SOCIAL IDENTITY COMPLEXITY AND BRAND AUTHENTICITY OF MULTIPLE

LEAGUES IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis examines the effect of fans' multiple professional sports league identities on brand love towards the leagues. As developing new fans' identities is directly connected with expanding leagues' market size, professional sports leagues may employ internal and external resources to capture fans who already have other sports identities. With this in mind, this study is designed to provide professional sports marketers a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of sports fans' multiple identities on brand love towards various leagues. Specifically, it hypothesized that sports fans' identity complexity positively influences their brand love of the league via tolerance, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and brand authenticity.

To demonstrate this hypothesis, research data was gathered through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and mediation analysis was used based on the fans' preferences of professional sports leagues. According to the results of the data analysis, there are significant effects of fans' multiple identities on their brand love via tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity. Furthermore, regardless of the preference of leagues, fans with multiple identities demonstrated higher brand love towards professional leagues through increased tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity. Details of this study, as well as theoretical and practical implications, research limitations, and future directions, are forwarded.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Myunghwan Do and Myunghee Lee,

and my younger brother, Heewook Do

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A powerful brand significantly affects consumer behavior, and a well-established brand garners customer attention compared to less-established brands. Considering the outcomes of building a strong brand, consumers not only highly evaluate the value of a brand but also become more likely to consider purchasing the brand's products or services (Morhart et al., 2015; Oh et al., 2019). However, it is not always easy for consumers to judge a brand's value amid a myriad of marketing strategies that have been implemented in recent years (e.g., marketing clutter; Elliott & Speck, 1998; Hammer et al., 2009). Among the many factors affecting these strategies, the authenticity of brands can play a significant role in consumers' decisions and behaviors (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020; Fritz et al., 2017). Additionally, an authentic brand offers a distinctive identity in the consumers' minds with a sense of history, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015).

Identifying the factors affecting branding is also imperative for sporting brands as customers' evaluation of the brand features leads to added value and consideration for purchasing service or goods such as match tickets and merchandise (Funk & James, 2001; Gladden & Funk, 2001). Various sports brands—ranging from sporting goods companies to spectator sports leagues, teams, and players—convey their identity to their customers and engage in marketing strategies intended to persuade consumers to purchase their products or services (Ahmad & Guzmán, 2020; Carlson et al., 2009; Choi et al., 2015; Kucharska et al., 2020). However, brands are not only established by internal (micro-level) factors but also external (macro-level) factors through competition or collaboration with other brands. Unlike in other

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industries, professional sports teams belong to a league, which consists of many teams that form a market under the sports organization's control.

The market value of the largest four professional sports in the United States (US) is as follows: National Football League (NFL) at $13 billion; National Basketball Association (NBA) at $7.4 billion; National Hockey League (NHL) at $4.43 billion; and Major League Baseball (MLB) at $7.4 billion (Willis, 2020). For these sports markets to expand their market size, the leagues need to develop strategies that can attract substantial customers' attention by managing internal factors (e.g., scheduling, game rules, and marketing), as well as external factors (e.g., social issues) (Goossens & Spieksma, 2009; Hamil & Morrow, 2011; Katz, 1964). Based on how leagues control these internal and external factors, they are able to construct their image in positive ways to cater to their consumers, who will then consider their purchases and consumption behaviors relative to other leagues' management of internal and external factors (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012).

Furthermore, in the daily course of managing leagues, consumers develop their own perceptions of league identities (Kunkel et al., 2014). A brand identity implies a unique feature inherent in a product that differentiates it from others in the market (Nandan, 2005). Sports leagues can strengthen their brand identity by developing their own features, including season and game starting times and match rules. The NFL, for example, traditionally starts its season in September but also has well-established special games on typical weekdays (e.g., Monday Night Football, Thursday Night Football). In the case of the NBA, the league has 12 minutes of playing time per quarter compared to other basketball leagues that play for 10 minutes (FIBA, 2020; NBA, 2019).

Additionally, there is a large body of research on fan identities within the sports consumer behavior literature. For example, a fan's identification with a team can be defined as "the personal commitment and emotional involvement customers have with a sport organization" (Sutton et al., 1997, p. 15). All these elements taken together, along with how a sports league's brand identity is perceived will vary based on how much fans identify with the league individually and collectively. Moreover, a dynamic of complexity exists in which fans develop multiple identities in connection with multiple leagues, often based on their city of origin or personal sports experiences.

The expansion of the professional sports industry is determined by how many customers will be engaged with the various leagues. While having as many fans as possible will lead to expanding the sports industry as a whole, sports fans are left to prioritize which leagues they prefer over others. When a sports fan follows multiple leagues, the fan can have multiple identities where they can develop a sense of belonging across multiple leagues (Ratten et al., 2010). Furthermore, management of internal and external factors by professional sports leagues can affect and foster fans' multiple identities. For instance, internally each league has a different set of schedules, such as their kick-off time for matches, as well as different venues and geographic markets in which their teams play. Some leagues in the US even promote other leagues' matches. The NBA, for example, has previously advertised NFL games during their playoff game (e.g., NBA, 2020b).

US sports leagues often face common social issues as part of their external environment. One salient example is the long-standing history of racism in the US professional sports industry (Evans et al., 2020). Recently, the four major sports leagues in the US have made tremendous impressions on fans with their strong statements and behavior, such as postponing their game

schedule and training to address social discrimination (Associated Press, 2020; Footer, 2020; NBA, 2020a; NHL, 2020). Additionally, these leagues have led their communities in social movement activities (Rowe et al., 2019), which has prompted some members of society to rethink race-related issues outside of the sports context. Research and history have shown that how leagues react to social issues affects their fans' behaviors (Garland & Rowe, 2001; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). Sports leagues have long campaigned against racism by utilizing similar anti-racism slogans among the leagues, in addition to other activities to reach their fans (Evans et al., 2020). As a result of these movements, some fans consider purchasing other leagues' properties (Beatty & Smith, 1987; Blattberg et al., 1976). In a situation where fans are interested in and loyal to various leagues, their multiple identities can be explained by social identity theory (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Literature on social identity complexity identifies how an overlap in fans' identities can affect their tolerance and behavioral intentions. Based on social identity complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), Brewer and Pierce (2005) contended that sports fans with low identity complexity (i.e., high overlap) tend to have a low out-group tolerance and acknowledge other fans as "people like me" to a higher degree than those who do not have a sports identity. However, Meyer (2014) revealed that sports fans with an average complexity could also have high tolerance toward out-group members. Furthermore, Lee, Cho, et al. (2020) found that although some fans have low sports identity, other factors such as place identification can affect individuals' intentions to attend sporting events. In this regard, it is necessary to conduct more studies on sports fans' multiple identifications to see how their identities and action interact (Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011).

Multiple identities are a result of a person's experiences and their subjectivity, and they have the potential to reduce prejudice between groups by increasing levels of tolerance, forming a positive image among and between groups, and establishing familiarity with out-group members (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). Higher tolerance related to multiculturalism promotes the opportunity to claim additional identities (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). For example, a person who follows the NFL and has a higher tolerance is able to establish a connection with other leagues' identities by interacting with those who follow other leagues. Furthermore, in the sports industry, identities can be formed not only through interaction with people but also through the behavior of sports organizations (e.g., CSR, Baena, 2018; Siahaya & Smits, 2020).

Given the advantage of CSR, almost all sports organizations including teams operate their own CSR programs in order to build sports identity while also offering a better quality of life to various groups in society (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Walker & Kent, 2009). In the US, for example, the four major sports leagues have CSR programs (e.g., NBA Cares, NFL Community, NHL Green, and MLB Community), and these programs also try to solve social problems, including ethical issues, education, health, and infrastructure related activities (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Carroll, 1999). Through these CSR programs, organizations can not only establish a positive brand image but also show their brand authenticity, which can convey their trustworthiness without commercial aspects to out-group communities as well (Joo et al., 2019; Martínez et al., 2014).

