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ILLUMINATING VIEWER-BASED BRAND EQUITY IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

Television provides a massive opportunity to sport teams for brand building by extending their reach to approximately 4 billion global viewers, 800 million Asian and 148 million Indian television homes. Despite of this, previous frameworks focused only on full-season ticket holders or spectators. The present study presents a conceptual framework for measuring brand-equity of sport teams in context of television viewers, coined as *Viewer-Based Brand Equity Model*, and provides a more integrative conceptualization of the concept. It is suggested that brand awareness (2 constructs) and brand associations (11 constructs) acts as an antecedents to VBBE of a sports team. In addition, the consequences of high/low VBBE of sport teams were also discussed in the framework. It is argued that VBBE framework will help sport managers for effectively managing their teams creating positive associations for television fans leading to increased fan loyalty, team differentiation, and an increased brand-equity.

KEYWORDS Brand Equity, Fan Loyalty, Sport Fans, Sport Clubs, Team Branding, Viewers, Viewer-Based Brand Equity

INTRODUCTION

Sports marketing ventures are occurring globally on large scale, involving sports as well as non-sports organizations, to leverage the benefits of sports in order to achieve economic, financial, and branding objectives (Ratten and Ratten, 2011) of the sport teams as well as of the organizations. Sports industry is now viewed as an attractive sector for the investors as it is now valued at an estimated $141 billion (Klayman, 2009). Sports equivalent to religion for some, is not only about game, but also contributes significantly to the economy and social sphere of almost all the countries. Goldman (2008) classified the economic significance of sports industry at three levels: individual, organizational and national level arguing that effective and efficient management of spots could help decision makers to create wealth and help for economy whereas King (2004) highlighted the importance of sports' contribution in the entertainment and service industries of any nation. The psychological connection existing between people and sports has made sporting events highly popular. Large amount of time, money and resources is spent for attending the sporting events like Olympics, FIFA, ICC, Wimbledon, Formula 1, NBA, and Indian Premier League, as these events touch the emotions of fans and have become an important part of their life. Today sports and respective teams compete not only with each other but they also compete with other industries and other leisure offerings making it mandatory for sport managers to develop and manage fruitful relations with their fans and other stake holders (Bauer, Sauer, and Schmitt, 2005).

Commercialization and professionalization of team sports has caused an increased competition. This has led to every sport manager taking interest in understanding the importance of 'team branding' for winning long-term fan loyalty since higher loyalty of fans ensure their involvement in the teams activities leading to the economic success of teams. In a survey done by Gallup (www.gallup.com) in mid 2009, it was observed that more than 56% of the respondents were watching sports because they were the fans of a particular team. It is therefore important for sport managers to build their teams as strong and global brands and at the same time identify the various critical factors having an impact on branding of teams. Brand equity has been identified as one important factor helping teams to develop competitive advantage and team differentiation from other competing teams. The positive relationship between brand-equity, purchase intentions and loyalty of the fans was empirically determined by Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005) treating them as antecedents to the economic success of the teams. Brand managers were advised by Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) to incorporate the concept of brand equity in their teams in order to enhance teams' image and hence their revenues. Gladden, Irwin, and Sutton (2001) put more focus on strengthening the team as a brand and advised sport managers to give greater importance to branding considering it as a strategic activity for achieving long-term profits rather than the focusing on winning that helps only in achieving the short-term goals. Importantly, managers should frequently evaluate the brand-equity of their teams as measurement is as important as building the brand-equity of their teams.

Till date the research in the area of brand equity in sports (Gladden, Milne, and Sutton, 1998; Gladden and Funk, 2002; Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, and Exler, 2008; Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007; Ross, Russell, and Bang, 2008) focuses on full-season ticket holders or the spectators but does not include those viewers who watch sports on television or on pay-per-view channels. Such viewers are in large numbers in Asian and European countries and are responsible for majority of the sports related consumption. Despite of these facts, previous researches focusing on a single segment i.e spectators lacked to measure the brand-equity of sport teams from viewers perspective. A holistic view should be taken while

