand personality alignment appeal do not guarantee that same degree of brand enhancing advantage.

Despite the support for the study hypotheses, as the athletes are key individuals involved in the branding appeal (i.e., strategic alignment), it deemed important to test the role of athlete familiarity in this team branding efforts. Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of the role of athlete-team brand personality alignment, the author turns to Study 2, in which the moderating role of athlete familiarity was tested.

VI. STUDY 2

The Effect of Strategic Alignment on Team Evaluation: The Moderating Role of Athlete Familiarity

In Study 1, the author empirically tested the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and the moderating role of team familiarity. However, in order to increase generalizability across team brand contexts, the author extended the test of athlete-team brand personality alignment with different levels of athlete familiarity. To do so, the author, in an experimental study, empirically examined the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment and the moderating role of athlete familiarity. A total of four different scenarios—a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design (alignment: aligned vs. misaligned / athlete familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar) were manipulated through different versions of stimulus materials.

1. Overview of the study

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and extend Study 1 by empirically testing the moderating role of athlete familiarity in the relationship between strategic alignment and team evaluations. Study 2 tested H₁ and H₃—effect of alignment and moderating effect of athlete familiarity—and incorporated the same experimental procedure used in Study 1 with a few modifications. Study 2 consisted of a 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental design, in which the author manipulated athlete brand personality with team brand personality (aligned vs. misaligned) and athlete familiarity (familiar vs.

unfamiliar).

A total of 119 undergraduate students at three national universities in Korea participated in the study. Undergraduate students were recruited via their enrollment in sport related courses. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (i.e., randomly provided different stimulus materials). Among the total of 119 respondents, after data screening, 113 surveys were deemed usable for further data analysis. The final respondents were consisted of 94 males (83.2%) and 19 females (16.8%) with average age of 23.3 years (SD = 2.16)—respondents' detailed demographic information is provided in the Table 11 below. As part of their participation, they read the given material (one of four different stimulus materials) and provided their evaluations.

After data screening process, there were an unequal number of cases in each scenario. To be specific, there were 29 samples in [aligned / familiar athlete] scenario, 28 samples in [aligned / unfamiliar athlete] scenario, 29 samples in [misaligned / familiar athlete] scenario, and 27 samples in [misaligned / unfamiliar athlete] scenario. To make sure all scenarios were equally represented in the sample, the author conducted a chi-square test, considering the expected value of 25% for each scenario. Results of the test demonstrated that observed frequencies did not differ from expected frequencies ($\chi^2 = .10$; $df = 3$; $p = .992$), indicating that no scenario was underrepresented in the final sample.

Table 11. Demographics of respondents (Study 2)

Design	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Alignment x Athlete Familiarity	Gender	Male	94	83.2
		Female	19	16.8
	Age	20 ~ 22	44	38.9
		23 ~ 25	46	40.7
		26 ~ 28	23	20.4

2. Method

2-1. Pretesting and contents of the stimulus material

Several stages of pretesting were necessary to develop stimulus materials manipulating athlete-team brand personality alignment (aligned vs. misaligned: utilizing team with imaginative brand personality and athletes with imaginative and tough brand personality) and athlete familiarity (familiar vs. unfamiliar)—total of four different scenarios. Through several pretests and multiple sessions of expert discussions, along with the findings from the preliminary study, the materials for the current study was constructed.

Four versions of the same materials with different degree of presented information were generated: 2 (athlete-team brand personality alignment: aligned vs. misaligned) x 2 (athlete familiarity: familiar vs. unfamiliar). Unfamiliar athletes with imaginative and tough brand personalities, and an unfamiliar team were retrieved from Study 1. However, pretests were necessary to correctly select familiar athletes for the stimulus materials. Prior to pretest, the author, through extensive literature review and investigation of online materials (especially news articles), generated a list of athletes (five athletes for

‘familiar’ category). Those familiar athletes were chosen based on their popularity and their overall image was a factor of consideration for deciding their imaginative and tough brand personality. In addition, team familiarity was held constant so that all scenarios contained unfamiliar teams—to minimize the confounding effect of team familiarity.

The first pretest (N = 62) was conducted to ensure that athletes initially selected for ‘familiar’ category were appropriate for investigation within the current study’s context (i.e., appropriately manipulating the intended brand personality). Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which each of the five brand personality attributes was appropriate for describing the familiar athletes (1 = very inappropriate, 5 = very appropriate) provided in the initial list. While most respondents rated the intended brand personality ‘very appropriate’, the result also revealed that some athletes were perceived as being comprised of more than one personality attribute (e.g., they were all rated either ‘appropriate’ or ‘very appropriate’ on ‘successful’ brand personality attribute). This result was rather anticipated as the athletes initially chosen for ‘familiar’ category are well-known for their success among soccer fans. The athletes rated the highest for ‘imaginative’ or ‘tough’, while scoring relatively low on other brand personality attributes were selected for the stimulus scenarios. Teams and athletes chosen for the stimulus materials are highlighted in the Table 12 below.

Table 12. Athletes and teams used in the stimulus materials (Study 2)

Familiarity	Athlete / Team	Brand Personality	Selected Athlete / Team
Familiar	Athlete	Imaginative	David Silva (Manchester City)
			Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
			Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
			Luca Modric (Real Madrid)
			Alexis Sanchez (Arsenal)
	Team	Tough	John Terry (Chelsea)
			Yaya Toure (Manchester City)
			Diego Costa (Chelsea)
			Francesco Totti (Roma)
			Pepe (Real Madrid)
Unfamiliar	Athlete	Imaginative	Robbie Rogers
		Tough	Oguchi Onyewu
	Team	Imaginative	Tonbridge Angels

Consistent with Study 1, the author manipulated athlete-team brand personality alignment within a ‘team signing an athlete’ context by either aligning or misaligning the team and athlete brand personality. Information given in each material was purposefully crafted to clearly reflect one particular category (e.g., a stimulus material for one of the aligned scenarios contained an unfamiliar team with an imaginative brand personality attribute and a familiar athlete with an imaginative brand personality attribute—pictures were also added to the stimulus materials in order to emphasize the intended brand personality, especially for athletes). Care was taken to ensure that each version of stimulus material had approximately equal amounts of text to increase the likelihood that responses would be a function of information content rather than information quantity. A panel of expert judges initially examined the stimulus materials for content validity and the presence of any potential

confounds.

In the next pretest (N = 37), respondents were asked to evaluate, using a five-point scale (anchored by 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely), how the athletes and teams rated on each of the brand personality attributes. Brand personality was measured using the single-item measures implemented by Carlson et al. (2009) and Carlson and Donavan (2013) in a professional sport context. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test manipulated brand personality attributes. The results revealed that respondents rated the manipulated brand personality attributes of each team and athlete significantly higher than other brand personality attributes. For example, David Silva, the familiar 'imaginative' athlete chosen for the current study, was rated significantly higher on 'imaginative' ($M_{\text{imaginative}} = 4.81$) than other brand personality attributes ($M_{\text{wholesome}} = 3.14$, $M_{\text{successful}} = 3.73$, $M_{\text{charming}} = 3.24$, $M_{\text{tough}} = 2.78$; $F(4, 180) = 24.185$, $p < .001$).

In the following pretest (N = 60), respondents were asked to evaluate, using a five-point scale (anchored by 1 = not at all, 5 = extremely), the degree of brand personality alignment (team and athlete brand personality), the degree of their familiarity with the teams and athletes, and their degree of likeability and perceived quality of the teams and athletes. A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test manipulated brand personality alignment, familiarity, and potential covariates (likeability and perceived quality). First, respondents rated aligned scenarios as more aligned than misaligned scenarios ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 4.03$ vs. $M_{\text{misaligned}} = 1.81$; $F(1, 58) = 164.351$, $p < .001$). Second, the familiarity of familiar athlete was significantly different from that of unfamiliar athlete ($M_{\text{familiar athlete}} = 3.91$ vs. $M_{\text{unfamiliar athlete}} = 1.94$; $F(1, 58) = 111.327$, $p < .001$), whereas team familiarity did not differ

among the four groups [$F(3, 56) = 2.095, p > .05$]. Taken together, the results of these pretests provided evidence that selected teams and athletes convey aligned brand personality and familiarity. Therefore, they were used in the manipulation scenarios for the current study.

Potential covariates were also tested through pretest. The result of one-way ANOVAs revealed that athlete likeability and perceived quality were not significantly different among the four groups (Likeability: $F(3, 56) = 1.599, p > .05$; Perceived quality: $F(3, 56) = 1.532, p > .05$). Likewise, team likeability and perceived quality did not differ among the four groups (Likeability: $F(3, 56) = 1.164, p > .05$; Perceived quality: $F(3, 56) = 1.069, p > .05$). Taken together, the results of these pretests for likeability and perceived quality revealed insignificance of potential covariates. However, despite the statistical insignificance, literatures and the preliminary study posit the possibility of confounding effects of those variables. Therefore, they were measured as covariates in the following study.

Finally, through a pilot test, the materials were pretested to ensure that they were reliably rated as descriptive, realistic, useful, and favorable, and to ensure that no one material was significantly different from the others on these criteria. The results of this final pilot test also revealed that respondents could correctly identify the intended manipulations (brand personality alignment and familiarity depicted by the information in the stimulus materials).

2-2. Procedure

As in Study 1, the experiment took place in a classroom setting, wherein the respondents were randomly assigned to one of four different

treatment conditions (care was taken to ensure that each cell contained approximately equal number of respondents). Following the initial greetings, respondents were given the materials which oriented them to the task. The material was in a fictitious newspaper article format which was made to appeal to the respondents in a more realistic manner. Respondents had enough time (approx. two minutes) to read the given material. After reviewing the material, respondents completed the questionnaire that measured dependent variables of interest and series of manipulation check questions. Consistent with Study 1, number of samples (minimum of 20 samples per cell: total of 80 samples) in each cell was determined using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007).