In the event that fans who value a friendly image and favorable emotions witness such behaviors by sports organizations, they may highly value the authenticity of the brand (Ballantyne et al., 2006; Rosica, 2007). A high value of brand authenticity correlates with a high brand love (Manthiou et al., 2014). Additionally, brand love is associated with having a long-

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term relationship with brands (Fournier, 1998). According to the concept of brand love, consumers who love a particular brand are prone to repetitive consumption of items or experiences associated with that brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). For example, customers who have extensive experience staying at luxury hotels feel that they can distinguish among each brand's authenticity; if they experience positive emotions as a result of associating with specific hotels, their love of specific hotel brands increases (Manthiou et al., 2014). According to this view, once consumers have experienced a positive emotion related to the brand, they are more likely to consume more of the brand's properties.

However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research to date that investigates fans' multiple identities in relation to the four major professional sports leagues in the US. As such, this thesis examines the professional sports industry to assess how the reactions of the US professional sports leagues to social issues impacts the sports identity of fans.

Statement of the Problem

Scholars do not agree on the results of fans' multiple identities. Brewer and Pierce (2005) identified that sports fans have low identity complexity (i.e., high overlap) and low tolerance compared to those who do not have a sports-related identity. However, Meyer (2014) found the opposite that sports fans also can have varying tolerance depending on their identity complexity. Additionally, Lee, Cho, et al. (2020) found that fans' identity strongly influences their intention to attend sports events according to place identification. Since scholars are not unanimous on the importance of multiple identities in the sports industry, more research is needed to find points of consensus.

Furthermore, the scholars mentioned above focused on only singular professional sports leagues: football (Brewer & Pierce, 2005), rugby (Meyer, 2014), and baseball (Lee, Cho, et al.,

2020). These studies did not consider the possibility that participants may have other sports

identities and that their favorite sports may not even be the target of the specific research study

they are participating in. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the variety of fans' leagues

identities in order to address the limitations of previous studies.

In the case of CSR, scholars have examined how CSR influences sports organizations

(Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Baena, 2018; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). It was possible to see how CSR

actually affected the organization. However, these studies were limited to understanding the

impact of the organizations' CSR on their fans' feelings of attachment to particular teams and

leagues. As a result of the growing awareness of the connection between organizations' CSR and

fan identity, CSR is regularly published in the media to the public, including fans, and is directly

associated with the organization's brand love (Baena, 2018). It is imperative to more thoroughly

comprehend how people who follow an organization are impacted by CSR.

Curiously, despite the rise of studying professional sports leagues as an academic

discipline (e.g., revenue, Atkinson et al., 1988; scheduling, Russell & Leung, 1994; sponsorship,

Amis et al., 1999; brand architecture, Kunkel et al., 2013), few have attempted to evaluate

leagues' brand authenticity. Although those scholars have tried to examine leagues'

organizational structures, they have not investigated customers' thoughts about the choices of

sports brands in marketing and other areas of leagues' business operations. As the leagues are

forming a market based on their fans, researchers have the opportunity to inquire about the

elements of the leagues that fans are interested in.

Purpose of the Study

Consumers' identity significantly contributes to consumer behavior in terms of the brands

and products they favor. By studying consumer identity, scholars and experts are able to examine

not only how customers decide to invest their money in particular brands (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) but also predict consumers' emotions in relation to the brand (Thompson et al., 2006). However, more research needs to be conducted on multiple identities compared to a single identity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In addition, brand authenticity is a significant indicator of predicting customers' decisions and behaviors in the modern era where sensationalistic advertisements appear (Fritz et al., 2017). Some researchers have evaluated brand authenticity by observing activities that supporters of the brand can plan for and expect in terms of performance (on marketing strategy, see CSR; Joo et al., 2019; Manthiou et al., 2014). However, little research has assessed brand authenticity as affected by external factors, such as statements of social justice. In this sense, professional sports leagues need to investigating how fans view their brand authenticity.

Based on these unique features of professional sports leagues, fans' love toward various sports leagues can be understood through the interaction among their multiple identities, their tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to expanding the meaning of social identity complexity theory, tolerance, CSR, brand authenticity, and brand love. This study will apply these variables towards developing marketing strategies for increasing sports spectating culture by sequentially mediating tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study is as follows: To what degree does league identity complexity influence the evaluation of sports leagues' brand love, relative to tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity? By taking a deductive reasoning process to answer this research

question, interrelations among the constructs are hypothesized in a causal chain of effects. The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.
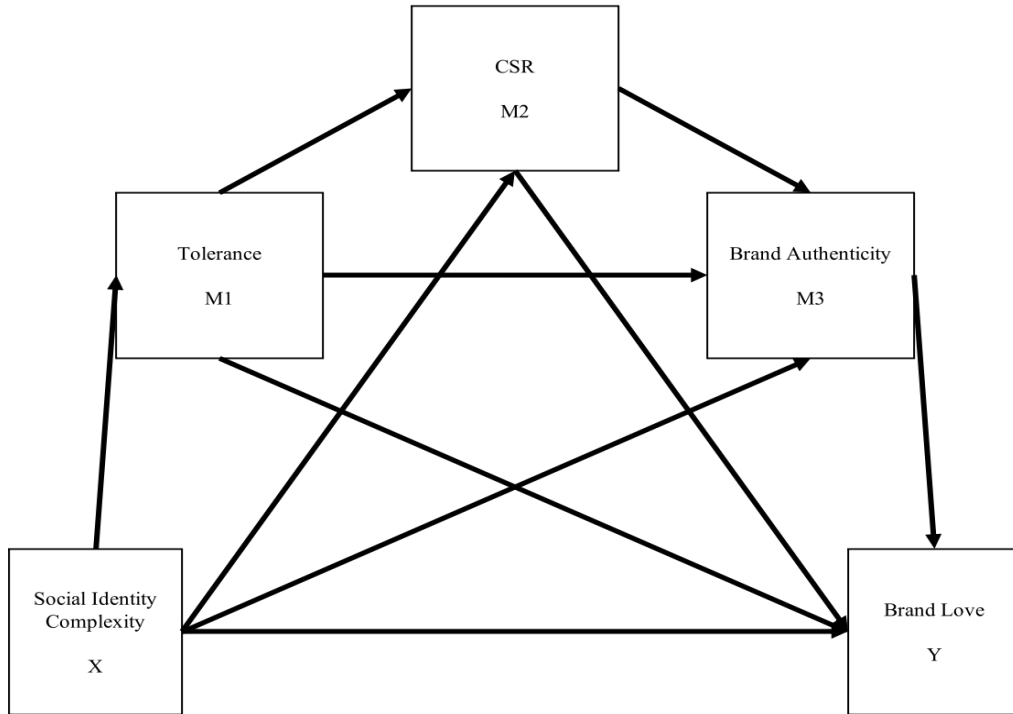
Figure 1. Conceptual model of this thesis.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis will be organized into five chapters. Chapter I will include the research topic, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Chapter II will include a review of the relevant literature related to the topics: (a) social identity, (b) social identity complexity, (c) tolerance, (d) CSR, (e) authenticity, (f) brand authenticity, and (g) brand love. Chapter III will include a description of the study's research methods (i.e., procedures,

measures, and analysis). The remaining chapters (IV and V) will introduce the result of this

thesis and the conclusion respectively.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on sports consumers' identities, their identity complexity, their tolerance, professional sports leagues' CSR and the leagues' brand authenticity. Additionally, brand love is explored in this study as an outcome variable impacted by multiple identities, tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity.

Social Identity

Psychologists and sociologists have contributed to research on social identity by understanding individuals' connections with multiple groups (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Feitosa et al., 2017; Phinney, 1992; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). For example, Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (p. 292); according to this definition, a social group consists of individuals who have a common social identification or beliefs and share the same social category. Depending on their identity, individuals may be distinguished into two groups — in-group (which includes aspects of favoritism) or out-group (which includes aspects of discrimination) (Hogg et al., 1995).

Initially, researchers determined social identity was associated with emotion, evaluations, and other psychological factors to evaluate in-group classifications (Turner et al., 1987). To empirically investigate social identity, some researchers extended social identity factors to include self-esteem (evaluative) and commitment (psychological) (Ellemers & Van Knippenberg, 1997). In general, the concept of identity in the social sciences is employed in order to evaluate an individual's self-concept of psychological traits that are associated with

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meanings (i.e., characteristics) of a physical or metaphysical nature (Ashmore et al., 2004; Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000).