measuring the brand-equity of sports teams and the perceptions of television viewers should be considered. A framework was, thus, developed to measure the brand-equity of sport teams from viewers perspectives by reviewing the concept of brand-equity in team sports by bringing relevant literature as well as conceptual and empirical studies made within the area of interest. A new term is coined, called as Viewer-Based brand equity (VBBE), representing the brand equity of sports team from viewers perspective. While coining the term we believed that we cannot isolate Viewers from team sports research and their perceptions should be taken into consideration for building the teams as global brands. The paper is structured in two parts. In the first part, we build a theoretical background on relevant literature on brand-equity in team sports and in the second part we present a conceptual framework showing the antecedents and consequences of the Viewer-based brand equity of teams. A qualitative study supporting the appropriate associations of viewers towards the sports team is also shown prior to the conceptualization of the VBBE framework.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Customer-Based Brand Equity
The immense use of the concept of brand equity by advertising practitioners and academicians during 1980s' is supposed to be its birth-year with Aaker (1991) popularizing this concept via his best-selling book "Managing Brand-Equity". Close association of brand-equity with brand loyalty (Emari, Jafari, and Mogaddam, 2012) and brand extension (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) creates curiosity among researchers, academicians and corporate houses for studying brand-equity while researchers arguing brands as the most valuable assets of the companies (Blackett, 1991). Initially, brand-equity was measured via various financial techniques to arrive at a financial called as financial-based brand equity but with the passage of time researchers felt the need to include customers' perceptions while evaluating the brand-equity of a brand. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) are considered as the most prominent views for providing insights about customer-based brand equity. Defining customer-based brand equity in terms of four basic dimensions, Aaker (1991) called brand-equity as the set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand adding to or subtracting the value provided by a product or service to a firm and to firms' customers whereas Keller (1991) presents his framework from individuals' perspective and defined it as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" by categorizing brand knowledge into brand awareness (brand recall and brand recognition) and brand image. He argued that awareness of customers regarding a brand and creation of some strong, unique, and favorable brand associations in memory generates customer-based brand equity.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) argued that brand-equity prevails when there exists a difference in consumer choice between the focal branded product and an unbranded product having the same level of product features and were of the view that brand differentiation created by marketing activities of the branded product creates brand-equity. Importantly, positive customer-based brand equity of a brand can help a brand to attract and retain customers (Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, and Neslin, 2012) creating greater revenues (Ailawadi, Lehmann, and Neslin, 2003), lower cost (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), profit margins (Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, and Neslin, 2012; Ailawadi, Neslin, and Lehmann 2003), successful brand extensions (Pitta and Katsanis, 1995), effective management of future cash flows (McAlister, Srinivasan, and Kim, 2007), customers' willingness for repeat purchase (Keller, 2003), and effective marketing communications (Tirole, 1990). Simon and Sullivan (1993) argued brand-equity as the appropriate metric for evaluating the long-term impact of the marketing decisions taken by the managers. To be more precise, the strategic role played by brand-equity helps marketers to make wise management decisions which ultimately help them in gaining a competitive advantage. Interestingly, the concept of brand-equity has been applied to other fields also and various researches on brand equity results in all different kinds of dimensions of brand equity such as healthcare sector (Blackston, 1992; Ferguson, Paulin, and Bergeron, 2010), services sector (Voss, Roth, and Chase, 2008; Berry, 2000), sportswear industry (Tong and Hawley, 2009; Kocak, Abimbola, and Ozer, 2007), financial sector (Taylor, Hunter, and Lindberg, 2007), FMCG sector (Netemeyer et al., 2004) and automobile industry (Tolba and Hassan, 2009; Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey, 2007).

Brand Equity in Team Sports
One such field where the leverage of brand equity has been garnered is the Sports Marketing field. As the concept of "Team Branding" has become more prominent in the sports marketing domain, discussed above, it has become important for every team to develop its own brand-equity. Every sport manager comes in front of several important questions during his tenure like: How to increase the revenues of the teams? How to attract masses of fans and at the same time retain them? How to increase the bargaining power of the team during settling for broadcasting rights? Can we strongly negotiate while selling Jersey rights to international organizations? How to increase the sales of tickets during official matches of the teams? Interestingly, these are important questions because they relate directly or indirectly to the profits and revenues of the teams and the answer to all the above mentioned questions lies in three strong words "Building Brand-Equity" of the teams. Sport managers have longed understood the importance of this concept and are indulged in a number of marketing strategies building teams brand-equity. Cobb-Walgren, Beal, and Donthu (1995) viewed that brands with high equity contributes to the long-term success of the organizations generating higher consumer preferences and purchase intentions. In addition, team-branding and developing a loyal fan-base helps the marketing managers to get connected to fans and at the same time helps the teams to fight competition and increase revenues. As a result, branding of teams has emerged as an important decision for the marketing executives as it also helps in gaining competitive advantage and teams' differentiation. At the same time, evaluation of the brand-equity measurement strategies is also important to know whether the resources invested in building brand-equity have reaped the benefits or not. For

this purpose, various researchers had developed their models aimed at measuring the brand-equity of the sport teams.

Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) were the first to develop a conceptual model for explaining various antecedents to brand equity in the Division I College Athletics. The antecedents were classified into team related, organization related and market related factors. The impact of these antecedents on the brand equity was measured using Aakers' (1991) brand equity theoretical model. These antecedents having an impact on the perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations and brand loyalty gives rise to some consequences which also had an impact on increasing or decreasing the brand equity of the college teams. They considered brand-equity creation as a cyclical phenomenon including both the antecedents and the consequences. Gladden and Funk (2002) developed Team Association Model (TAM) consisting of 16 dimensions. These dimensions were derived from Kellers' categorization of brand associations. The 16 dimensions were classified on the basis of attributes, benefits, and attitudes. The model was empirically tested on a national sample of sport consumers supported 16 distinct constructs representing appropriate brand associations in team sports. Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, and Exler (2008) and Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia (2007) also developed models for measuring the brand-equity and brand associations in the team sports setting but one of the serious limitations of their models was the focus on spectator sports industry from manufactured goods point of view. Ross (2006) conceptually shows the relationship between marketing strategies of a sports team and its impact on the brand equity of the team. He also highlights the outcomes of having a high brand-equity as high profits, merchandise sales, ticket revenues, and attendance. Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) developed their Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS), via free-thought listing technique and CFA, intended to measure the brand associations in professional team sports. They argued that the associations of spectators of professional team sports could be broadly classified into 11 dimensions: non-player personnel, team success, team history, stadium community, team play characteristics, brand mark, commitment, organizational attributes, concessions, social interaction, and rivalry giving a good understanding of various associations of the spectators. TBAS scale can be viewed as an improved and reliable framework as the associations were scrutinized by being in touch with the consumers and are not only researcher-generated associations.

Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) advised managers to put more emphasis on the extended marketing mix rather than traditional marketing mix while devising marketing strategies for spectator sports and argued that marketing strategies for spectator sports should not focus only on traditional marketing mix but it should also involve 7 P's of services marketing. They viewed brand equity as an important construct that is affected by the marketing activities of the team management and having an important effect on the outcomes of the activities. These marketing efforts effect the brand awareness and brand associations of the sports team(s), which in turn leads to

some favorable conditions, if employed strategically. So all the models developed earlier were not having any significance when they were used for measuring the customer-based brand equity of sports team(s). They also argued that there are very less studies that focus on the brand-equity concept in spectator sports perspective and even more less studies that focus on the brand-equity from the customers' perspective. They develop their model, called as spectator-based brand equity model, to measure the brand-equity of sports team(s) from customer perspectives. This model consists of 49-item and 13 constructs which they empirically apply for measuring the brand equity of a NBA team by collecting data from sporting consumers. Brand Association was measured as: non-player personnel, team success, history of the team, stadium/home of the team, team characteristics, logo of the team, concessions, socialization, team rivalry, commitment, and organizational attributes. On the other hand, Brand Awareness was measured as: team identification and team internalization. The model also provides a baseline results for future researches regarding the development and measuring the spectator-based brand equity. Interestingly, in spectator-sports, in addition to the audience attending the game or competition, many more watch the game on television or pay per view channels. The above mentioned frameworks, however, focuses more on full-season ticket holders and does not include those viewers who watch sports on TV or on pay-per-view channels.

Television viewers: The neglected part of the previous researches on teams brand equity

One cannot imagine a world without television today. It has become an integral part of our lives and considered as a global major mass media being a huge industry. According to iDate's report, global television market has grown at around 268.9 billion Euros' in 2009 with the Indian cable industry valued at an estimated $5.94 billion which after China and the USA is the third largest in the world (Pioneer Investcorp). Japan, India, and China were the leading Asian multichannel advertising markets in 2010 accounting for 80% of the total accumulated revenues (Asia Pacific Multichannel TV 2012 report by Casbaa). The most important progress is the reach which television provides now. Earlier very few homes used to have television sets some fifty years back but that is history now. Television ownership, globally, is growing very fast with global TV audience reaching nearly 4 billion by the end of 2011 with 800 millions in Asia (www.wikipedia.com). In India alone, the television industry has also seen a tremendous growth till 2010 as the total number of available channels rose to 515 including 150 paid-channels. Also, the number of television homes in the country is on rise and has grew to 148 million in 2011, an increase of 28 million in 4 Years (Press Trust of India, 2010). As per a report by Nielsen (2010), sports telecasts continue to drive large as well as lucrative audiences and households earning more than $100,000 were more likely to watch major sporting events like the Super Bowl, World Series or World Cup with an American adult spending 43 hours/week watching television which is growing every year by 2 minutes. Such viewers are in large numbers in Asian and European