2-3. Measurement

The author used the same measures as in Study 1, including overall team brand evaluation index ($\alpha = .74$), customer-based team brand equity index ($\alpha = .78$), soccer involvement ($\alpha = .73$), team and athlete likeability ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .77$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .80$), team and athlete perceived quality ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .86$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .92$), athlete-team brand personality alignment ($\alpha = .98$), and team and athlete familiarity ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .88$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .98$). For the summary of the measurements, see Table 13 below.

Consistent with Study 1, all the items in the questionnaire were reviewed through Graesser et al.'s (1999) comments on 'common problems associated with survey questionnaire'. Furthermore, a panel of scholars who have expertise on research method and sport management reviewed the items—specifically the appropriateness of the items in measuring intended constructs. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted in order to revise the measurement

items, identify and correct wording of the items, and to discover potential problems associated with conducting the study and survey.

Table 13. Summary of measurement (Study 2)

Items	Source
Overall team evaluation	Aaker (1991), Dawar & Pillutla (2000), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Customer-based team brand equity	Netemeyer et al. (2004), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Involvement	Shank & Beasley (1998)
Likeability	Bristow & Sebastian (2001), Jones et al. (2004)
Perceived quality	Ross et al. (2006), Zeithaml (1998)
Athlete-team brand personality alignment	Lee & Cho (2009)
Familiarity	Simonin & Ruth (1998)

2-4. Data analysis

A statistical package (SPSS 20.0) was used to analyze the validation of measurement items and to test hypotheses. Reliability test was undertaken to test the validity of the measures, while a 2 x 2 multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with the overall brand evaluation index and the customer-based brand equity index as dependent variables was conducted to test research hypotheses. Prior to undertaking MANCOVA, consistent with Study 1, tests for assumptions were conducted. Finally, a 2 x 2 MANCOVA was conducted to test the study hypotheses. All statistical significance was assumed at a .05 level.

3. Results

3-1. Internal consistency (scale reliability)

Cronbach's alpha test generated values ranging from .73 to .98 for all measurement items, which satisfied the .70 threshold level (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and complete Cronbach's alpha coefficient values are depicted in the Table 14 below. The correlations between the two dependent variables were statistically significant at $p < .001$ level (indicating linear relationships between the variables), while not exceeding the upper limit of $r = .90$ (which can cause multicollinearity) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), satisfying one of the assumptions of MANCOVA.

3-2. Manipulation check

A series of One-way ANOVAs were conducted to demonstrate whether the two manipulated athlete-team brand personality alignment levels differed significantly from one another; and whether the two operationalized conditions of athlete familiarity differed significantly from each other. First, ANOVA with alignment as the dependent variable revealed statistically significant difference between aligned groups and misaligned groups ($M_{\text{aligned}} = 6.09$ vs. $M_{\text{misaligned}} = 2.00$ [out of 7]; $F(1, 111) = 1277.685$, $p < .001$). Second, ANOVA with athlete familiarity as the dependent variable also revealed statistically significant difference ($M_{\text{familiar athlete}} = 6.28$ vs. $M_{\text{unfamiliar athlete}} = 2.10$ [out of 7]; $F(1, 111) = 1167.155$, $p < .001$). Taken together, the results provided evidence that intended alignment and familiarity were successfully manipulated.

Table 14. Correlation matrix (Study 2)

Design	Variables	TE	BE	IN	TL	AL	TQ	AQ	BP	TF	AF	M	SD	α
Alignment x Athlete Familiarity	Team evaluation (TE)	1										4.55	.57	.74
	Team brand equity (BE)	.63**	1									4.42	.72	.78
	Involvement (IN)	-.08	.07	1								6.08	.56	.73
	Team likeability (TL)	.04	.07	-.07	1							3.10	.97	.77
	Athlete likeability (AL)	-.11	.09	.29**	-.11	1						4.66	1.11	.80
	Team perceived quality (TQ)	.08	.07	-.15	.60**	-.13	1					2.30	1.27	.86
	Athlete perceived quality (AQ)	-.02	.07	.27**	.01	.42**	-.03	1				5.11	1.29	.92
	BP alignment (BP)	.25**	.15	.24*	.12	-.13	.02	-.25**	1			4.06	2.14	.98
	Team familiarity (TF)	-.13	-.06	-.28**	.08	-.12	.11	.01	-.14	1		1.59	.46	.88
	Athlete familiarity (AF)	-.02	.04	-.08	.01	.36**	-.05	.29**	.05	-.02	1	4.24	2.20	.98

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α : Cronbach's alpha

3-3. Preliminary analysis

Data for the four experimentally manipulated groups are displayed in the Table 15 below. Confounding check was conducted as there were five potential covariates measured in the current study. The results of a series of ANOVAs conducted are depicted in the Table 16 below. Respondents' involvement, team/athlete likeability, and team/athlete perceived quality did not differ among the four manipulated groups under consideration.

Table 15. Distribution, means, and standard deviations for four experimental conditions: Overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity (Study 2)

Groups	n	Overall team evaluation		Customer-based team brand equity	
		M	SD	M	SD
Aligned-familiar athlete	29	4.66	.53	4.57	.62
Aligned-unfamiliar athlete	28	4.74	.63	4.67	.65
Misaligned-familiar athlete	29	4.39	.58	4.28	.87
Misaligned-unfamiliar athlete	27	4.40	.42	4.19	.55

Table 16. Confounding check on differences between groups (Study 2)

Design	Groups*	INV**	LT**	LA**	TP**	AP**
	1	6.17	3.09	4.85	2.17	5.17
Alignment	2	6.09	3.36	4.49	2.55	4.63
x Athlete	3	5.93	3.09	4.79	2.28	5.38
Familiarity	4	6.13	2.84	4.51	2.19	5.26
				n.s.		

*aligned-familiar(1)/unfamiliar(2), misaligned-familiar(3)/unfamiliar(4)

**INV: involvement, LT: team likeability, LA: athlete likeability, TP: team perceived quality, AP: athlete perceived quality

n.s.: not significant between any of the groups

Consistent with Study 1, soccer involvement did not differ among the four groups as the purposely selected samples were relatively highly involved in sports. Furthermore, team likeability and perceived quality were also not significantly different as the team used in the fictitious scenarios was unfamiliar. Lastly, the insignificant differences of athlete likeability and perceived quality may be due to alignment information complementing the difference occurred from familiarity. Although confounding check tests found no statistical difference among the groups, literatures and the preliminary study posit the possibility of confounding effects of the variables. The current study, therefore, included those covariate variables in the following MANOVA—computed MANCOVA for hypotheses testing.

A 2 x 2 MANCOVA with the overall team brand evaluation index and the customer-based team brand equity index as dependent variables, soccer involvement, team/athlete likeability and team/athlete perceived quality as covariates (demographic variables such as age, gender, and income level were not included in the analyses as they did not have significant impacts on the dependent variables when analyzed as covariates), and alignment and athlete familiarity as independent categorical variables was conducted. Levene's tests for each dependent variable were statistically insignificant (all values $p > .05$), indicating equality of error variances across the treatment groups on each dependent variable. In addition, Box's M test was statistically insignificant (all values $p > .001$), indicating equality of variance-covariance matrices of the multiple dependent variables across the treatment groups. These results ensure that the current study have not violated any assumptions for MANCOVA test.

The two-way MANCOVA interaction between alignment and athlete familiarity was statistically insignificant [Wilks' λ (Lambda) = .993, $F(2, 103)$

= .376, $p > .05$; for full results, see Table 17], not supporting H_3 . However, there was a significant main effect of alignment on overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 104) = 11.581, p = .001$] and customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 104) = 11.256, p = .001$], in support of H_{1a} and H_{1b} . Meanwhile, consistent with the results of confounding check, five covariate variables did not yield statistically significant main effect. The detailed results are further discussed in the following sections.

Table 17. Full MANCOVA results (Study 2)

DVs	Sum of Squares	F	P <	Partial η^2
Overall team brand evaluation				
Involvement	.68	(1, 104) = 2.30	n.s.	.02
Team likeability	.14	(1, 104) = .48	n.s.	.01
Athlete likeability	.52	(1, 104) = 1.76	n.s.	.02
Team perceived quality	.04	(1, 104) = .12	n.s.	.00
Athlete perceived quality	.69	(1, 104) = 2.32	n.s.	.02
Alignment	3.44	(1, 104) = 11.58	.01	.10
Athlete familiarity	.08	(1, 104) = .27	n.s.	.00
Alignment x Athlete familiarity	.03	(1, 104) = .10	n.s.	.00
Customer-based team brand equity				
Involvement	.23	(1, 104) = .49	n.s.	.01
Team likeability	.48	(1, 104) = 1.02	n.s.	.01
Athlete likeability	.60	(1, 104) = 1.28	n.s.	.01
Team perceived quality	.50	(1, 104) = 1.08	n.s.	.01
Athlete perceived quality	1.68	(1, 104) = 3.61	n.s.	.03
Alignment	5.24	(1, 104) = 11.26	.01	.10
Athlete familiarity	.10	(1, 104) = .22	n.s.	.00
Alignment x Athlete familiarity	.33	(1, 104) = .70	n.s.	.01

3-4. Effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team brand evaluation and customer-based team brand equity

In support of H_{1a} , respondents evaluated the overall team brand more positively when athlete-team brand personality was aligned ($M = 4.73$) than when misaligned ($M = 4.37$; $F(1, 104) = 11.581, p = .001$). Furthermore, H_{1b} was also supported as respondents rated customer-based team brand equity more positively when brand personality was aligned ($M = 4.65$) than when misaligned ($M = 4.20$; $F(1, 104) = 11.256, p = .001$). Moreover, the main effect of athlete familiarity on overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 104) = .272, p > .05$] and on customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 104) = .217, p > .05$] was not statistically significant.