In the area of sport management, social identity has received steady attention as a social-level identification related to consumer behavior with a team, spectating culture, and its brand (Kim et al., 2019). In terms of connection with a team, social identity correlates with purchasing the team's properties and participating in the team's events (James et al., 2019; Underwood et al., 2001). Regarding sports brands, several studies related to brand-related behavior and consumers' purchases have been conducted (Ko et al., 2008; Kwon et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2007; Pope & Voges, 2000). Researchers have studied global sports apparel brands such as Nike and Adidas in order to investigate not only how their marketing strategies affected the purchase of their product but also how they conveyed brand authenticity to their consumers (Choi et al., 2015). Further, researchers have studied the roles of identification on fans' stadium experiences (Lee et al., 2017), perceptions of conflict situations (Lee, Kim, et al., 2020), and in shaping multiple identities (Lee, Cho, et al., 2020). In this sense, studying a sports fan's identity is an essential factor in expanding our understanding of brand authenticity in the sports industry.

Social Identity Complexity

Social identity complexity as a newer theoretical construct was introduced by Roccas and Brewer (2002). This theory helps to assess the perceived degree of overlap among elements of a person's multi-group membership. According to the authors, such memberships can be explained by four categories (see Figure 2): intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

In terms of intersection (Figure 2a), an individual can achieve additional identities while maintaining a single in-group identification, thereby defining the in-group as the intersection of

multiple memberships. A football fan, for example, can define their identity with respect to the complex combination of both football clubs and other professional sports, and other football fans may share these identities. Regarding dominance within this theory (Figure 2b), individuals' primary identities can, in effect, subordinate other potential group identities. For instance, all football fans are considered to be members of the in-group of football. Therefore, fans will be closer to other football fans than to others who do not follow football. In the case of compartmentalization (Figure 2c), all identities can be described and expressed according to differentiation and isolation. For example, one's professional sports identity at the stadium may be the only way to distinguish in-group and out-group membership. However, religious fellowship or cultural group membership may be considered as the primary basis for shared identity and social life outside of the sports context. Finally, in terms of the merger of multiple identities (Figure 2d), all recognized identities are combined as one. In the case of a female football fan, while gender may be a dividing factor outside the context of football, one's identification with football is not affiliated with such a distinction and crosses the gender divide.
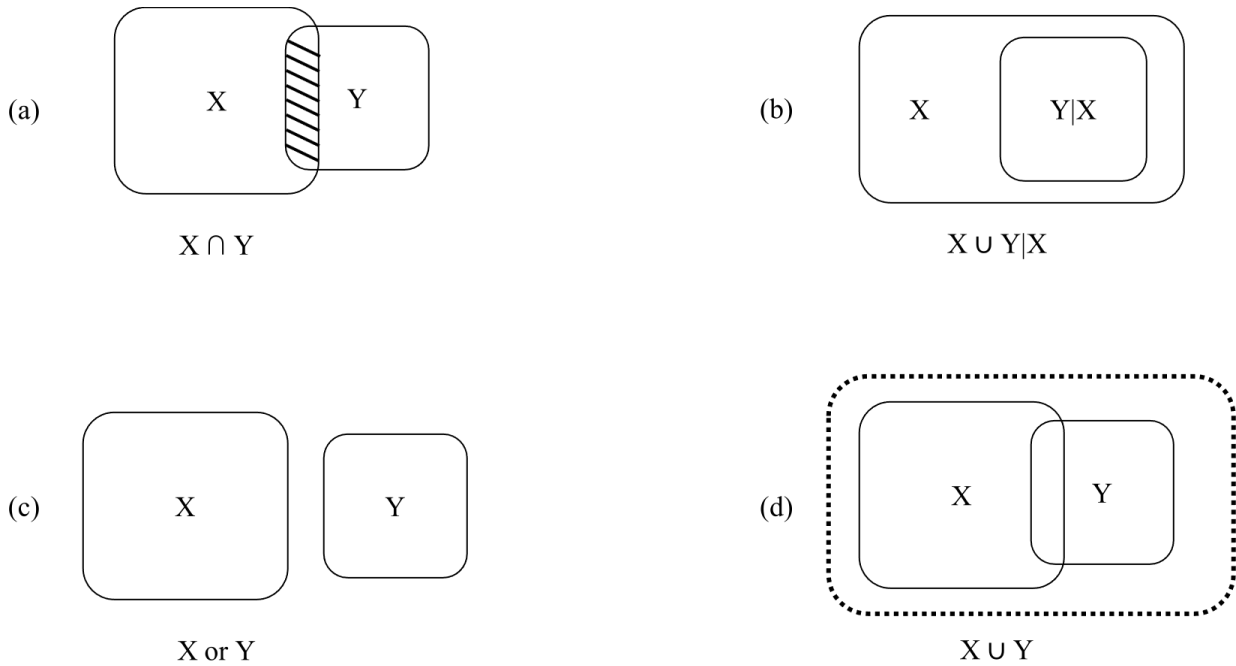
Figure 2. Structure of multiple in-group memberships.

Within this framework of social identity complexity, when the identity complexity is low (i.e., high overlap), members' identification convergence occurs and follows more coherent behavioral outcomes (e.g., in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination) among group members (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Additionally, Brewer and Pierce (2005) contributed empirical research that people's attitudes can be changed, depending on the degree of tolerance by out-groups and diversity. When people's identities reflect high complexity, they tend to be more accepting and tolerant of outgroup members. Thus, members' identification and their expected behavior outcomes are impacted by individuals' differences within the area of social identity complexity.

Scholars who have researched social identity agree that there is a need for additional empirical studies on multiple identities (Ashmore et al., 2004; Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Deaux,

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1996; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011). In the field of studies on the sports industry, scholars opine that views of multiple identities in terms of sports are not all convergent. Brewer and Pierce (2005), for example, found that sports fans may express a high overlap of identity (i.e., low identity complexity) and a lack of distinctiveness, and recognize sports fans as a relatively homogeneous group compared to people who do not identify with sports. However, Meyer (2014) demonstrated that sports fans do not always express a high overlap of identities. To extend this result, Lee, Cho, et al. (2020) researched sports consumers to find the effect of the degree of the interaction between fan and place identification on attendance intention. Given these findings, it is necessary to conduct additional research regarding sports consumers' multiple identities to better understand their interplay.

Tolerance

Tolerance is a key concept for understanding the relationship between in-groups and out-groups, which, in turn, creates a more diverse environment within an organization. Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) illustrated the function of tolerance as "the acceptance and positive estimation of intergroup difference" (p. 167). Some scholars have articulated that a high complexity in one's identity leads to a greater tolerance of out-group members (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Miller et al., 2009; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Schmid et al., 2009). In this way, tolerance can be perceived as an element of self-evaluation that is important both in terms of recognizing members' emotions and as a way of accepting of group members' differences.

Previous researchers have tested levels of tolerance by assessing the relationship between in-group and out-group membership. For example, Brewer and Pierce (2005) found that increased tolerance correlated with having a more positive attitude toward out-group members and more complex identifications than individuals who express lower tolerance levels.

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Additionally, the authors reported that since sports fans often display a low out-group tolerance, they are more likely to be characterized as low complexity and to perceive other in-group members as highly overlapping and convergent (Brewer & Pierce, 2005). In their study, Brewer and Pierce (2005) measured tolerance using a questionnaire to determine whether respondents' attitudes linked with various social issues, including multiculturalism and affirmative action. However, Meyer's research (2014) was not consistent with previous research because according to his findings, when fans express increased levels of tolerance, they are able to display positive attitudes toward out-group members in addition to being able to distinguish between in-group and out-group members.

Furthermore, a brand's attempts to influence people's purchasing decisions may include expressions of tolerance for multicultural markets. For some luxury brands, when branding efforts included a push toward high tolerance to reflect multicultural factors, customer attitudes were changed positively (Seo et al., 2015). With this in mind, tolerance for race and culture is likely to provide an opportunity for sports leagues' behaviors to convey a positive mindset to their fans.