countries and are involved in majority of the sports related consumption. As per International Cricket Council (ICC), more than 310 million viewers view different sports on ESPN Star Sports 24 hours a day in Asia. As per, aMap, rating agency, the final of the ICC World Cup 2011 between India and Sri Lanka, considering the viewership of a single channel only, was viewed by 67.6 million viewers in India. Important thing that attracts the attention is that this figure did not include the viewership of national channel Doordarshan which has a reach to approximately 90% of the countrys' 1.21 billion population. While the in-home television coverage of the FIFA womens' World Cup Germany 2011 reached 407.8 million peoples around the world, based on viewers watching a minimum of 3 consecutive minutes of coverage (FIFA Womens' World Cup Germany 2011 Television Audience Report).

This shows the love of people towards spending their time on watching sports on television. These numbers are huge and motivating for the team managers and sport marketers and give them a reason for taking into consideration the perceptions of television viewers while measuring the customer-based brand equity of the sports team for reflecting the true story. Despite of their importance, television viewers continues to be in the dark corner and has been ignored till date in previous frameworks about brand-equity research in team sports.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

CONCEPTUALIZING VIEWER-BASED BRAND EQUITY (VBBE) FRAMEWORK

Our framework, Viewer-based brand equity, has been based on Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) and Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) SBBE framework coupled with common sense and extensive literature review. We defined viewers as those individuals who watch sports on television or any online source and argued that they are different from spectators on the basis of the source they are using for watching sports. In order to check the validity of Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) SBBE model, it was decided to brainstorm the various associations among television viewers. A pilot study was, thus, conducted where respondents were asked about their associations with an Indian sporting event, Indian Premier League (IPL). The focus group (12 persons) contained academicians, sports persons, and students familiar with the sporting event and who watch it on television/other sources. All the associations that emerged during the focus group interview were recorded and it was observed that viewers associate with teams differently as compared to spectators' associations. It was then decided to remove those associations that were deemed inappropriate from viewers perspective like stadium community of the home team and concessions in stadiums during matches. Also, two additional associations (sponsors and celebrity players) were added in VBBE model that were frequently mentioned by the respondents.

The VBBE model, shown in Fig. 1, consists of brand awareness and brand associations as the main components of the model impacting perceptions and evaluations of any sporting team from viewers perspective. First, it was suggested that brand awareness dimension consists of two (2) distinct but related constructs. Secondly, brand association dimension consists of twelve (11) distinct constructs collectively representing the concept of brand associations. Finally, it was argued that viewers' perceptions regarding brand awareness and brand associations of team sports acts as an antecedent to the VBBE of the team sports. In addition, high/low VBBE of team sports will influence the outcomes as discussed later.

BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is a crucial factor that has the ability to influence consumers' (fans hereafter) decision for evaluating and choosing any service and create a foundation for inducing a psychological connection with a sports team. Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) defined brand awareness in sport context as "the familiarity of the sport consumer with a particular team". It reflects how strong a sport brand is in the minds of the fans and impacts the chances and the ease with which the brand elements (name, logo, symbol, slogan, color of uniform) comes to fans mind (Ross, 2006). Funk and James (2002) argued that awareness serves as a base for knowing the existence of the sports team and helps in converting a normal fan into an allegiant fan. For every sport manager, few questions are of great importance: 1) Are fans familiar with the existence of the sports team, 2) What is the level of psychological connection with the sport teams among fans. The answer to these above questions was given by Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) who argued that team identification and team internalization acts as antecedents to sport teams' awareness.

Team identification

Team identification answers the first question and measures whether or how well a fan is aware of the sports team. Sutton et al., (1997) defined team identification as "the personal commitment and emotional involvement customers have with a sport team". Also, it reflects the degree to which a fan is personally committed to a team and his personal feelings towards that team reflecting his identification with the sport team and the likelihood that he will retrieve the team when given a clue. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) argued that identification with a team can enhance an individuals' self-esteem owing to values and personal meaning that transfers to the fans when they associate with a particular team. Wann (1997) viewed team identification as an important driver for the development of a psychological connection between fans and sport teams where a fan can imagine him/her as an important constituent of the team and can develop additional associations when the team performs as per the expectations. Importantly, high team identification influences high media consumption (TV and newspapers), merchandise sales, and increases the likelihood of increasing fans motivations for getting associated with a particular team and helps managers in better management of sport teams (Gau, James, and Kim, 2009).