3-5. Athlete-team brand personality alignment x athlete familiarity interaction

As mentioned above, a two-way MANCOVA using the overall team brand evaluation [$F(1, 104) = .095, p > .05$] and customer-based team brand equity [$F(1, 104) = .704, p > .05$] as the dependent variables and athlete-team brand personality alignment and athlete familiarity as independent variables revealed a statistically insignificant two-way interaction. The statistically insignificant interaction was, therefore, not examined further— H_{3a} and H_{3b} were not supported. Despite the insignificance, the interaction term values are depicted in the Table 18 below.

Table 18. Alignment x athlete familiarity

Dependent variable	Alignment	Athlete familiarity	M
Overall team brand evaluation	Aligned	Familiar	4.69
		Unfamiliar	4.77
	Misaligned	Familiar	4.36
		Unfamiliar	4.38
Customer-based team brand equity	Aligned	Familiar	4.57
		Unfamiliar	4.74
	Misaligned	Familiar	4.23
		Unfamiliar	4.18

4. Discussion

The current study empirically examined H_1 and H_3 through a 2 x 2 (alignment x athlete familiarity) between-subjects factorial design. Consistent with Study 1, the author found added support for athlete-team brand personality alignment in that aligning athlete brand personality with the team brand personality led to increased overall team brand evaluations and customer-based team brand equity evaluations. That is, when athlete-team brand personality alignment is present, fans more easily process the brand meaning, thereby increasing overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity.

This study also demonstrated the insignificant moderating effect of athlete familiarity. Although two hypotheses (H_{2c} and H_{2d}) were not supported, this result provides meaningful implications because it demonstrated that teams do not always have to utilize familiar athletes when conveying team branding messages through their athletes—providing consistent message through aligned brand personality is more important than considering more familiar athletes to

use in the branding appeal. This finding may solve the problem frequently faced by the team front office officials and coaching staffs. As performance and achievements are of the utmost importance for coaching staffs, conflicts exist when marketing managers try to undertake events with star athletes. Although star athletes' power of appeal can be crucial in marketing success, the findings of the current study suggest that team branding appeal can be just as effective when conducted with unfamiliar athletes. Therefore, based on this finding, team marketing manager can plan athlete-involved marketing events with less problems.

The insignificant moderating effect of athlete familiarity can possibly be explained by source attractiveness model—one of the most frequently witnessed models in athlete endorsement literature. This model, which is an extension of the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1991), proposes that message effectiveness depends on the similarity between the source and the receiver, source likeability (e.g., physical appearance), and source familiarity (Shilbury et al., 2003). Among these sub-variables, familiarity is deemed as one of the most impactful constructs (Siemens, Smith, Fisher, & Jensen, 2008). Moreover, Kamins and Gupta (1994) suggest that endorser familiarity can facilitate the degree to which congruency between product and endorser can be effective. In addition, McCracken (1989) also supports that a familiar spokesperson can have a greater impact on consumers due to their identifiable personality and characteristics. In other words, according to the findings of these former studies, endorser familiarity (athlete familiarity in the current study's case) has a positive influence on the effect of endorsement. Therefore, as the branding appeal is conveyed through athletes in the current study, there may have been a conflict between the top-down/bottom-up information

processing and source attractiveness model, which in turn resulted in the insignificant moderating effect of athlete familiarity.

Another possible explanation for the insignificant moderating role of athlete familiarity can be found from the changeable nature of athlete brand personality. Although study participants who were familiar with the athletes already had prior perceptions, these previously held athlete brand personalities may have been altered through the aligned brand personality appeal. This reasoning is supported by the extant study which asserted the changeable nature of athlete brand personality (Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Fink et al., 2009; Horrow, 1982). For example, the majority of fans' prior perception of athlete brand personality are gained through their on-field performance (i.e., if an athlete displays a tough style of play on the field, then the brand personality of the athlete is likely to be perceived as 'tough'). Therefore, these pre-held athlete brand personality may have been altered through the information provided in the stimulus materials. Thus, counter to the author's expectations, athlete familiarity was not a significant influence on the effect of strategic alignment on team evaluations.

The following Study 3 additionally examined the moderating role of interaction quality to understand whether athletes' interaction conditions exist that will help predict when athlete-team brand personality alignment is more or less influential. Furthermore, in Study 3, Study 1 and 2 were replicated with a non-student sample and in a non-experimental setting. This deemed important as these settings are more commonplace in professional sport teams' marketing communication efforts.

VII. STUDY 3

The Effect of Strategic Alignment on Team Evaluation: The Moderating Role of Interaction Quality

Although Study 1 and 2 provided strong evidence in support of the effect of strategic alignment (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment), the author implemented Study 3 in order to extend the generalizability of the findings to a real life context beyond the experimental settings used in previous studies. Therefore, Study 3 was undertaken at professional sport teams' marketing events (e.g., public services undertaken by athletes: teaching school students sports, fan meetings, etc.) where fans actually interacted with athletes face-to-face in an attempt to better understand the effects of brand personality alignment on team evaluation and moderating effects of team and athlete familiarity. Furthermore, to build on the results of previous studies, the author tested another condition in which the strategic alignment would be more influential in supporting the team branding appeal. The current study did so by examining how the degrees of fans' perceived interaction quality affect the effect of alignment.

1. Overview of the study

Study 3 tested H₁ (effect of alignment), H₂ (moderating role of team familiarity), H₃ (moderating role of athlete familiarity), and H₄ (moderating role of interaction quality) in a field setting unlike the experimental study conducted in previous studies. In this study, the author tested above hypotheses

in the context of actual team's CSR movements and marketing events (e.g., fan festival, public services undertaken by athletes: teaching school students sports, helping elders whom in need, etc.) where fans actually interacted with athletes face-to-face.

As the study was undertaken in a real life setting, it was important to first select a team that would allow the study to be conducted at their CSR and marketing events. In other words, persuading and having team front office personnel on board with the study purpose was a step which needed to be preceded: the author informed the team personnel of the study importance and appealed the expected contribution of the results. However, due to busy schedules of front office personnel, it is often difficult to gain access to professional sport teams (Parent, 2008); therefore, key contact played a vital role in the selection of the teams. The author had developed trusting relationship with the front office personnel of several professional soccer teams in Korea. Therefore, the teams' personnel agreed to allow the study to be conducted via informed consent and provided permission for the findings to be used in research publications. In a span of two months, the author collected survey data at the teams' CSR movements and marketing events.

2. Method

2-1. Sample and data collection

The sample data were collected at the professional soccer teams' (one from Division 1 and one from Division 2) marketing events (two different marketing events—a fan meeting and a CSR activity—were purposely selected

to provide variation in fans' degree of familiarity with the teams and athletes). Division 1 teams and their athletes are relatively more well-known or has higher awareness among fans compared to the teams and athletes in the second division. Furthermore, more avid fans tend to attend fan meeting events, while there are relatively higher portions of casual or non-fans at CSR activities such as soccer training sessions at girls' high school.

The survey was randomly distributed to fans (or non-fans) who were at those events mentioned above, using convenient sampling method, to capture respondents' perceived team and athlete brand personality alignment, overall team evaluation, customer-based team brand equity, team and athlete familiarity, respondents' perceived interaction quality, soccer involvement, team and athlete likeability, and perceived quality of the team and athlete. In order to maintain respondents' understanding of the terms in the questionnaire (especially team and athlete brand personality alignment), the author and experienced volunteers were present at all times to answer any questions aroused (e.g., if there were any respondent who were not clear of the meaning brand personality or did not know what it meant, the author or the volunteers provided explanation).

The most important part of this field study was the respondents' understanding of team and athlete brand personality alignment. In order to maximize their understanding, at each and every athlete-fan interacting event, the team officials provided a brief speech regarding the event with the explanation of the team color (i.e., brand image). Furthermore, when athletes went up to introduce themselves to the fans, they explicitly conveyed their brand personality (these were manipulated by the author and the team official prior to the events) and purposely acted throughout the events to appeal a specific brand personality. These manipulation efforts were made to enhance

fans' perception of athlete-team brand personality alignment.

Furthermore, to encourage respondents' interest and their level of commitment, the team officials at the events provided oral presentations of the necessity of the study and how much fans' participation and their opinions are appreciated. Among the total of 227 survey data collected, after data screening (excluding those improperly answered questionnaires), 209 responses were deemed usable for further data analysis. Aforementioned final sample size deemed adequate to conduct regression analysis (Green, 1991). The respondents consisted of 135 males (64.6%) and 74 females (35.4%) with average age of 29.7 (SD = 10.88)—further details of respondents' demographic information are depicted in the Table 19 below.

Table 19. Demographics of respondents (Study 3)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	135	64.6
	Female	74	35.4
Age	10 ~ 19	22	10.5
	20 ~ 29	104	49.8
	30 ~ 39	35	16.7
	40 ~ 49	36	17.3
	50 ~ 59	9	4.3
	60 or older	3	1.4
Income level (monthly)	less than \$2,000	14	6.7
	\$2,000 ~ \$2,999	88	42.1
	\$3,000 ~ \$3,999	97	46.4
	\$4,000 ~ \$4,999	10	4.8

2-2. Control variables

The covariates (i.e., soccer involvement, likeability and perceived quality of team/athlete) used in Study 1 and 2 were also used as control variables in the current study. As mentioned before, these five variables, based on extant studies, theoretically have the potential to affect the effect of the predictor variable of the current study. Therefore, in order to investigate the true effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment, aforementioned variables were included in the questionnaire to control the potential effect of those variables.