Recently, professional sports leagues in the US announced plans to suspend their schedules as a response to fans protesting racial discrimination, especially by the police (Associated Press, 2020; Footer, 2020; NBA 2020a; NHL, 2020). Nevertheless, these leagues focused only on ethnic diversity in social and organizational aspects, not marketing aspects (e.g., Cunningham, 2011; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999; Piedra et al., 2017). Therefore, the meaning of tolerance in the field of marketing can be extended in this study by addressing how leagues' tolerance-related behaviors affected fans' attitude.

CSR

CSR is broadly defined as "a company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing its long-run beneficial impact on society" (Mohr et al., 2001, p. 47). Based on this definition of CSR, various activities—such as supporting nonprofit organizations, employees' well-being, the environment, and human rights issues—have been interpreted and studied (Mohr & Webb, 2005). These involvements are a result of CSR policies, which have the potential to offer strategic direction to enhance an organization's performance, competitiveness, and image (Baena, 2018; Breitbarth & Harris, 2008; Walker & Kent, 2009). With regard to CSR, researchers are investigating the role of CSR in a broader organizational and strategic management context beyond defining and identifying CSR activities (e.g., Husted & Salazar, 2006; Ogden & Watson, 1999).

Since CSR in the sports industry generates distinct positive effects on its organizations compared to other industries, it is widely applied to sport management (Walker & Heere, 2011; Walker & Kent, 2009). For instance, the power of star players, the association with sports teams and communities, and the level of effect witnessed by its many customers distinguish the sports industry from other industries and may provide interesting and new perspectives for the study of CSR.

Furthermore, in the US's professional sports leagues, each organization operates its own programs to contribute to improving the community (e.g., NBA Cares, NFL Community, NHL Green, and MLB Community). Through such CSR programs, sports organizations potentially add not only intrinsic value but also instrumental value to their communities. In the case of intrinsic value, for example, CSR from the organizations conveys their positive brand image to their communities by showing their brand authenticity (Baena, 2018; Joo et al., 2019). In contrast

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to an intrinsic value, through instrumental value organizations are able to secure and increase their revenues (e.g., ticket sales, local sponsors; see Babiak & Wolfe, 2006).

Although the results that sports organizations can obtain from the community have been proven through many studies, there is a limit to precisely measuring the objective characteristics of sports' CSR from consumers' point of view (see also Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Baena, 2018; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). To overcome this limitation, Walker and Heere (2011) developed a scale of Consumer Attitudes toward Responsible Entities in Sport (CARES) that consists of cognitive awareness and affective evaluation. Based on these variables, CSR will play an important role in understanding fan identities and brand authenticity in this thesis.

Authenticity

Authenticity is broadly applied in our daily life (Hicks et al., 2019) in its association with trustworthiness (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004) and the values of sincerity, originality, honesty, and genuineness (Boyle, 2003; Fine, 2003). Authenticity has been also researched in various fields, such as art, where it is utilized to deliberate a work's inherent qualities and initial characteristics (Benjamin, 1973; Cornet 1975; Derbaix & Decrop, 2007).

In philosophy, researchers often associate authenticity with people's moral behavior. Self-oriented conceptions of authenticity can be illustrated using a moral ideal of modernity and progress which promotes the idea that the self is autonomous and unique (Taylor, 1991). As suggested by existential philosophers such as Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (1943), authentic people are sincere, make thought-out decisions, and take responsibility for their behaviors, rather than embracing an artificially determined value of the self.

In sociology, authenticity is highlighted when observing that something that is not the "real" thing can be objectively explained but rather should be recognized as a socially

constructed situation connected to expectations (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). Fine (2003) described authentic behavior as being "linked to an absence of cognitive understanding, creating an unmediated experience – sincere, innocent, original, genuine, and unaffected, distinct from strategic and pragmatic self-presentation" (p. 155). Therefore, authenticity is an element that helps to represent the subjectivity of the socially constructed nature of expectations.

In psychology, authenticity is viewed as individuals' subjective experiences that have significantly influenced their self-knowledge, understanding, and relationship behavior. For example, when people feel rejected by external influences, these individuals' actions are regarded as authentic when their behaviors mirror their true selves and values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon et al., 1997). Hence, authenticity is the expression of personal identity formed through one's strong subjective experiences.

The notion of authenticity has received considerable attention from researchers in the areas of marketing and consumer behavior (Choi et al., 2015; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Kim et al., 2020; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Investigations in these areas have been mostly exploratory in their approach, centering on elements related to particular brands or people's experiences, such as those with historic sites (Chronis & Hampton, 2008; Grayson & Martinec, 2004), luxury wines (Beverland, 2006), advertisements (Beverland et al., 2008), and sports-related tourism (Hinch & Higham, 2005). Within these areas, authenticity conveys consumers' desires to achieve what is real and genuine (Fine, 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kates, 2004; Rose & Wood, 2005).

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity has attracted much attention from scholars and practitioners as a way to determine potential relationships between a consumer and a particular brand. Additionally,

some experts have concluded that authenticity is a key element in order to set up a modern

brand's success (Brown et al., 2003; Bruhn et al., 2012). Gilmore and Pine (2007) illustrated that

the function of authenticity can be more influential than quality and price, which are also

important factors in purchasing a product. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that perceived

brand authenticity is effective in a variety of ways (Fritz et al., 2017; Morhart et al., 2015;

Moulard et al., 2016; Napoli et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2019; Schallehn et al., 2014).

Authenticity can be largely regarded as one of two dimensions in the marketing field:

objective and subjective. Objective cues are connected to a physical object and are time-related

to the brand that consumers evaluate regarding brand authenticity (Grayson & Martinec, 2004).

With this perspective, for instance, brands with historical components, such as traditional

cultures, religion, customs, and beliefs, may obtain a distinctive identity and nostalgic aura

which add to their authenticity (Brown et al., 2003; Chhabra et al., 2003; Penaloza, 2000;

Postrel, 2004). Beverland (2006) contended that brands that pursue authenticity as part of their

identity are able to obtain a genuine aura of authenticity by preserving their history, endeavoring

for optimal production, and averting commercial promotion. Other scholars also support the idea

that the passion of marketers and consumers' passion for their products can increase the brand's

authenticity (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020; Moulard et al., 2016).

Conversely, the subjective dimension of authenticity is evaluated by consumers' identities

(Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). For example, consumers' views — including

comprehension, knowledge, interests, and personal tastes — may each influence the construction

of authenticity (Grazian, 2005). Authentic and inauthentic dimensions are socially constructed

(Leigh et al., 2006) and, thus, are organized not objectively but subjectively; therefore, scholars

have expressed difficulty in distinguishing between them. Additionally, since authenticity can be

established through factors that make up the market (Grazian, 2005), a customer's emotions towards the brand's genuineness may affect their evaluation of that brand (Napoli et al., 2014). Furthermore, brand authenticity has been linked not only to individual beliefs (Wickham, 2013) but also to personal evaluation (Bruhn et al., 2012).

In order to evaluate the subjective parts of brand authenticity, researchers have developed an objective scale of brand authenticity that includes multiple dimensions (see also Guèvremont, 2018; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014; Schallehn et al., 2014). For instance, Morhart et al. (2015) proposed four dimensions of brand authenticity: history (including timeliness), credibility (ability to deliver on entertainment), integrity (moral purity and responsibility), and symbolism (ability to construct their value). In the case of Napoli et al. (2014), the researchers similarly contended that there are three categories of brand authenticity, including heritage (brand's connection to history and past), sincerity (brand trustworthiness about value and principle), and quality commitment (high quality of brand standard).

Although scholars in the field of sport management have conducted research on brand authenticity related to sports apparel brands (Choi et al., 2015) and athletes (Kucharska et al., 2020), they have paid relatively little attention to the professional sports leagues. In the case of the four major professional sports leagues in the US (e.g., NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB), with a collective value of over $32.23 billion (Willis, 2020), it is worth investigating the effect of brand authenticity conveyed to the fans.