Team Internalization

On the other hand, the second sub-dimension, team internalization, answers the second question. Team internalization reflects an individuals' self-reasoning so as to fulfill his dispositional needs (Funk and James, 2004)

where the dispositional needs of the fan reflects their psychological needs, fans characteristics, and most importantly their personality traits. It reflects the degree to which a fan is psychologically committed with the team and explains how well he has incorporated the team into his personal and social life. It was argued that as soon as a fan develops a psychological bond via team internalization process he may consider that particular team as an important part of his life believing that the team forms a core constituent of his self-identity. This sort of self-identity relationship of the fans with a sport researches has highlighted that fans who have high internalization with a particular sport team can easily name their favorite team (s) and their characteristics. Team internalization has been considered as an important predictor of brand awareness in sports related researches as it influences the behavioral components of sport fans more importantly impacting fans attendance who watch sports either live in stadiums or at homes on their television sets or online (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Hill and Green, 2000).

BRAND ASSOCIATIONS

Aaker (1991) defined brand associations as "those thoughts that come to consumers' mind when a brand is encountered". He was of the opinion that associations reflect what consumers' thinks of a brand in their mind. Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert (1994) classified brand associations broadly as tangible, functional, intangible and experiential associations while Keller (1993) classified them into 3 categories as attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Brand associations are important in a way as they had been considered to influence consumer behavior, brand differentiation, forming positive attitude/feelings towards a brand and give consumers a strong reason to purchase that brand (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996). Various means of marketing communications from the sports team and personal experience of the consumers with the team help consumers in forming perceptions about the advertised team contributing significantly to form perceptions about the team which ultimately helps consumers in defining teams' image in their mind increasing its revenues.

Ross (2006) argued that brand associations can help sport teams in the same way they help brands and contributes significantly in developing the SBBE of sport teams. Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) developed Team Brand Attitude Scale (TBAS), using a four-stage research design, to measure the brand associations in professional team sports and argue that research lags in terms of identification and development of brand associations in sports context which is in the developmental stage. Six (6) years had been passed since the development of TBAS scale where the focus of the researchers was on spectators who watch live matches in stadiums but does not include the associations of television viewers. Interestingly, viewers also associate with sport teams like Spectators do where brand associations reflects the attributes, benefits and attitudes associated with their minds but we argue that in addition to brand associations in previous brand-equity models involving spectators there are some additional associations from viewers perspectives which are important, un-identified till date in previous brand-equity models and needs to be focused on. An understanding of the brand associations from viewers perspective will help the sport managers in efficiently controlling their marketing activities creating teams' image and formation of positive brand associations.

Brand Mark

Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) defined brand mark as "thoughts regarding the identifying mark such as the logo, symbol, and the colors of a team". They argued that there are 3 constituents of brand mark named the logo, symbol and the color of the team. Brand mark holds an important place in the minds of the fans because it helps them to identify their favorite team among the crowd involving many other teams and helps in bringing the team in the consideration set of fans. Gladden and Funk (2002) argued brand mark as an important factor in teams' success and categorized it as a constituent of the Attributes part of his TAM model and also its importance was highlighted by Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008). Naik and Gupta (2012) on the basis of their empirical work observed that brand mark does not matter much for the television viewers but still it plays an important role as it reflects fans first encounter with a team and helps in converting them into loyal fans. We argued that people don't remember teams by their names only but by their brand mark also. For example, in Indian Premier League (IPL) there are 9 teams playing in the tournament. Every team has its teams' logo, symbol, uniforms color and teams anthem. Importance of brand mark can be gauged by the fact that the fans in IPL can recognize their favorite teams by brand mark elements alone even if the name of the teams are not mentioned.

Social Interaction

Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) defined Social Interaction as "the idea of associating with others, friends and other fans of a particular professional team". Wakefield (1995) argued that an individuals decision of following a particular team does not depend on his own but is also impacted by the approval of his family and friends. Thus, a team can experience high loyalty from fans if their friends and families support the same team. Gladden and Funk (2002) call it as Peer group acceptance (PGA) and believes that a fan can positively and strongly associate with a team if his peer group or family supports his decision of following the same team. Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, and Exler (2008) called social interaction as 'socialization and companionship' where a fan tends to focus on developing and maintaining relations with other fans supporting the same team. It is argued that viewers don't watch matches in isolation but sometimes in the company of his family, friends and/or peer groups. They, thus, have a strong tendency to shape the associations of the individual fan thereby impacting the viewer-based brand equity of the team.