2-3. Measurement

Similar procedures to previous studies were undertaken in generating the questionnaire for the current study. The items retrieved from the former studies were revised and modified (when necessary) through expert review and were adjusted or modified to make it compatible to the current study's context and purpose. Furthermore, the contents of the questionnaire were reviewed by sport marketing and English literature experts for correct translation and deliverance of the questions in the original studies. All items were presented on a seven-point scale as it is recommended by a former study for minimizing the response error (Krosnick & Fabrigar, 1997).

The author utilized the same measures as in Study 1 and 2, including athlete-team brand personality alignment ($\alpha = .93$), overall team brand evaluation index ($\alpha = .95$), customer-based team brand equity index ($\alpha = .97$), team and athlete familiarity ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .95$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .90$), soccer involvement ($\alpha =$

.90), team and athlete likeability ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .81$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .76$), team and athlete perceived quality ($\alpha_{\text{team}} = .77$, $\alpha_{\text{athlete}} = .85$).

The newly added and tested moderating variable, interaction quality (i.e., fans' perceived interaction quality obtained through face-to-face interaction with athletes at teams' marketing events), is comprised of three sub-dimensions: attitude (e.g., willingness to help), behavior (e.g., helpfulness), and expertise (Bitner, 1990; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1984, 1990). Therefore, these three dimensions were each assessed by three seven-point Likert scale items (very strongly disagree – very strongly agree) capturing perceptions of athletes' attitude, behavior, and expertise at the marketing events (Brady & Cronin, 2001): *Attitude*: (1) The athletes were friendly, (2) The athletes demonstrated their willingness to participate in the event, (3) The attitude of athletes showed me that they happily participated in the event ($\alpha = .97$); *Behavior*: (1) Athletes took actions to willingly participate and address my needs, (2) Whenever necessary, athletes responded quickly to my needs, (3) The behavior of the athletes indicated to me that they understand why they are at the event ($\alpha = .96$); *Expertise*: (1) Athletes knew what they were required to do, (2) Athletes were able to answer my questions quickly, (3) Athletes understood that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs ($\alpha = .98$). For hypothesis testing purposes, an overall interaction quality index was created by averaging the three sub-dimension measures ($\alpha = .98$). For the summary of the measurements, see Table 20 below.

Finally, once the measurement items were formed, all the items in the questionnaire were reviewed through Graesser et al.'s (1999) comments on 'common problems associated with survey questionnaire': complex syntax,

working memory overload, vague noun phrases, unfamiliar terms, imprecise terms, misleading presupposition, unclear question category and amalgamation of more than one question category, mismatch between the question category and the answer options, difficulty associated with information recall which respondents are unlikely to answer, and unclear question purpose. Furthermore, a panel of scholars who have expertise on research method and sport management reviewed the items—specifically the appropriateness of the items in measuring intended constructs. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted in order to revise the measurement items, identify and correct wording of the items, and to discover potential problems associated with conducting the study and survey.

Table 20. Summary of measurement (Study 3)

Items	Source
Overall team evaluation	Aaker (1991), Dawar & Pillutla (2000), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Customer-based team brand equity	Netemeyer et al. (2004), Sirianni et al. (2013)
Involvement	Shank & Beasley (1998)
Likeability	Bristow & Sebastian (2001), Jones et al. (2004)
Perceived quality	Ross et al. (2006), Zeithaml (1998)
Interaction quality	Bitner (1990), Bitner et al. (1990), Brady & Cronin (2001), Gronroos (1984, 1990)
Athlete-team brand personality alignment	Lee & Cho (2009)
Familiarity	Simonin & Ruth (1998)

2-4. Data analysis

Two statistical packages (SPSS 20.0 and AMOS 20.0) were used to

analyze the validation of measurement items and to test study hypotheses. The two steps undertaken to test the validity of the measures were reliability test and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Since the entire set of items used in the current study were retained from extant literature, measures of the study constructs were initially subjected to CFA. Therefore, CFA was performed in order to test model fit and construct validity—comprised of convergent validity and discriminant validity. The former (convergent validity) is computed based on consistency, goodness-of-fit, and factor loading of the latent variables. In other words, higher convergent validity demonstrates better model fit. The latter (discriminant validity) is evaluated using shared variance (i.e., squared correlation coefficient) where high discriminant validity means greater extent to which one latent variable discriminates from other latent variables (Farrell, 2010).

Goodness of fit for CFA was assessed with the ratio of chi-square (χ^2) to its degree of freedom, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), comparative-of-fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Convergent validity was evaluated by computing the standardized regression weights, while discriminant validity was tested using two standard-error interval estimate. Furthermore, simple linear regression and series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test research hypotheses (to measure the moderating effect of team and athlete familiarity and interaction quality). The current study adopted hierarchical analyses as suggested by Song (2011) and Frazier, Tix, and Barron (2004) instead of conducting structural equation model as former simulation studies have shown that hierarchical regression procedures result in fewer Type I and Type II errors for detecting moderator effects (Mason, Tu, & Cauce, 1996;

Stone-Romero & Anderson, 1994).

While the benefits of hierarchical regression are evident, there also exists a critical problem when conducting hierarchical regression analyses: multicollinearity. As this statistical method deals with an interaction of two variables (i.e., a predictor variable and a moderator variable), there exists a danger of multicollinearity. Two methods are most commonly used to minimize the probability of committing multicollinearity: mean centering and standardization. Although mean centering reduces problems associated with multicollinearity (i.e., high correlations) among the variables in the regression equation (for further explanation, see Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), there may be further benefits to standardizing (i.e., *z* scoring) rather than mean centering (Aiken & West, 1991). For example, standardizing these variables makes it easier to plot significant moderator effects because convenient representative values can be substituted easily into a regression equation to obtain predicted values for representative groups when the standard deviations of these variables equal one (see Cohen et al., 2003). Therefore, the current study adopted standardization rather than mean centering method to avoid multicollinearity in the hierarchical regression models.

Prior to undertaking hierarchical regression analyses, number of assumptions needed to be satisfied. Therefore, preliminary analyses were conducted to test the assumptions—i.e., (1) independence of observations, (2) linear relationship between variables, (3) homoscedasticity, and (4) multicollinearity (Mayers, 2013). The author proceeded with the regression analyses as no assumptions were violated, with the exception of multicollinearity. An examination of correlations revealed that predictor variable was significantly correlated with covariates. However, as the collinearity

statistics (i.e., Tolerance and VIF) were all within accepted limits, the assumption of multicollinearity was deemed to have been met (Hair et al., 2009). All statistical significance was assumed at a .05 level.

3. Results

3-1. Internal consistency and CFA

Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were above the recommended .70 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), ranging from .76 to .98, indicating that the constructs were internally consistent. Descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and complete Cronbach's alpha coefficient values are depicted in the Table 21 below.

The CFA revealed acceptable fit. Although the chi-square statistic was significant ($\chi^2 = 1462.577$, $df = 724$, $p < .001$), it is important to consider other fit indices as the chi-square statistic has shown to be sensitive to sample size (Hair et al., 2009). Other indices of the measurement model adequately met the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2009) (CFI = .927, TLI = .917, SRMR = .040, RMSEA = .070), indicating acceptable fit for further analysis. Furthermore, standardized regression weights were all above the recommended .50 threshold (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), ranging from .517 to .965, indicating adequate convergent validity. The CFA results also provided evidence of discriminant validity as none of the confidence intervals of the phi estimates included 1.00 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Table 21. Correlation matrix (Study 3)

Variables	TE	BE	IN	TL	AL	TQ	AQ	BP	TF	AF	IQ	M	SD	α
Team evaluation (TE)	1											4.42	1.51	.95
Team brand equity (BE)	.80**	1										4.30	1.71	.97
Involvement (IN)	.14	.21**	1									5.47	1.21	.90
Team likeability (TL)	.18**	.21**	.84**	1								5.50	1.12	.81
Athlete likeability (AL)	.19**	.22**	.71**	.69**	1							5.18	1.31	.76
Team perceived quality (TQ)	.19**	.18**	.48**	.49**	.46**	1						4.95	1.57	.77
Athlete perceived quality (AQ)	.29**	.29**	.52**	.46**	.55**	.52**	1					5.19	1.58	.85
BP alignment (BP)	.59**	.64**	.24**	.26**	.21**	.15*	.29**	1				4.36	1.73	.93
Team familiarity (TF)	-.13	-.12	-.04	-.01	-.03	-.07	-.03	-.11	1			4.23	1.78	.95
Athlete familiarity (AF)	-.10	-.10	.36**	.33**	.30**	.27**	.13	-.01	.09	1		5.78	1.23	.90
Interaction quality (IQ)	.19**	.17*	.11	.08	.10	.12	.10	.17*	-.95**	-.04	1	4.25	1.65	.98

** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α : Cronbach's alpha

3-2. Effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team brand evaluation and customer-based team brand equity

Two simple linear regression analyses were conducted to test hypotheses H_{1a} and H_{1b}. Table 22 below shows the summary of the two simple linear regression models with athlete-team brand personality alignment regressed on overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity. The results indicated that alignment positively influenced team evaluation [F(1, 207) = 109.897, p < .001, with R² of .347] and brand equity [F(1, 207) = 144.464, p < .001, with R² of .411], in support of H_{1a} and H_{1b}. In the following sections, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test H₂, H₃, and H₄.