Brand Love

Brand love has been described as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name" (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Based on this definition, consumers can experience a sense of brand love by comparing different

product/brand facets, such as high product quality, self-identity, positive affect, a sense of natural fit, emotional bonding, willingness to invest, and frequency and length of use (Batra et al., 2012). Furthermore, brand love has been utilized to describe brands that are portrayed with integrity, commitment to quality, and a sense of moral virtue (Beverland, 2006; Napoli et al., 2014). Such love is also characterized by positive experiences and feelings of intimacy with the brand (Alex & Joseph, 2012; Karjaluoto et al., 2016).

Sports fans may express affection toward their favorite leagues and/or teams because the organizations provide emotional experiences that are connected to both triumphs and disasters; fans may experience either positive or negative emotions, depending on the result of game or season (Wann et al., 1994). Despite these results, fans' affinity (i.e., love) for their favorite professional sports teams is not always affected by wins and losses (Wann et al., 1994). Additionally, fans' affinity toward a particular team has been shown to extend to the league in general (Kunkel et al., 2013).

Customers who have a strong positive experience with a product/brand have been shown to feel positively toward that product or brand (Manthiou et al., 2014). Specifically, in the sports industry, teams and leagues often create nostalgic feelings that evoke positive emotion and intention (Cattaneo & Guerini, 2012; Marchegiani & Phau, 2011). To demonstrate this phenomenon, Scola and Gordon (2018) proposed a framework for retro marketing in sports, which includes five areas: imagery, merchandising, venue, gameday promotions, and advertising. For example, 'throwback' promotional events hosted by a team or league are intended to produce moments that elevate the brand's nostalgia as a way to connect the present with the past (Scola & Gordon, 2018). As a result, these authentic experiences with a team and league may elicit fans' memories and affect the love they feel for it.

Research Hypothesis

Based on the review of literature, this thesis has established the following research hypotheses by using social identity complexity as an independent variable, tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity as mediators, and brand love as a dependent variable.

Hypothesis 1: Sports fans' identity complexity positively influences their brand love of the league.

Hypothesis 2: The levels of fans' tolerance mediate the effect of their identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived league's CSR mediates the effect of fans' identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 4: A league's brand authenticity mediates the effect of fans' identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 5: The levels of fans' tolerance and CSR sequentially mediate the effect of their identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 6: The levels of fans' tolerance and perceived brand authenticity sequentially mediate the effect of their identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived CSR and brand authenticity sequentially mediate the effect of fans' identity complexity on their brand love towards the league.

Hypothesis 8: The levels of fans' tolerance, the league's CSR, and their perceived brand authenticity sequentially mediate the effect of fans' identity complexity and their brand love toward the league.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the relationship among social identity complexity, tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity, and its impact on brand love in sports leagues in the US. To do so, data was gathered through MTurk survey website. In order to examine the relationships, the thesis is implementing path and mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; Stride et al., 2015).

Procedures

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants for this thesis were recruited through MTurk. As MTurk recruits diverse populations that adequately represent the online-using population to researchers, the survey website has been widely employed for research purposes (Horton et al., 2011; Larkin & Fink, 2016; Mason & Suri, 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010; Sato et al., 2016). For the current study, MTurk participants first were presented with informed consent to sign, and those who agree to participate in the study were re-directed to the external questionnaire via Qualtrics. If respondents faithfully participated in the survey, they were rewarded (e.g., $ 0.50 for completing the questionnaire).

Measures

Participants were asked to answer questions related to social identity complexity (Brewer & Pierce, 2005), tolerance (National Opinion Research Center, 1998), CSR (Walker & Heere, 2011), brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015), brand love (Manthiou et al., 2014), and demographic variables (see Appendix A-1). To measure social identity complexity and in order to develop the study's categories of in-groups and out-groups, respondents were asked to indicate how much they identify with fans of each league and how fans from each league overlapped with

other league fans. To help respondents better understand the multiple identities questionnaires, Brewer and Pierce's (2005) explanation was adopted in the context of identification with leagues. All overlap questionnaires were measured on a scale from 0 to 10.

In the later section of the complexity questionnaires, participants received a series of tolerance-related questions (National Opinion Research Center, 1998) to determine their attitude about various social issues, including multiculturalism and affirmative action. The questionnaires of tolerance were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Then, in order to verify participants' favorite and least favorite professional sports leagues in the US among the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB, they ranked which league they prefer.

After responding to the tolerance and the ranking section, participants answered the remaining questions based on their favorite and least favorite leagues. The CSR questionnaire was composed of cognitive awareness and affective evaluation items (Walker & Heere, 2011). Then, respondents evaluated the brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). This section consists of four dimensions, including continuity (historicity and timelessness), credibility (ability to deliver on entertainment), integrity (moral purity and responsibility), and symbolism (ability to construct their value). For brand love, respondents answered seven questions adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The scales for CSR, brand authenticity, and brand love were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The last part of the survey concluded with demographic information.

Data Analysis

Data was coded using SPSS (ver. 25). To test the hypotheses, a mediation analysis using Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2018) with bootstrapping was employed with fans' league identity complexity as an independent variable, the evaluation of league brand love as a dependent

variable, and the degree of tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity as mediators (see Figure 1). Additionally, based on the participants' answers, a mediation analysis was conducted by dividing the participants based on their favorite league and least favorite league.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter explains the results of the data that was collected through MTurk. The results and analyses are described in the following orders: (a) sample characteristics, (b) descriptive, reliability, and correlation analysis, and (c) mediation analysis.

Sample Characteristics

To collect quantitative data, MTurk participants with a qualifying Human Intelligence Task (HIT) approval rate greater than 95% were included in this survey data. The purpose in setting up such a high HIT approval rate was to enhance the research reliability (Hunt & Scheetz, 2019). On the basis of this condition, after excluding 28 participants whose samples did not have a high enough approval rate to meet the study's inclusion criteria out of 270 respondents, 242 responses were used for analysis.

Among the 242 final participants, 181 males (74.8%) and 61 females (25.2%) were involved in this survey. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 70 ($M = 32.7$). In the case of their race, Caucasian ($n = 98$, 40.5%) recorded the most participants followed by Asian ($n = 79$, 32.6%), Hispanic ($n = 25$, 10.3%), Native American ($n = 21$, 8.7%), African American ($n = 18$, 7.4%), and "other" race ($n = 1$, 0.4%). Over a half of the participants had a Bachelor's degree ($n = 153$, 63.2%). The NBA was the most favored league (87 participants, 36.0%), while the NHL was the least favored league (78 participants, 32.2%). Detailed demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (*n* = 242).

Variable		Sample (*n* = 242)		
Gender				
Male		181 (74.8%)		
Female		61 (25.2%)		
Age (*M* = 32.4, SD = 9.03)				
20 – 29 years		99 (40.9%)		
30 – 39 years		109 (45%)		
40 years and older		34 (14%)		
Race				
Native American		21 (8.7%)		
Asian		79 (32.6%)		
African American		18 (7.4%)		
Hispanic		25 (10.3%)		
Caucasian		98 (40.5%)		
Other		1 (0.4%)		
Education				
High School Diploma		21 (8.7%)		
Associate Degree		19 (7.9%)		
University In Progress		8 (3.3%)		
Bachelor's Degree		153 (63.2%)		
Master's Degree		39 (16.1%)		
Doctorate Degree		2 (0.8%)		
Favorite League		**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**
NBA (n = 87)	NFL	45 (51.7%)	22 (25.3%)	20 (23.0%)
	NHL	22 (25.3%)	31 (35.6%)	34 (39.1%)
	MLB	20 (23.0%)	34 (39.1%)	33 (37.9%)
NFL (n = 76)	NBA	45 (59.2%)	12 (15.8%)	19 (25.0%)
	NHL	14 (18.4%)	34 (44.7)	28 (36.8%)
	MLB	17 (22.4%)	30 (39.5%)	29 (38.2%)
NHL (n = 43)	NBA	23 (53.5%)	5 (11.6%)	15 (34.9%)
	NFL	10 (23.3%)	16 (37.2%)	17 (39.5%)
	MLB	10 (23.3%)	22 (51.2%)	11(25.6%)
MLB (n = 36)	NBA	19 (52.8%)	5 (13.9%)	12 (33.3%)
	NFL	9 (25.0%)	19 (52.8%)	8 (22.2%)
	NHL	8 (22.2%)	12 (33.3%)	16 (44.4%)