Team Rivalry

Team rivalry has been defined by Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) as "the competition among teams known to be historically significant competitors". Rivalries are common in sporting competitions and sometimes produce some of the most memorable moments of sporting events as well as amazing commentary for television viewers. Amegashie and Kutosoati (2005) while studying individual rivalries in boxing argue that rivalries also exist permanently in other format of team sports inducing better

performance from the players (Triplett, 1898, Tauer and Harackiewicz, 2004) and create a good demand of that sport. The importance of rivalry in team sport can be gauged from the semi-final match of ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 played between India and Pakistan. Also named as War and halting the life of more than 2 billion people in the two country results in the death of the death of 3 peoples in Pakistan, including one celebrity actor, as Pakistan lost the match. Importantly, this match accumulated a global viewership of approximately 150 million (www.wikipedia.com). One field of research argued that intergroup rivalries has the ability to make peoples (we arguing fans) think about their group (we arguing favorite teams) more positively (Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis, 2002) and thus helps in strengthening the bonding between the two. The strength of this psychological bond between the fans and teams, thus, enhances the viewer-based brand equity of the teams.

Team Success

Ross, James, and Vargas (2006) defined team success as "the thoughts such as a team's success in competition, the perceived quality of the players, and the perceived quality of the team itself". We argue that success of a team and quality players are two different constructs and both directly impacts the Viewer-based brand equity. Team success was, thus, defined as "the perceived quality of the team itself in the minds of the fans impacted by teams previous and current performances". Gladden and Funk (2002) also viewed team success and star players as different constructs directly impacting fans associations and teams' brand-equity. Success of teams in tournaments doesn't have any alternative and significantly impact the sale of tickets and merchandise, donations, develop an excellent atmosphere during matches, attracts national/international media and corporate sponsors (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, and Exler, 2008), thus, contributing to the brand-equity (we arguing Viewer-based brand equity) of the team whereas Cialdini et al. (1976) argued on the basis of their Basking-in-reflected-glory theory that people remembers winners in their memory in the long run.

Team History

Historical thoughts regarding the team, the history of success, and the history of the team's personnel (Ross, James, Vargas, 2006) reflects team history. Gladden and Funk (2002) called it as 'traditions associated with a team that can leverage brand association formation where the style of play of the team coupled with traditions represents the description of team history (Kolbe and James, 2000). Team history is not created in just one day but is traditionally maintained over a long time and impacts fan loyalty, teams image, team differentiation, increasing teams perceived value and enhancing brand-equity (we arguing viewer-based brand equity) of the team (Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007). We believe that a team with strong history coupled with traditions and culture of its original place will impact fans perceptions. In addition, sport managers can use these characteristics in marketing the teams.

Organizational Commitment

The concept of commitment has been subjected to research in fields like psychology, sociology, and consumer behavior (Crosby and Taylor, 1983). Commitment may be considered as a psychological attachment to an object influencing consumer behavior to reject alternatives (Buchanan, 1985). Beatty and Kahle (1988) defined commitment as "the emotional or psychological attachment to a brand". Commitment to a team refers to how a fan think himself affiliated to his favorite team and his thoughts about the same (Ross, James, and Vargas, 2006) and is generally influenced by the length and continuity of the fan-team relation and most importantly the reason for getting committed to his favorite team. Psychological commitment of fans to their favorite team is very important affected by a strong, persistent, and intangible inner feeling from the core of fans heart towards the team (Gladden and Funk, 2001). Interestingly, committed fans of teams have high long-term fan loyalty, positive attitude towards the team and teams image, increased satisfaction, self-esteem, and are resistant to changes (Backman and Crompton, 1991; Sarı, Eskiler, and Soyer, 2011; Javani, Hossein, Rahnama and NasrEsfahani, 2012). We argue that highly committed fans having a strong psychological bonding with the sports team will strongly associate with their favorite teams and thereby enhance the viewer-based brand equity of the teams.

Organizational Attributes

Previous researches defined organizational attributes as "thoughts regarding specific attributes of teams that characterize teams loyalty towards its fans impacted by the actions of the teams management and overall teams' personality" (Ross, 2006; Ross, James, and Vargas, 2006; Ross, Russell, and Bang, 2008). In simple words organizational attributes reflects the loyalty of a team towards its fans and is just opposite to fan loyalty. Organizational attribute is a significant predictor of the teams' brand equity (Gladden, Milne, and Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006; Ross, James, and Vargas, 2006; Ross, Russell, and Bang, 2008). Clubs aiming for creating strong fan loyalty and high brand-equity should arrange for frequent interactions among team fans and should focused on managing their relations with fans by providing extraordinary experiences to them, organizing tournaments for fans (Bauer, Exler, and Stokburger-Sauer, 2008), understanding and responding to fans issues, appropriate management of actions to know fans expectations (McDonald and Sherry, 2010), inviting teams star players to interact with the fans, building sports clubs/museums for fans thereby enhancing team identification and creating value for team (Trial, Fink, and Anderson, 2003). In addition, teams associated with any corporate social responsibility (CSR) makes them legitimate in viewers eyes and also adds to the brand-equity of team. It was argued that when fans experience teams loyalty, the psychological bonding is strengthened and positive associations towards the team are formed, thus, enhancing the viewer-based brand equity of that team.