Table 22. Parameter estimates for two simple regression models

DVs	Model	B	St. Error	β	t	p <
Team evaluation	(Constant)	2.18	.23		9.51	.001
	Alignment	.51	.05	.59	10.48	.001
Team brand equity	(Constant)	1.53	.25		6.18	.001
	Alignment	.63	.05	.64	12.02	.001

3-3. Moderating effect of team familiarity on alignment-team evaluation / team brand equity relationship

Two hierarchical regression analyses with an interaction term was used to test the moderating effect of team familiarity on the alignment-overall team evaluation / customer-based team brand equity. A three model hierarchical regression was conducted with overall team evaluation and customer-based team

brand equity as the criterion variables. Soccer involvement, team/athlete likeability and perceived quality were entered as control variables in the first model, alignment and team familiarity were entered in the second model, and the interaction term was entered in the third model.

After entering the five control variables in the first model, alignment and team familiarity were entered into the second model. This Model 2 predicted 38.0% ($p < .001$) and 42.8% ($p < .001$) of the variance in overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity respectively. Furthermore, the R^2 change of the third model (where the interaction term was added) was also statistically significant (explaining 39.3%, $p = .039$ and 45.2%, $p = .003$ of the variance respectively) as indicated by the significance of F change. As shown in Table 23, there was a significant, yet negative, moderating effect of team familiarity on the alignment-team evaluation ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .039$) and alignment-team brand equity ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .003$) relationship. Thus, consistent with the findings of Study 1, the results supported H_{2a} and H_{2b} .

Table 23. Model summary of hierarchical regression models - team familiarity (moderator)

DVs	Model	R^2	ΔR^2	Sig. F Change
Overall team evaluation	1	.099	.099	.001
	2	.380	.281	.000
	3	.383	.013	.039
Customer-based team brand equity	1	.091	.091	.002
	2	.428	.337	.000
	3	.452	.024	.003

3-4. Moderating effect of athlete familiarity on alignment-team evaluation / team brand equity relationship

Another two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with an alignment-athlete familiarity interaction term. After entering the five control variables in the first model, alignment and athlete familiarity were entered into the second model, which explained 38.6% ($p < .001$) and 44.1% ($p < .001$) of the variance in overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity respectively. However, when the interaction term (alignment x athlete familiarity) was added into the third model, the results did not reveal any moderator effect (see Table 24 below for the model summary). Although H_{3a} and H_{3b} were not supported, the results are consistent with the finding of Study 2, where alignment and athlete familiarity interaction effect was also insignificant.

Table 24. Model summary of hierarchical regression models - athlete familiarity (moderator)

DVs	Model	R ²	ΔR^2	Sig. F Change
Overall team evaluation	1	.099	.099	.001
	2	.386	.287	.000
	3	.389	.003	.323
Customer-based team brand equity	1	.091	.091	.002
	2	.441	.350	.000
	3	.449	.008	.090

3-5. Moderating effect of interaction quality on alignment-team evaluation / team brand equity relationship

The final analyzing process was undertaken to test hypotheses H_{4a} and H_{4b}. Similar to the previous analyses, two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted with an alignment-interaction quality interaction term. In the first model, the same five control variables entered cumulatively accounted for 9.9% ($p = .001$) and 9.1% ($p = .002$) of the variance in overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity respectively. The second model (where a predictor variable and a moderator variable are added) predicted an additional 28.4% ($p < .001$) and 33.8% ($p < .001$) of the variance respectively. After controlling the effects of covariates, alignment was positively associated with overall team evaluation ($\beta = .54, p < .001$) and customer-based team brand equity ($\beta = .61, p < .001$), while interaction quality was not a significant predictor of the two criterion variables. Thus, consistent with the results of Study 1 and 2, H_{1a} and H_{1b} were once again supported in a field setting. Meanwhile, partially consistent with the results of Study 1 and 2, athlete quality was the only covariate variable which had significant effect on the dependent variables.

After the interaction term (alignment x interaction quality) was included in Model 3, the model as a whole explained 39.8% and 46% of the variance respectively. The R^2 change was statistically significant as indicated by the significance of F change. As shown in Table 25, there was a significant moderating effect of interaction quality on alignment-team evaluation ($\beta = .13, p = .024$) and alignment-team brand equity ($\beta = .18, p = .001$) relationship. Thus, the results supported H_{4a} and H_{4b}.

Table 25. Parameter estimates for hierarchical regression models - interaction quality (moderator)

DVs	Model	B	St. Error	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Team evaluation	Model 1				.10	.10**
	Involvement	-.26	.17	-.21		
	Team likeability	.26	.17	.19		
	Athlete likeability	.04	.12	.03		
	Team quality	.03	.08	.03		
	Athlete quality	.27	.08	.28**		
	Model 2				.38	.28***
	Alignment	.82	.09	.54***		
	Interaction quality	.13	.09	.09		
	Model 3				.40	.02*
Alignment x Interaction quality	.19	.09	.13*			
Team brand equity	Model 1				.09	.09**
	Involvement	-.02	.19	-.01		
	Team likeability	.12	.20	.08		
	Athlete likeability	.06	.13	.05		
	Team quality	.01	.09	.01		
	Athlete quality	.25	.10	.23*		
	Model 2				.43	.34***
	Alignment	1.034	.10	.61***		
	Interaction quality	.09	.09	.05		
	Model 3				.45	.02**
Alignment x Interaction quality	.31	.09	.18**			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

4. Discussion

Although the controlled experiments (Study 1 and 2) provided confident assertions regarding the positive effect of athlete-team brand

personality alignment in team branding efforts, this field study offers a broader test of athlete-team brand personality alignment in a more common athlete-fan interacting contexts—outside the athlete signing scenarios tested in the experiment settings and provides greater assurance about the generalizability of the findings. In Study 3, the author reexamined the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on team evaluation and the moderating role of team and athlete familiarity in a field setting.

According to the results, athlete-team brand personality alignment was a significant predictor of the team evaluation and team brand equity. Moreover, team familiarity was a significant moderator while athlete familiarity was not. These results were consistent with the results of Study 1 and 2. Therefore, unfamiliar teams should actively utilize their ‘human brands’ in branding communication efforts. Furthermore, when undertaking team branding appeal through the strategic alignment, the focus should be on how to convey the aligned message and not on which athlete to communicate the messages through as athlete familiarity does not moderate the effect of brand personality alignment.

In addition, the author empirically tested the moderating effect of interaction quality on predictor-criterion variable relationship. Although the interaction term explained additional 2% of the total variance, moderator effects are difficult to detect in non-experimental field studies and, therefore, even those explaining as little as 1% of the total variance should be considered important (McClelland & Judd, 1993). As predicted, higher interaction quality led to stronger alignment effect on criterion variables compared to lower interaction quality (H_{4a} and H_{4b} supported). That is, when athletes’ interaction performance did not meet fans’ expectations (i.e., low interaction quality),

strategically aligned branding appeal becomes less influential. Therefore, it is important to train or educate athletes (e.g., through internal marketing programs) of the service nature embedded in professional sport business. Particularly, as athletes now interact with fans more frequently through multiple online platforms, it is crucial for the team officials to closely manage these interactions as one slip can sink an entire branding efforts.

VIII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Using athletes is a common, frequently noticed practice in advertising campaigns. Despite the large cost required to secure athlete endorsers, this promotional strategy is still popular as athletes are popular human brands—athletes are the most frequently selected endorsers compared to any other celebrities (i.e., musicians, actors, comedians, etc.) (Carlson & Donovan, 2008; Lake, Reece, & Rifon, 2010). However, despite the popularity of athletes in the realm of advertising, no research to date has examined the role of athletes in team branding. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to empirically examine the direct link between athlete-team brand personality alignment to team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity, as well as moderating role of team and athlete familiarity and interaction quality in relation to strategic alignment. The results of the current research fill gaps in the literature and extend the body of knowledge in branding studies in general and sport team branding studies in particular.

Hypothesis 1 was fully supported (both in experimental and field settings), meaning that athlete-team brand personality alignment has a positive effect on overall team evaluation and team brand equity evaluation. In other words, as fans' perception of the degree of strategic alignment increase, fans tend to evaluate teams more positively. This is consistent with extant studies as aligned and consistent information is easier to process and understand which, in turn, leads to conceptual fluency and increased preference (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Reber et al., 2004). These results are also partially supported by the extant studies in the field of sport sponsorship and athlete endorsement (e.g., Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; McDaniel,

1999; Till & Busler, 2000), which report that congruence between sponsor and sponsored entity or endorser and endorsed entity has positive influence on desired outcomes.

Furthermore, hypotheses 2 and 4 were also supported. This means that the effect of strategic alignment (when athlete-team brand personality is strategically aligned) on team evaluation is weakened when fans are more familiar with the team, whereas the same relationship is strengthened when fans' perceived interaction quality is more positive. This negative interaction effect of team familiarity is supported by bottom-up information processing as people tend to undertake more extensive information processing for unfamiliar brands (Hilton & Darley, 1991; Schwarz, 2002). On the other hand, the positive interaction effect of interaction quality is supported by Tversky and Kahneman's (1974) 'anchoring and adjustment heuristic' as fans use athlete-team brand personality alignment as an anchor for evaluating the team brand and adjust for the effect of interaction quality.

In terms of the moderating role of athlete familiarity (hypothesis 3) in the relationship between strategic alignment and team evaluation, this research failed to demonstrate the moderating effect. This insignificant moderating effect of athlete familiarity can be explained by source attractiveness model. According to this model, effectiveness of advertising messages depends on source familiarity (Shilbury et al., 2003). Furthermore, a former study demonstrated that endorser familiarity can facilitate the degree to which congruency between product and endorser can be effective (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). In other words, the positive moderating effect of athlete familiarity may have conflicted with the top-down/bottom-up information processing.

Another possible explanation for the insignificant moderating role of

athlete familiarity can be found from the changeable nature of athlete brand personality (Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Fink et al., 2009; Horrow, 1982). In other words, fans' pre-held athlete brand personality may have been altered through the information provided in the stimulus materials (Study 2) or through their actual encounter with athletes (Study 3). Thus, counter to the author's expectations, athlete familiarity was not a significant influence on the effect of strategic alignment on team evaluations. These specific findings of the current study entail several important academic and managerial implications and add further depth to our knowledge of professional sport team branding studies.