Table 1. Continued

Least Favorite League		3rd	2nd	1st
NBA (n = 46)	NFL	11 (23.9%)	16 (34.8%)	19 (41.3%)
	NHL	19 (41.3%)	12 (26.1%)	15 (32.6%)
	MLB	16 (34.8%)	18 (39.1%)	12 (26.1%)
NFL (n = 45)	NBA	7 (15.6%)	18 (40.0%)	20 (44.4%)
	NHL	13 (28.9%)	15 (33.3%)	17 (37.8%)
	MLB	25 (55.6%)	12 (26.7%)	8 (17.8%)
NHL (n = 78)	NBA	7 (9.0%)	37 (47.4%)	34 (43.6%)
	NFL	26 (33.3%)	24 (30.8%)	28 (35.9%)
	MLB	45 (57.7%)	17 (21.8%)	16 (20.5%)
MLB (n = 73)	NBA	8 (11.0%)	32 (43.8%)	33 (45.2%)
	NFL	20 (27.4%)	24 (32.9%)	29 (39.7%)
	NHL	45 (61.6%)	17 (23.3%)	11 (15.1%)

Descriptive, Reliability, and Correlation Analysis

In order to assess the psychometric properties, I conducted reliability and correlation analyses. Furthermore, the data was divided into two parts based on participants' answers of their favorite and least favorite league. Table 2 and Table 3 present the detailed results of the data.

Almost all variables, with the exception of the tolerance variables, showed sufficient reliability. Nunnally (1994) supported that a level of reliability of .70 or higher is sufficient for a hypothesized measure of the construct. However, in terms of tolerance, the variables indicated insufficient reliability. Previous studies by Brewer and Pierce (2005) and Meyer (2014) also reported a low reliability on tolerance variables. While Meyer (2014) summated two variables for multiculturalism in their research, because of the insufficient reliability, the current thesis used a single item for the multiculturalism tolerance measure. The single measure was associated with CSR and deemed usable to scale perceptions toward different cultures.

Skewness and kurtosis were computed in order to determine whether the data were regularly distributed. An ideal value for skewness is within 2 or -2. When the result of skewness is less than 2 or greater than -2, the variable is considered to be symmetrical (Pallant, 2020). In the event that the result of kurtosis is greater than zero, the variable's distribution is different than a normal distribution with respect to producing outliers; if the result of kurtosis is less than zero, the distribution is less outlier prone than a normal distribution (Westfall & Henning, 2013). The range of skewness and kurtosis on all variables are represented in Table 2 and Table 3. As all those numbers for skewness and kurtosis were near 0, the data were considered to be regularly distributed with non-problematic negative skewness on all variables. The results of kurtosis indicated a relatively flat distribution; although the data lack a large cluster in the center, values were positioned at the extreme values.

In terms of correlation analysis, a Pearson correlation was performed to determine the relationship between identity complexity, tolerance, CSR, brand authenticity, and brand love. This correlation process can confirm that the relationship among variables has a constant direction (Conover & Iman, 1981; Pallant, 2020). Such a relationship is also important in order to test that the variables share a linear association with one another. Furthermore, as all variables in both groups have significant relationships, the aforementioned validity tests and the multidimension scales are conceptually associated (Kopcha et al., 2014; Sony & Naik, 2012). Multicollinearity was not an issue as all correlations were below .85 (Berry et al., 1985; Bollen & Lennox, 1991). Based on these features of the data, the results of the mediation analysis are explained in the following section.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation of favorite leagues.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. FOVER	-				
2. TOLER 4	.35**	-			
3. FCSR	.26**	.44**	-		
4. FBA	.21**	.46**	.73**	-	
5. FBL	.15*	.40**	.70**	.84**	-
M	5.75	5.00	5.18	5.34	5.51
SD	1.96	1.35	1.10	.91	.91
Skewness	-.24	-.68	-.83	-.51	-.97
Kurtosis	.07	.21	.72	.26	1.45
Cronbach's α	.70	.	.89	.92	.89

Note. FOVER = Favorite League Overlap, TOLER = Tolerance, FCSR = Favorite CSR, FBA = Favorite Brand Authenticity, FBL = Favorite Brand Love; in the case of tolerance, a single variable associated with multiculturalism was used since the variable does not have sufficient reliability; **p < .01; * p <.05.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation of least favorite leagues.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. LFOVER	-				
2. TOLER 4	.27**	-			
3. LFCSR	.37**	.43**	-		
4. LFBA	.33**	.45**	.76**	-	
5. LFBL	.37**	.40**	.84**	.75**	-
M	5.48	5.00	4.87	5.12	5.01
SD	1.98	1.35	1.27	.89	1.15
Skewness	-.25	-.68	-.99	-.39	-.99
Kurtosis	-.17	.21	.69	.09	1.08
Cronbach's α	.76	.	.92	.93	.92

Note. LFOVER = Least Favorite League Overlap, TOLER = Tolerance, LFCSR = Least Favorite CSR, LFBA = Least Favorite Brand Authenticity, LFBL = Least Favorite Brand Love; in the case of tolerance, a single variable associated with multiculturalism was used since the variable does not have sufficient reliability; **$p < .01$.

Mediation Analysis

To test whether tolerance for multiculturalism, CSR, and brand authenticity sequentially mediate the influence of social identity complexity on brand love, a serial mediation with bootstrap methods was performed using Mplus 8 (Hayes, 2017; Muthén & Muthén, 2018; Stride et al., 2015). Additionally, the estimated R-square values for the endogenous latent variables were analyzed to determine how much these covariates influence the four factors in each model. As the pattern of correlations (see Table 2 and Table 3) between the predictor and the three mediators have significant relationships toward brand love, these variables are associated with each other. All paths for the full PROCESS model and the corresponding beta coefficients, indirect effects, and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals are displayed in Table 4 and Table 5.

In terms of favorite league (see Table 4), the model explained the variance in the identity complexity to brand love (R-square = .720), followed by to brand authenticity (R-square = .564), to CSR (R-square = .211), and to tolerance (R-square = .121). In addition, although the total effect and the total indirect effect of fans' favorite league identity complexity on favorite league's brand love was significant ($\beta = .152$, SE = .068, $p = .025$, $\beta = .197$, SE = .063, $p = .002$), the direct effect of fans' favorite league identity complexity on their favorite league's brand love was not significant ($\beta = -.046$, SE = .032, $p = .147$). Therefore, H1 was rejected. As indicated by

the bootstrap confidence interval in Table 4, the indirect effect of fans' favorite league complexity on brand love through both tolerance and brand authenticity was not significant, but CSR was significant. Hence, H2 and H4 were rejected, but H3 was supported. In addition, the indirect effects of favorite league complexity on brand love through tolerance and CSR, as well as tolerance and brand authenticity were significant. Therefore, H5 and H6 were supported. Furthermore, the indirect effect of favorite league complexity on brand love through CSR and brand authenticity was significant. Therefore, H7 was supported. Importantly, the indirect effect of complexity on brand love through all mediators (tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity) was also found to be significant. Therefore, H8 was supported. These results suggest that an increase in overlapping within leagues (i.e., low identity complexity) leads to greater tolerance, which in turn leads to higher CSR, higher brand authenticity resulting in higher levels of brand love. Additionally, comparison between the strength of the specific indirect effect using bootstrapped CIs reported that the indirect effect of identity complexity on brand love through tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity was significantly lager (.066) than other indirect paths.