Non-Player Personnel

Non-player personnel may be regarded as those persons who are not playing the sport but are acting as ancillary or facilitating persons such as coaches/trainers of the teams, team owners, team management (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Ross, James, and Vargas, 2006; Ross, Russell, and Bang,

2008; Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2008). Knowledgeable, experienced and scientific non-player personnel understand the needs of the team players and are prime in inducing the performance of the potential players (Trninić, Papic, and Trninić, 2009). Non-player personnel like coaches, owners, and teams management had to spot and develop potential talents by applying new and innovative training methods, selecting and motivating players for the team, developing strategies and game layouts during the matches which thereby impacts teams performance, success and thus contributes to teams brand-equity. Till recently, cheerleaders had been added as an important non-player personnel as Naik and Gupta (2012) viewed that cheerleaders attract viewers towards Indian Premier League (IPL) and had a significant impact on viewers' psychology. They found that viewers view the cheerleaders of Royal Challengers Bangalore as the most attractive and some viewers also tune-in to watch IPL matches because of the cheerleaders. It was thus decided to include cheerleaders in the non-player personnel and it was believed that non-player personnel had a direct (cheerleaders) as well as an indirect (coaches, management, owners) contribution to the viewer-based brand equity of the team.

Events' Image
Interestingly, every sports event (big or small) has its own image (Gwinner, 1997; Ferrand and Pages, 1999; Musante, 2006) which it has created over the period of time. Events like Olympics, Formula1, NASCAR, NBA, FIFA, IPL etc presents immense opportunities for sport teams to enhance their brand-equity by leveraging the benefits of events image (Syracuse, 2004). This is very common in sponsorship where the main objective of marketers is to transfer the image of event/team/athlete to their own brand by associating it with the event/team/athlete (Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Musante, 2006). McCracken (1989) argued via his most comprehensive image transference theory that every endorser holds an image in consumers mind and image transference takes place from the endorser to the brand when the brand is associated with the endorser. Keller (1993) also presents an explanation regarding attitude and image formation regarding brands suggesting the transference of associations from one source to the other. We believed that the image of an event plays a crucial role in enhancing the brand-equity of the team i.e event matters for the viewers. Thus, a team playing in NBA will have favorable brand associations in comparison to a team playing in any local/regional basketball tournament and viewers will be more inclined towards teams from big and prominent events. It was, thus, argued that events' image has a crucial role to play in enhancing/diluting the viewer-based brand equity of a sports team.

Sponsors
One of the latest developments in the field of sports marketing has been the introduction of Concurrent (multiple) Sponsors. Meenaghan (1983) defined sponsorship as "the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives" whereas Otker (1988) defined it in a commercial way as: "buying an association with an event, a team a group, etc. and

exploiting an association with an event, a team, a group, etc., for specific marketing communications purposes" whereas concurrent sponsorships mean two or more than two sponsors are sponsoring a team, event or a cause. Using sponsorship strategy multiple sponsors hopes to build customer loyalty as well as positive feelings and attitude towards the company where they associate their brand with a sponsored entity (sporting events, non-sporting events, cause, and individuals). Sports context provides an important platform for the marketers for sponsorships opportunity as it could be seen that out of all the expenditure done on sponsorships, sports represent nearly 88% of all sponsorships (TWSM Annual Review 2009).

Importantly, a sponsor associated with a team could also impact, indirectly, the brand-equity of that team and the situation becomes more complex when the team is sponsored by many sponsors concurrently. Previous researchers has highlighted that those sponsors who are prominent and more related with the event (we arguing teams) could reap benefits from the events' image (Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 2002; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Rifon, Choi, Trimble, and Li, 2004) whereas converse is also true. A controversial (alcoholic and tobacco) sponsor could dilute the brand-equity of the event (we arguing sport teams). These days the presence of multiple sponsors within a team makes it more difficult for the team managers to manage their teams (Ruth and Simonin, 2003; Pentecost and Spence, 2009; Cornwell, Weeks, and Roy, 2005; Carrillat, Harris, and Lafferty, 2010). Best example could be of Indian Premier League which includes a total of 120 (approx) sponsors sponsoring 9 teams only, each team having an average of 13 sponsors, attracting the attention of viewers during match hours or teams/sponsors advertising. It is argued that viewers have a pre-sponsorship image (positive/negative) of a brand and when it sponsors a team the image gets transferred to the teams' image hence enhancing or diluting the equity of a team. It is therefore argued that sponsors have an impact on the viewer-based brand equity of the teams.