1. Theoretical implications

Frontline employees are increasingly recognized as a vital source of firms' branding appeal (Matta & Folkes, 2005; Wentzel, 2009) and, therefore, are becoming more central in firms' branding efforts (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). In the similar vein, athletes, the key employees of professional sport teams, should be at the forefront of the teams' branding appeals. Furthermore, it would be a logical prediction to assume branding appeal to be relatively more powerful when the team branding information is conveyed by athletes (as they are subjects of fan identification).

Through a series of three studies, the author demonstrated how branded athlete-fan interaction (i.e., athlete-team brand personality alignment) can significantly influence fans' team related responses. Additionally, conditions in which aforementioned effect is strengthened or weakened are examined. In sum, the findings of the current research not only investigated the role of athletes in team branding strategies, but also identified when strategic alignment

is more influential in shaping overall team evaluation and customer-based team brand equity. The findings of the current study provide several theoretical contributions.

First, by aligning athlete brand personality with the team brand's positioning (i.e., team brand personality), this research is the first to adopt the construct of 'branded service encounters' and to empirically test its impact on team evaluations. Although 'branded service encounters' is a well-established construct in the service marketing literature, the current study is the first to apply the concept into the realm of sport marketing and develop the new 'branded athlete-fan interaction' construct. Furthermore, the findings of the current study provide a novel contribution to the branding literature (sport team branding literature in particular) because only a few studies in branding literature and none in sport management literature have empirically studied the role of employees or athletes in brand equity-building efforts. The current study particularly established the vital role of athletes in teams' branding appeal. From this perspective, the current study fills the gaps in the literature on team branding literature and extends the body of knowledge to team branding through athletes.

Second, many extant studies (e.g., Gwinner, 1997; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; McDaniel, 1999; Till & Busler, 2000) in the field of marketing and sport management have already provided empirical support for the effects of sponsor-sponsored entity or endorser-product congruence, fit, or alignment on consumer responses. However, these extant studies have primarily deemed athletes as a marketing medium for outside firms. Therefore, the current study is distinguishable as strategic alignment of athlete-team brand personality is concerned with an internal source (i.e. athletes

of a team), whereas extant studies are concerned with an external source (i.e. athletes as an endorser). This difference entails marketing effectiveness as the process of developing, managing, and maintaining a brand through an internal source can be less troublesome compared to outside sources. In other words, strategically aligning (through marketing communication) athlete-team brand personality is more easily managed rather than finding an appealing athlete with a specific brand personality.

Third, the experimental design of the research enabled the author to test the effect of alignment on team-related responses and specific situations in which the strategic alignment can be more influential as a team branding appeal. This is a novel contribution to the sport team branding literature as no extant empirical work to date has focused on the team brand building effects attributed to athlete-team brand personality alignment and empirically test the effects both experimental and non-experimental. The current study addressed this gap. Furthermore, this study supplemented several limitations inherent in methodological approaches of the extant studies. While former studies used fictitious celebrities to verify the effectiveness of endorser-product congruence (e.g., Till & Busler, 2000), the current study used real athletes and teams both in the experimental and field settings; thus enhancing external validity. This effort adds additional meaning to the results of the current study.

2. Managerial implications

While the current study provides several meaningful theoretical implications, it also provides important managerial implications for marketing management. Based on the findings, the author suggests that teams should train

and motivate (by drawing their understanding and necessity of a such marketing movement) athletes to perform their service roles in a manner that represents the team's selected brand personality. For example, team officials can invite service experts and educate athletes how they should behave (from their facial expression to body gestures) when interacting with fans or general public. It is important for the athletes to truly realize their responsibilities as the 'human brand' and represent a powerful brand-building asset for teams. In addition, in order to maximize the effect of unified team branding message, marketing managers should deliberately design and direct their team brand positioning efforts, such as branded advertising campaigns and public relations programs in line with teams' branded athlete-fan interactions. Furthermore, as the effect of strategic alignment is more robust for relatively unknown teams, marketing managers of newly inaugurating teams or relatively unfamiliar teams should consider undertaking this branding method. Contrast to team familiarity, Study 2 demonstrated the insignificant moderating effect of athlete familiarity. Although predicted hypothesis (H_{3a} and H_{3b}) were not supported, this finding still provides insightful implication. The effect of strategic alignment stands regardless of athlete familiarity. In other words, teams do not have to allocate more familiar (or famous) athletes when conducting team branding efforts through strategic alignment of athlete-team brand personality.

Study 3 revealed another important condition which affects the effect of strategic alignment: interaction quality. The results of this study suggest that athletes' attitude, behavior, and expertise are important elements of athlete-fan interaction. This finding has significant implications for the service-mind training to cultivate athletes who can provide heart-felt services to achieve positive service assessment. In other words, athletes should internalize elements

of service mind when interacting with fans or the general public. In order to do that, marketing managers should stress more importance on internal marketing programs. While conducting team espoused brand personality appeal through athletes can be a powerful tool, the author acknowledges the difficulties associated with building standardized brand experiences as athlete-delivered marketing messages can vary from athlete to athlete (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). This inconsistency can be addressed through internal marketing programs as they are a tool which communicates brand positioning within the team and assist athletes' understanding of the team selected brand personality (Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998).

Furthermore, to implement branded athlete-fan interaction successfully, the author suggests that marketing managers or decision making team officials work closely with their coaching staffs or scouting team to nurture or sign athletes who naturally possess team aligned brand personality. The author understands that signing athletes who has corresponding brand personality is difficult for teams. Especially for professional sports where winning is a goal of the utmost importance and, therefore, either nurturing or signing athletes based on their brand personality cannot be on the top of the checklist. However, as F.C. Barcelona stands as a successful example, it is not impossible to pursue a certain brand positioning and to be competitive simultaneously. F.C. Barcelona has implemented the team color and maintained that color for over several decades and still stands as a giant in international football. Their color is now deep rooted into the club and is one of a few professional sport teams with distinct and pronounced brand image (Hamil, Walters, & Watson, 2010).

The author suggests that teams work to develop and maintain branded

athlete-fan interaction standardization. These efforts should lead to a more consistent evidence of the team brand meaning in every athlete-fan interaction. With this goal in mind, teams should undertake role-play training methods in which managers and/or other team officials play the part of fans so athletes can practice their attitude, behavior, and expertise in a risk-free setting. Furthermore, the marketing managers can use ‘mystery shopper’ method to periodically observe athletes’ interactive attitudes and behaviors with fans.

3. Limitations and future research

The greatest contribution of this research is the empirical investigation of the role of athlete-fan interaction in reinforcing team branding appeal—particularly through strategically aligning athlete and team brand personality. Although the results of the current research are consistent and robust, the author recognizes several limitations that must be taken into account when generalizing the results of the current research. The first limitation is the student sample used in Study 1 and 2. Although student samples are deemed acceptable (Calder et al., 1981), the generalizability of the findings may be limited. For this reason, the author conducted Study 3 where data were collected in a field setting. Given the consistent effect of alignment across all studies, the author do not feel that this limitation is overwhelming. The next limitation is that the sport used in all three studies was soccer. Thus, the findings may have been influenced by the specific characteristics of soccer fans and may be difficult to generalize the results to sport fans in general. Additional samples from different types of sports should be collected in future researches to further clarify the effect of strategic alignment.

Another limitation involves the context used for manipulations of athlete-team brand personality alignment and team/athlete familiarity. Although athletes are human brands who affect the collective branding of the teams and a team signing an athlete is one of the most common branding information fans are exposed to in real life (Pifer et al., 2015), it remains unclear whether findings would be similar if a stronger manipulation was used, such as allowing respondents to experience a live athlete-fan interaction with an athlete acting the role in a field experiment. Future research may manipulate the athlete's physical appearance, outwear, or other branded tangibles to align (misalign) with the team brand personality to further investigate the effects of alignment on team evaluation. The author also calls for additional research that examines how branded athlete-fan interaction collaborates with other factors prevalent in service environments, such as other athletes and team atmospherics (Bitner, 1990; Matta & Folkes, 2005).

In addition, future studies might uncover athlete-team brand personality alignment's relationship to actual fan spending to fully understand the financial benefit accrued through this integrated branding strategy. Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine the relative effect strength of strategic alignment compared to other factors that affect overall team evaluation, such as team performance and possession of star athletes. This may be particularly interesting as performance or success of the teams has been one of the most important factors that affect fan perception toward teams (e.g., Gladden & Funk, 2002; Mason, 1999). Strategic alignment's relative position compared to other influential factors would provide insightful implications for marketing managers.

Another issue for future research to delve into is the empirical test of athlete brand personality's changeable nature. Although former studies (Carlson

& Donovan, 2013; Fink et al., 2009; Horrow, 1982) have provided theoretical foundation for such nature, the empirical support for the effect of marketing communications on altering athlete brand personality can provide a fuller picture of the strategic brand personality alignment. Finally, although athlete familiarity was an insignificant moderator, it would be worthwhile to assess the moderating role of athlete familiarity using 'top-of-the-game' athletes such as Cristiano Ronaldo. Findings of a such study can provide clearer theoretical foundation of the effects of athlete familiarity in team branding efforts.

IX. CONCLUSION

The current research confirmed the effect of athlete-team brand personality alignment on overall team evaluation and team brand equity. Moreover, interaction effects between strategic alignment and team/athlete familiarity and interaction quality were also tested. Team marketing managers can utilize their athletes in team branding efforts by closely managing branded athlete-fan interaction. Furthermore, the effect of alignment is stronger for unfamiliar teams and for higher interaction quality. Thus, newly inaugurating or relatively unpopular teams can maximize their branding appeal by strategically aligning their athletes with that of the team brand personality. Finally, as athlete familiarity was not a significant moderator, teams can focus on how they are going to appeal their team espoused brand personality through athletes rather than which athlete (familiar) to put forth.