In the case of least favorite league (see Table 5), the model described the variance in the identity complexity to brand love (R-square = .729) to brand authenticity (R-square = .602), to CSR (R-square = .255), and to tolerance (R-square = .071). Furthermore, the total effect and the total indirect effect of fans' least favorite league identity complexity on their brand love has a significant effect (β =.370, SE = .064, p = .000, β =.314, SE = .055, p = .000). However, the direct effect of complexity on brand love was not significant (β =.056, SE = .034, p = .106). Therefore, H1 was rejected. On the other hand, in terms of indirect effects, significant results were shown in all paths except for two routes (see Table 5). The results showed that the indirect effect of identity complexity on brand love through CSR was significant, as was the indirect

effect of the complexity on brand love through two mediators (tolerance and CSR, tolerance and brand authenticity, and CSR and brand authenticity) and three mediators (tolerance, CSR, and brand authenticity). Although H2 and H4 were rejected, H3, H5, H6, H7, and H8 were supported. Furthermore, the indirect effect contrasts demonstrated that the effect of complexity on brand love through tolerance and CSR (.059) was larger than through tolerance and brand authenticity (.009), CSR and brand authenticity (.047), and all mediators combined sequentially (.016)

Table 4. Mediation analysis of favorite league

Favorite League				
Path	95% CI			
	Coeff.	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect				
(1) FOVER → TOLER 4	.348*	.067	.234	.452
(2) FOVER → FCSR	.124	.065	.017	.228
(3) FOVER → FBA	-.028	.043	-.099	.041
(4) FOVER → FBL	-.046	.032	-.103	.003
(5) TOLER 4 → FCSR	.401*	.072	.276	.512
(6) TOLER 4 → FBA	.180*	.061	.082	.283
(7) TOLER 4 → FBL	.000	.050	-.082	.083
(8) FCSR → FBA	.662*	.070	.555	.750
(9) FCSR → FBL	.182*	.071	.070	.309
(10) FBA → FBL	.715*	.070	.587	.822
Indirect Effects from FOVER to FBL				
Total Effect	.152*	.068	.037	.264
Total Indirect Effect	.197*	.063	.092	.298
(1) FOVER → TOLER 4 → FBL	.000	.018	-.029	.030
(2) FOVER → FCSR → FBL	.023*	.015	.005	.055
(3) FOVER → FBA → FBL	-.020	.031	-.073	.029
(4) FOVER → TOLER 4 → FCSR → FBL	.025*	.013	.010	.055
(5) FOVER → TOLER 4 → FBA → FBL	.045*	.019	.020	.084
(6) FOVER → FCSR → FBA → FBL	.059*	.031	.011	.113
(7) FOVER → TOLER 4 → FCSR → FBA → FBL	.066*	.019	.041	.107

Note. FOVER = Favorite League Overlap, TOLER = Tolerance, FCSR = Favorite CSR, FBA =

Favorite Brand Authenticity, FBL = Favorite Brand Love; in the case of tolerance, a single

variable associated with multiculturalism was used since the variable does not have sufficient

reliability; * Significant effect.

Table 5. Mediation analysis of least favorite league

Least Favorite League				
Path	95% CI			
	Coeff.	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Effect				
(1) LFOVER → TOLER 4	.266*	.064	.160	.370
(2) LFOVER → LFCSR	.275*	.063	.172	.380
(3) LFOVER → LFBA	.041	.051	-.042	.128
(4) LFOVER → LFBL	.056	.034	.001	.114
(5) TOLER 4 → LFCSR	.356*	.077	.221	.477
(6) TOLER 4 → LFBA	.141*	.055	.050	.233
(7) TOLER 4 → LFBL	.001	.045	-.70	.080
(8) LFCSR → LFBA	.688*	.039	.618	.748
(9) LFCSR → LFBL	.626*	.069	.512	.733
(10) LFBA → LFBL	.247*	.076	.125	.369
Indirect Effects from LFOVER to LFBL				
Total Effect	.370*	.064	.261	.471
Total Indirect Effect	.314*	.055	.218	.401
(1) LFOVER → TOLER 4 → LFBL	.000	.013	-.019	.022
(2) LFOVER → LFCSR → LFBL	.172*	.044	.107	.252
(3) LFOVER → LFBA → LFBL	.010	.013	-.009	.036
(4) LFOVER → TOLER 4 → LFCSR → LFBL	.059*	.019	.034	.098
(5) LFOVER → TOLER 4 → LFBA → LFBL	.009*	.006	.003	.023
(6) LFOVER → LFCSR → LFBA → LFBL	.047*	.018	.023	.082

Table 5. Continued

(7) LFOVER → TOLER 4 → LFCSR → LFBA → LFBL	.016*	.007	.008	.032

Note. LFOVER = Least Favorite League Overlap, TOLER = Tolerance, LFCSR = Least Favorite CSR, LFBA = Least Favorite Brand Authenticity, LFBL = Least Favorite Brand Love; in the case of tolerance, a single variable associated with multiculturalism was used since the variable does not have sufficient reliability; * Significant effect.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter synthesizes the relationships between all the variables that were employed in this thesis, and its impact and contribution to sport management literature and related theories under the following subheadings: (a) discussion and interpretation of results, (b) theoretical implications, (c) practical implications, (d) limitations and future research, and (e) conclusions.

Discussion and Interpretation of Results

Based on the results reported in Chapter IV, this research has garnered several remarkable outcomes. First, there are differences on how sports fans perceive the level of convergence of fans across leagues. Brewer and Pierce (2005) reported that sports fans in general have less tolerance, and this leads to accepting other fans who support other leagues as "people like me." However, my results in this study captured a wider range of fans' tolerance levels. Certainly, there were differences in their favorite and least favorite leagues, and how they see other fans converging to a general group. Since all leagues have their unique features such as schedules and rules, not all sports fans are alike (see Table 1). In fact, their attitude about their most and least favorite leagues may extend to them discriminating against other leagues and their fans. Cobbs et al. (2017) revealed that fans who closely identified with one league are more likely to react to their rival league and fans negatively. Nevertheless, this current thesis illuminates how a sense of respect by acknowledging social identity complexity (measured by identity overlap) can lead to brand love via tolerance, perceptions of CSR, and brand authenticity (see Table 5).

Second, the influence between variables is different with regard to fans' preference for the leagues. Table 4 and Table 5 indicate the results of direct and indirect analysis between all

variables. In terms of the relationship between CSR and brand love, the difference in the effect is remarkably noticeable depending on fans' ranking of the four major sports leagues. The direct effect of least favorite league (β = .626, p = .000) is greater than favorite league (β = .182, p = .010). With this result from the least favorite league, it is demonstrated that the CSR may have a stronger effect on brand love for sports fans who are less identified with the league. This result coincides with Choi and Winterich's (2013) research that the influence on brand's moral behavior for out-group has a greater effect on brand attitude than in-group.

Furthermore, when it comes to the relationship between brand authenticity and brand love, there is a huge gap regarding fans' preferences. The fans' relationship with their favorite league has a more significant effect (β = .715, p = .000) than with their least favorite league (β = .274, p = .001). Based on this result, I deduce that when it comes to their favorite league, fans are quick to feel the league's brand is authentic because they already know considerable information about the league. However, in terms of their least favorite league, since fans do not have sufficient knowledge of those leagues, it is difficult for them to feel that the league is authentic. They are more critical of their least favorite league due to a lack of information. To support this result, Chang et al. (1994) demonstrated that the more information consumers possess about the product, the more active they are in their choices. With such considerations, this thesis proposes a way of producing a dramatic change on the relationship between CSR and brand love, and brand authenticity and brand love.

Last, tolerance is found to effect brand love, not directly but through the multiple mediators. Identifying these roles of serial mediators provides meaningful implications for the brand management of both most liked and least liked leagues. In particular, the effect size of these mediations may be stronger for non-favorite leagues. It may not be as easy to get people

with well-developed sports identities to get involved with developing brand love as it is with those who are less identified. Contrary to Brewer and Pierce's (2005) viewpoint that sports fans have a general in-group mentality, within sports fans, their social identity complexity and tolerance influences their perception towards leagues differently. Managing customer relationships with sports fans can be complicated because of these variances. Further, for effective brand strategies, causal chains of CSR and brand authenticity need to be considered in addition to these personal characteristics. Therefore, the research model examined in this thesis provides a better way to understand fans' psychological processes in developing brand love and to plan and test branding strategies.

Theoretical Implications

This current study makes several important theoretical contributions to expanding the literature on social identity complexity theory and all the variables considered in this study. First, this thesis contributes to establishing the meaning of sports fans' identity complexity. Brewer and Pierce (2005) reported that as sports fans with a high overlap (i.e., low identity complexity) are likely to be less tolerant and accepting of out-group members without distinct characteristics. However, the results of this thesis are not consistent with their research, but instead support Meyer's (2014) research that sports fans are able to distinguish between different features of professional sports leagues. Therefore, sports fans who have a high overlap (i.e., low identity complexity) between professional sports leagues are likely to have a high tolerance and be accepting of other leagues' fans by recognizing their features.

Second, this thesis overcomes the limitation of previous studies that did not compare various leagues' identities. Prior research (e.g., Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011; Lee, Cho, et al., 2020; Meyer, 2014) conducted an analysis of a particular

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sports identity taking into consideration other factors such as non-sports fans, race, and place identification. However, this thesis shows that sports leagues' identity complexity can positively affect both the organization of the leagues and fan behavior. Thus, sports fans are able to distinguish between all four leagues' characteristics, and do not acknowledge sports as one entity.

Third, this thesis provides an evaluation of how the CSR of sports leagues impacts fans' thoughts and emotions. Many previous studies (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Baena, 2018; Sheth & Babiak, 2009; Walker & Kent, 2009) did not adequately consider either fans' minds or measure sports environments; therefore, these studies had limitations when it comes to confirming the effect of professional sports leagues' CSR on fans' behavior. In this sense, this thesis contributes to expanding our understanding of the effect of organizations' CSR on not only fan behavior but also the authenticity of organizations' behavior.

Fourth, this thesis is the first to attempt to measure the authenticity of professional sports leagues' brands. Although research on professional sports leagues has been conducted in various ways (e.g., Amis et al., 1999; Atkinson et al., 1988; Kunkel et al., 2013; Russell & Leung, 1994), studies that compare the high value associated with professional sports and consumer's beliefs on the authenticity of brands have not been conducted. Thus, this thesis analyzes how the authenticity of leagues' brand authenticity affects customers and contributes to the formation of positive relationships between fans and leagues.

Practical Implications

This thesis can provide information about developing both sports fans' spectating cultures and the market size of professional sports leagues to marketing practitioners in the sports industry. These strategies can be divided into two main aspects: favorite league and least favorite

league. In terms of the former, the favorite league increases its revenue through the marketing programs that other leagues have participated in during their games. The current thesis also demonstrated that when fans have multiple identities related to professional sports leagues, their favorite league's identity is not negatively affected by other league identities. Furthermore, when the brand is more associated with multicultural aspects, its customers think of the brand more positively (Seo et al., 2015). For example, even though the NBA accepted advertisements that promote other leagues' schedules such as the NFL, the NHL, or the MLB during their game, fans of the NBA do not lessen their NBA identity (Heere & James, 2007; NBA, 2020b). By utilizing this method, leagues may increase revenue and build a positive relationship with other leagues.

On the other hand, in the case of the least favorite league, the organization should work to eliminate negative images its potential and current customers have. As purchase intention is directly associated with brand image (Koronios et al., 2016; Wang & Yang, 2010), the model of this thesis can help other leagues to adopt an effective method to change fans' attitudes. Furthermore, the results from this thesis revealed that fans' feelings about their least favorite leagues are more loving if they have multiple identities. Therefore, from a long-term perspective, the league should consider engaging in joint activities with other leagues in order to deepen their relationship with fans.

Marketing practitioners from both favorite and least favorite leagues should keep in mind that the relationship between fans and leagues depends on how fans evaluate CSR and leagues' brand authenticity. If a fan experiences the leagues' authentic behavior through their CSR programs, the fan's brand love for their favorite or least favorite leagues will increase whether or not fans are tolerant about accepting other leagues' cultures.

Additionally, if the leagues conduct a successful CSR initiative, they should release the details of their activities to their fans on a large scale using media. Through such announcements, fans may more highly evaluate not only the leagues' CSR but also their brand authenticity. While these factors that can affect a relationship with fans, sports leagues should remember the important role of CSR and their brand authenticity when developing marketing strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this thesis contributes to developing theoretical and practical implications in the field of sport management, there are some limitations that need to be resolved in future research. First, this thesis focused on only professional sports leagues in the US. To test the validity of this model, future researchers should investigate other countries that operate multiple professional leagues. Additionally, as each country has different cultural passions associated with sports, future researchers should consider the unique characteristics of the country in their research.

Second, this thesis used only one scale related to tolerance for multiculturalism due to issues with the reliability of the scales. Since similar limitation has also existed in previous studies (e.g., Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Meyer, 2014), future researchers should employ other tolerance scales connected with social identity complexity.

Third, this thesis did not provide sufficient practical and theoretical recommendations for how the leagues can induce their fans to establish multiple identities in conjunction with other leagues. The purpose of this thesis is to understand knowledge of identity complexity in the sports industry; however, the current results can be applied specifically only when fans have multiple identities. Therefore, future researchers should develop a strategy for how people develop multiple identities in professional sports leagues.

Conclusion

The current thesis investigates how sports fans' identity complexity affects their brand love towards professional sports leagues through the level of fans' tolerance, and the evaluation of league's CSR and brand authenticity. Based on the results, this thesis not only contributes to understanding fans' multiple identities as associated with social identity complexity theory but also presents insights for marketing practitioners about the effects of identity complexity in the sports industry. Future research should be conducted that examines how social identity complexity contributes to expanding the literature on sport management and to establishing fans' multiple identities.

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QUESTIONNAIRES OF THIS THESIS

A-1. Questionnaires of this thesis (Note. OOO means participants' favorite and least favorite professional sports leagues in the US based on the rank each league).

Rank each league
NBA
NFL
NHL
MLB

Author(s)	Factors	Items
Brewer and Pierce (2005)	Social Identity Complexity	NBA / NFL
		NBA / NHL
		NBA / MLB
		NFL / NBA
		NFL / NHL
		NFL / MLB
		NHL / NBA
		NHL / NFL
		NHL / MLB
		MLB / NBA
		MLB / NFL
		MLB / NHL
National Opinion Research Center (1998)	Tolerance	1. Increasing the number of racial and ethnic minorities in the workplace benefits our country. 2. Hiring and college admissions should not give any preference to racial and ethnic minorities. 3. It is better for the country if racial and ethnic groups adapt and blend into the large society. 4. It is better for the country if racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions.
Walker and Heere (2011)	CSR	1. I am aware of the social programs of my favorite OOO.

A-1. Continued

Author(s)	Factors	Items
		2. I know of the good things my favorite OOO does for the community.
		3. I believe my OOO to be a socially responsible organization.
		4. I feel good about my favorite OOO partly because of all the things they do to benefit the community.
		5. Part of the reason I like my favorite OOO is because of what they do for the community.
		6. One of the reasons I speak positively about my favorite OOO is because of what they do for the community.
		7. I buy merchandise from my favorite OOO partly because I believe they are a socially responsible organization.
Morhart et al. (2015)	Brand Authenticity	1. OOO is a brand with a history.
		2. OOO is a timeless brand.
		3. OOO is a brand that survives times.
		4. OOO is a brand that survives trends.
		5. OOO is a brand that will not betray you.
		6. OOO is a brand that accomplishes its value promise.
		7. OOO is a honest brand.
		8. OOO is a brand that gives back to its consumers.
		9. OOO is a brand with moral principles.
		10. OOO is a brand true to a set of moral values.

A-1. Continued

Author(s)	Factors	Items
		11. OOO is a brand that cares about its consumers.
		12. OOO is a brand that adds meaning to people's lives.
		13. OOO is a brand that reflects important values people care about.
		14. OOO is a brand that connects people with their real selves.
		15. OOO is a brand that connects people with what is really important.
Manthiou et al. (2014)	Brand Love	1. OOO is a wonderful brand.
		2. OOO makes me feel good.
		3. OOO is totally awesome.
		4. I have positive feelings about OOO.
		5. OOO makes me very happy.
		6. I love OOO!
		7. OOO is a pure delight.
Demographic variables		
Gender		
Age		
Ethnicity		
Level of education		