In sum, the current study contributes to the body of our knowledge on the role of athletes in team branding appeals by theoretically and empirically examining the previously overlooked utilization of core 'human brands' in team branding communications. Findings from this research contribute to understanding of the effect of branded athlete-fan interaction and provides valuable managerial implications. The proposed recommendations derived from the analyses provide important cues for future research and extends our knowledge of branding methods in professional sports setting.

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APPENDIX A

Cover story for <Preliminary study>

구단 브랜딩!

선수를 통한 수원삼성 브랜딩 이야기

K리그에서 매년 공격적인 마케팅과 새로운 변화 시도로 각광받고 있는 수원삼성이 다시 한 번 새로운 마케팅을 도입한다. 수원삼성은 해외 우수 구단들에게서 찾아볼 수 있는 구단만의 색 (Color of Suwon)을 구축하고 강화하기 위해 선수 브랜드 개성과 구단의 브랜드 개성을 일치시키는데 노력을 기울이고 있다.

수원삼성 마케팅 팀장에 따르면 “선수는 구단의 가장 강력한 상품이다. 팬들은 경기에 열광하지만 결국 경기를 만들어 내는 사람들이 바로 선수들이다. 따라서 구단 브랜딩을 선수를 통해서 하는 방법을 도입하고 있다.”

수원삼성 대표이사는 “우리 구단은 K리그를 대표하는 구단으로의 입지를 굳히기 위해 구단의 모든 브랜드 개성을 일치시켜 보다 획일화 된 이미지를 형성하기 위해 이번 마케팅 방안을 강구했다.”

수원삼성은 이번 마케팅을 통해 추구하는 스포츠에 걸맞고 구단이 추구하는 브랜드 개성인 “티프하고 거친” 이미지를 강조한다. 이러한 움직임의 일환으로 K리그 티프함의 상징이라고 할 수 있는 김은선 선수를 영입하였다.

앞으로도 다양한 마케팅 메시지 전달을 통해 선수와 구단의 브랜드 개성 일치를 강조할 계획이다.

APPENDIX B

Stimulus materials for <Study 1 and 2>

1. Content

a) Aligned – imaginative team and imaginative athlete

▶ familiar team (unfamiliar team) / familiar athlete (unfamiliar athlete)

최근 유소년 축구캠프 설명회 참석차 한국을 방문한 스페인 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels) 축구단 마케팅 디렉터 로메라(Claudia Romera)씨는 스포티안과의 단독 인터뷰에서 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels)가 추구하는 브랜드 이미지와 선수 영입 계획에 대해 언급하였다.

로메라씨는 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels)의 마케팅 성공요인 중 하나로 일관된 이미지를 꼽았다. “우리 구단의 이미지를 몇 가지 단어로 표현하자면 ‘간결하고 정확한 패스, 공간침투, 화려함, 창의적’ 등으로 나타낼 수 있다. 팬들이 경기장을 방문하면 선수들의 플레이 스타일부터 경기장 내에서 보고, 듣고, 느낄 수 있는 모든 부분들이 앞서 언급한 이미지를 연상시키도록 노력하고 있다. 앞으로도 계속해서 일관된 이미지를 강조한 마케팅을 펼칠 것이다.”

구단 마케팅 관련 계획뿐만 아니라 선수 영입에 관해서도 언급하였다. 로메라씨는 “선수는 구단의 가장 중요한 자산이기 때문에 선수 영입은 매우 신중하게 진행된다. 현재 가장 근접해 있는 영입대상은 다비드 실바 (마르코 데이비슨)이다. 다비드 실바 (마르코 데이비슨)는 예측 불가능한 움직임과 패스, 창의적인 공간 활용 능력 등 창의적이고 화려한 플레이를 선보이는 선수이다. 팬들을 비롯한 구단 관계자들은 다비드 실바 (마르코 데이비슨)의 영입이 성사되기를 고대하고 있다”라고 말하며 다비드 실바 (마르코 데이비슨) 영입에 큰 기대감을 나타냈다.

b) Misaligned – imaginative team and tough athlete

▶ familiar team (unfamiliar team) / familiar athlete (unfamiliar athlete)

최근 유소년 축구캠프 설명회 참석차 한국을 방문한 스페인 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels) 축구단 마케팅 디렉터 로메라(Claudia Romera)씨는 스포티안과의 단독 인터뷰에서 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels)가 추구하는 브랜드 이미지와 선수 영입 계획에 대해 언급하였다.

로메라씨는 FC. Barcelona (Luxe Angels)의 마케팅 성공요인 중 하나로 일관된 이미지를 꼽았다. “우리 구단의 이미지를 몇 가지 단어로 표현하자면 ‘간결하고 정확한 패스, 공간침투, 화려함, 창의적’ 등으로 나타낼 수 있다. 팬들이 경기장을 방문하면 선수들의 플레이 스타일부터 경기장 내에서 보고, 듣고, 느낄 수 있는 모든 부분들이 앞서 언급한 이미지를 연상시키도록 노력하고 있다. 앞으로도 계속해서 일관된 이미지를 강조한 마케팅을 펼칠 것이다.”

구단 마케팅 관련 계획뿐만 아니라 선수 영입에 관해서도 언급하였다. 로메라씨는 “선수는 구단의 가장 중요한 자산이기 때문에 선수 영입은 매우 신중하게 진행된다. 현재 가장 근접해 있는 영입대상은 야야투레 (제이슨 스틸)이다. 야야투레 (제이슨 스틸)는 강인한 체력과 피지컬, 몸을 아끼지 않는 저돌적인 플레이 능력 등 강하고 거친 플레이를 선보이는 선수이다. 팬들을 비롯한 구단 관계자들은 야야투레 (제이슨 스틸)의 영입이 성사되기를 고대하고 있다”라고 말하며 야야투레 (제이슨 스틸) 영입에 큰 기대감을 나타냈다.

2. Fictitious newspaper version given to respondents

SPORTIAN

스포티안

[독점 인터뷰] 바르셀로나 마케팅 디렉터

"바르셀로나 마케팅 성공요인"



▲ 바르셀로나 마케팅 디렉터 로메라씨 ©스포티안

최근 유소년 축구캠프 설명회 참석차 한국을 방문한 스페인 (미국) F.C. Barcelona 축구단 마케팅 디렉터 로메라(Claudia Romera)씨는 스포티안과의 단독 인터뷰에서 F.C. Barcelona가 추구하는 구단 색깔과 선수 영입 계획에 대해 언급하였다.

로메라씨는 F.C. Barcelona의 마케팅 성공요인 중 하나로 일관된 이미지를 꼽았다: "우리 구단의 이미지를 몇 가지 단어로 표현하자면 '간결하고 정확한 패스, 공간침투, 화려함, 창의적' 등으로 나타낼 수 있다. 팬들이 경기장을 방문하면 선수들의 플레이 스타일부터 경기장 내에서 보고, 듣고, 느낄 수 있는 모든 부분들이 앞서 언급한 이미지를 연상시키도록 노력하고 있다. 앞으로도 계속해서 일관된 이미지를 강조한 마케팅을 펼칠 것이다."



▲ 바르셀로나가 주목하고 있는 로비 로저스 선수 ©스포티안

구단 마케팅 관련 계획뿐만 아니라 선수 영입에 관해서도 언급하였다. 로메라씨는 "선수는 구단의 가장 중요한 자산이기 때문에 선수 영입은 매우 신중하게 진행된다. 현재 가장 근접해 있는 영입대상은 로비 로저스이다. 로비 로저스는 예측 불가능한 움직임과 패스, 창의적인 공간 활용 능력 등 창의적이고 화려한 플레이를 선보이는 선수이다. 팬들을 비롯한 구단 관계자들은 로비 로저스의 영입이 성사되기를 고대하고 있다"라고 말하며 로비 로저스 영입에 큰 기대감을 나타냈다.

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for <Study 1 and 2>

문1. 다음 문항은 신문기사에 언급된 구단에 대한 귀하의 생각을 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 기사에서 언급된 구단에 대한 나의 느낌은 매우 긍정적이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 신뢰가 간다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 실력과 마케팅을 겸비한 구단이라고 생각한다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 팬들의 사랑을 받는 구단이라고 생각한다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. 나는 기회가 된다면 기사에서 언급된 구단의 시합을 TV 혹은 직접 가서 볼 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 프로축구계에서 최고의 브랜드를 자랑하는 구단이라고 생각한다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. 기사에서 언급된 구단 브랜드 이미지는 프로축구계에서 돋보이는 브랜드로 성장할 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. 기사에서 언급된 구단의 티켓가격이 다른 구단들보다 비싸더라도 경기를 보러갈 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. 기사에서 언급된 구단이 팬들에게 제공하는 가치는 다른 프로축구 구단들에 비해 높을 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문2. 다음 문항은 축구에 대한 귀하의 관여도에 대한 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 축구 경기는 흥미진진하다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 축구 경기는 재미있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 축구 경기는 볼만한 가치가 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 축구 경기는 내게 매우 중요하다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문3. 다음 문항은 신문기사에서 언급된 구단 및 선수에 대한 귀하의 태도를 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 나는 기사에서 언급된 구단을 다른 구단들보다 더 좋아하는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 나는 다른 구단들보다 기사에서 언급된 구단에 대해 더 많은 관심을 갖는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 나는 기회가 된다면 기사에서 언급된 구단을 직접 방문해보고 싶다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 실력이 뛰어난 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. 기사에서 언급된 구단은 우수한 경기력을 선보이는 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. 나는 기사에서 언급된 선수를 다른 선수들보다 더 좋아하는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. 나는 다른 선수들보다 기사에서 언급된 선수에 대해 더 많은 관심을 갖는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. 나는 기회가 된다면 기사에서 언급된 선수를 만나보고 싶다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. 기사에서 언급된 선수는 실력이 뛰어난 선수이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
10. 기사에서 언급된 선수는 우수한 경기력을 선보이는 선수이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문4. 다음 문항은 신문기사에서 언급된 구단과 선수의 브랜드 이미지 일치여부에 대한 귀하의 생각을 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 기사에서 언급된 구단과 선수는 비슷한 이미지를 가지고 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 내가 느낀 구단의 이미지는 선수가 갖는 이미지와 일치한다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 기사에서 언급된 구단이 추구하는 이미지와 선수가 가지고 있는 이미지는 매우 다르다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문5. 다음 문항은 기사에서 언급된 구단과 선수에 대한 귀하의 친숙도를 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항							
나는 기사에서 언급된 구단에 대해							
1.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 친숙하지 않다						매우 친숙하다
2.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 알지 못한다						매우 잘 안다
3.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 들어본 적이 없다						많이 들어본 적이 있다
나는 기사에서 언급된 선수에 대해							
1.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 친숙하지 않다						매우 친숙하다
2.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 알지 못한다						매우 잘 안다
3.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 들어본 적이 없다						많이 들어본 적이 있다

마지막으로 조사 관리와 통계처리를 위하여 몇 가지 개인적인 특성에 대한 질문입니다.

- DQ1. 귀하의 성별은 어떻게 되십니까? ① 남자 ② 여자
- DQ2. 귀하의 연령은 오늘 기준으로 어떻게 되십니까? (_____세)
- DQ3. 귀하의 월평균 가계소득 수준은 어느 정도입니까?
- ① 200만원 미만 ② 200-300만원 미만 ③ 300-400만원 미만
- ④ 400-500만원 미만 ⑤ 500-600만원 미만 ⑥ 600만원 이상

◎ 바쁘신 중에 조사에 참여해주셔서 감사합니다. ◎

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire for <Study 3>

문1. 다음 문항은 구단과 선수들의 이미지 일치여부에 대한 귀하의 생각을 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 축구단과 오늘 행사에 왔던 선수들은 비슷한 이미지를 가지고 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 축구단 브랜드 이미지는 오늘 본 선수들의 이미지와 일치한다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 축구단 이미지와 오늘 본 선수들의 이미지는 매우 다르다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문2. 다음 문항은 구단에 대한 귀하의 생각을 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 축구단에 대한 나의 느낌은 매우 긍정적이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 축구단은 신뢰가 가는 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 축구단은 실력과 마케팅을 겸비한 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 축구단은 팬들의 사랑을 받는 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. 나는 기회가 된다면 축구단의 시합을 TV 혹은 직접 가서 볼 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. 축구단은 K리그에서 최고의 브랜드를 자랑하는 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. 축구단의 브랜드 이미지는 K리그에서 돋보인다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. 축구단의 티켓가격이 다른 구단들보다 비싸더라도 경기를 보러갈 것이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. 축구단이 팬들에게 제공하는 가치는 다른 K리그 구단들에 비해 우수하다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문3. 다음 문항은 구단과 선수들에 대한 귀하의 친숙도를 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항							
나는 축구단에 대해							
1.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 친숙하지 않다					매우 친숙하다	
2.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 알지 못한다					매우 잘 안다	
3.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 들어본 적이 없다					많이 들어본 적이 있다	
나는 오늘 본 선수들에 대해							
1.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 친숙하지 않다					매우 친숙하다	
2.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 알지 못한다					매우 잘 안다	
3.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
	전혀 들어본 적이 없다					많이 들어본 적이 있다	

문4. 다음 문항은 오늘 행사에서 선수들에 대해 귀하가 느낀 점을 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 선수들은 사람들을 친절하게 대하였다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 선수들은 행사 참여에 긍정적이고 적극적인 태도를 보였다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 선수들은 즐거운 마음으로 행사에 참여하였다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 선수들은 행사에서 자신이 맡은 일에 최선을 다하였다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. 선수들은 사람들이 필요로 할 때 최선을 다해 도와주었다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. 선수들은 행사에 참여한 사람들이 무엇을 원하는지 잘 이해하고 있었다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. 선수들은 행사에서 자신이 맡은 일이 무엇인지 정확히 알고 있었다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. 나는 선수들이 오늘 행사에서 맡은 일을 잘 해낼 것이라고 믿고 의지할 수 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. 선수들은 오늘 행사에서 맡은 일에 대해 지식과 전문성을 가지고 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문5. 다음 문항은 축구에 대한 귀하의 관여도에 대한 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 축구 경기는 흥미진진하다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 축구 경기는 재미있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 축구 경기는 볼만한 가치가 있다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 축구 경기는 내게 매우 중요하다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

문6. 다음 문항은 구단과 선수들에 대한 귀하의 태도를 알아보는 질문입니다.

◎ 귀하의 생각과 가장 일치하는 번호에 ✓표를 하여 주시기 바랍니다.							
설 문 문 항	전혀 그렇지 않다				매우 그렇다		
1. 나는 오늘 본 구단을 다른 구단들보다 더 좋아하는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
2. 나는 다른 구단들보다 오늘 본 구단에 대해 더 많은 관심을 갖는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
3. 나는 기회가 된다면 오늘 본 구단을 직접 방문해보고 싶다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
4. 오늘 본 구단은 실력이 뛰어난 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
5. 오늘 본 구단은 우수한 경기력을 선보이는 구단이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
6. 나는 오늘 행사에서 본 선수들을 다른 선수들보다 더 좋아하는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
7. 나는 다른 선수들보다 오늘 행사에서 본 선수들에 대해 더 많은 관심을 갖는 편이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
8. 나는 기회가 된다면 오늘 행사에서 본 선수들을 또 만나보고 싶다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
9. 오늘 행사에서 본 선수들은 실력이 뛰어난 선수들이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
10. 오늘 행사에서 본 선수들은 우수한 경기력을 선보이는 선수들이다.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

마지막으로 조사 관리와 통계처리를 위하여 몇 가지 개인적인 특성에 대한 질문입니다.

DQ1. 귀하의 성별은 어떻게 되십니까? ① 남자 ② 여자

DQ2. 귀하의 연령은 오늘 기준으로 어떻게 되십니까? (_____세)

DQ3. 귀하의 월평균 가계소득 수준은 어느 정도입니까?

- ① 200만원 미만 ② 200-300만원 미만 ③ 300-400만원 미만
 ④ 400-500만원 미만 ⑤ 500-600만원 미만 ⑥ 600만원 이상

◎ 바쁘신 중에 조사에 참여해주셔서 감사합니다. ◎

국 문 초 록

선수를 통한 구단 브랜딩: 선수-구단 브랜드 개성의 전략적 정렬이 구단 평가 및 구단 브랜드 자산에 미치는 영향을 중심으로

안 준 상

서울대학교 대학원

체육교육과

브랜드에 인격을 불어 넣는 ‘브랜딩’은 스포츠 분야에서도 점차 그 중요성이 커지고 있다. 따라서 구단 브랜딩에 대한 연구들이 다수 진행되어 왔다. 하지만 정작 가장 영향력을 가진 선수들을 활용한 구단 브랜딩에 관한 연구는 전무한 상황이다. 선행연구 중 스타선수들이 구단 브랜드 및 이미지에 미치는 영향을 조사한 연구들은 존재하지만 이는 구단이 주가 되는 브랜딩 움직임이 아니라 스타선수들의 브랜드 후광효과를 구단이 누리려는 연구들이었다. 따라서 본 연구에서는 구단의 관점에서 선수를 활용한 구단 브랜딩의 효과 즉, 구단 평가에 미치는 영향 (특히 선수-구단 브랜드 개성 전략적 정렬이 구단 평가 및 구단 브랜드 자산에 미치는 영향)을 규명하고자 하였다. 연구목적을 달성하기 위해 두 차례의 실험연구와 현장연구(field study)를 진행하였으며, 자료는 SPSS 20.0과 AMOS 20.0을 이용하여 분석하였다.

연구 1 분석결과, 선수-구단 브랜드 개성 전략적 정렬이 구단 평가

및 구단 브랜드 자산에 긍정적인 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났고, 본 결과는 구단 친숙도가 낮은 집단에서 더욱 강하게 나타났다. 연구 2의 결과도 마찬가지로 전략적 정렬의 통계적으로 유의한 영향을 확인하였으나, 본 연구에서 가설로 세웠던 선수 친숙도의 조절효과는 유의하지 않은 것으로 나타났다. 마지막으로, 현장연구로 진행된 연구 3에서도 선수-구단 브랜드 개성 전략적 정렬의 유의미한 영향력이 나타났으며, 상호작용품질의 조절효과 또한 나타났다.

본 연구는 선수를 활용한 구단 브랜딩의 효과를 측정하고 그 효과를 극대화할 수 있는 특정 상황(친숙도가 낮은 구단 및 상호작용품질이 높은 경우)들을 확인하였다는 점에서 의의를 찾을 수 있다. 특히, 스포츠 구단 브랜딩 연구를 포함한 일반적 브랜딩 연구 문헌 확장에 일조하였다. 마지막으로 본 연구는 연구결과를 바탕으로 프로스포츠에 도입 가능한 실무적 시사점을 제공했다는 점에서 더 큰 의미를 갖는다.

주요어: 구단 브랜딩, 브랜드 개성, 전략적 정렬, 구단 / 선수 친숙도, 상호작용품질

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