Celebrity Players
Celebrity players like Michael Jordan, David Beckham, Roger Federer, Maria Sharapova, Tiger Woods, Sachin Tendulkar, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Yuvraj Singh are themselves strong global brands having a strong impact on watching and purchasing habits of their fans who watch sport matches due to their fame which in turn enhances the Viewer-based brand equity of the teams to which these players belongs. An excellent example could be of LeBron James, celebrity basketball player, who added $100 million dollars in revenues to his former team, the Cleveland Cavaliers, during a short time span of 7 years. Matuszewski (2010) argued that the departure of LeBron James results in the decline of value of Cleveland Cavaliers upto $250 million estimating that his presence in team Chicago could add $2.7 billion in just six years if he decided to play for the same. It is opinioned that he added much more viewer-based brand equity to the teams he had played for. Other best example could be of Sachin Tendulkar, legendary Cricketer of India, who has a very strong global fan base considering him as the God of

Cricket. Naik and Gupta (2012) on the basis of their empirical study argued that there are many fans who watch Indian Premier League because of their interest in some celebrity player. Celebrity players have the attractive power that can build/enhance the brand-equity of a team in long-run, improve merchandise sales, increase sale of tickets (Gladden, Milne, and Sutton, 1998), can engender strong meaning, cultural and societal norms to the respective teams, acts as a role model for fans (Hartmann et al., 2003; Hyman and Sierra, 2010). All these above mentioned statements highlight the importance of celebrity players and their ability to impact the brand-equity of teams from viewers perspective.

CONSEQUENCES OF VIEWER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

The SBBE framework empirically validated by Ross, Russell, and Bang (2008) also suffers a major limitation by not incorporating the consequences. This framework puts limited light by highlighting only SBBE and not considering the important consequences. In this regards, on the basis of previous brand-equity literature in sports, it was decided to include the consequences of high/low VBBE of a team. Some of the important outcomes of high VBBE were suggested as below:

Fan Loyalty

Emari, Jafari, and Mogaddam (2012) highlighted the close association between brand-equity and brand loyalty. Gladden and Funk (2002) on the basis of their empirical work on 929 fans of a professional sports developed a model and argued that brand associations of fans towards a sport team has a significant contribution in enhancing its brand-equity and high/low brand-equity of sports team can impact the loyalty of fans while Bauer et al. (2005) argued that high brand equity of a sport team results in increased fan loyalty among fans of German professional sport. In addition, previous researches has also highlighted the existence of the relationship between brand associations and fans loyalty (Javani, Hossein, Rahnama, and NasrEsfahani, 2012; Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer, and Exler, 2008; and Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2008). Erdener et al. (2008) studied the relationship between brand association and fans loyalty and argued that brand-equity of sport teams impacts loyalty of fans towards a team. We, thus, argued that high viewer-based brand equity of a team provides opportunities to attract and retain loyal fans impacting revenues of sport teams.

Merchandise Sales

One important outcome of high viewer-based brand equity of a team is that it helps in the sale of merchandise including the sales of apparels and related items on which the name or logo of the team has been marked (Gladden, Milne, and Sutton, 1998). Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia (2007) defined merchandise as "sportswear, souvenirs, preparation, and all class of articles that shows clearly to the name and logo of the sport organization". Merchandise is important as it reflect the image of the sport team (Brooks, 1994) and gives a reason to fans for buying them. Tutko (1989) argued that fans identity acts as a main source of motivation for fans to wear the merchandise of their favorite teams. We argue that fans don't buy merchandise instead they buy the image of the team. A team with high reputation and a good image ultimately contributes to the viewer-based brand equity and, thus, influences the sale of merchandise.

Jersey Rights

The concept of selling the Jersey rights is new in the field of sports marketing originated in USA in 2006 when Major League Soccer becomes the first professional league to allow advertising on their teams' jerseys contributing heavily to the revenues of the teams. For example, Los Angeles Galaxy sold its Jersey rights for $4.0 million - $5.0 million to Herbalife (Sports Business Journal). Initially, teams in USA were not reluctant to sell their Jersey rights to companies except Nike, Reebok, or Adidas but once the practice started it created history as large number of companies came forward for buying the Jersey Rights so as to give a sporty look to their own brand. In England also the Jersey Rights deal for Manchester United ranged to about $32 million. In 2011, a marketing research firm (www.horizonmedia.com) estimated that the teams of global sporting events added a huge amount of money into their revenues by selling Jersey rights deals alone: National Football League ($230.9 million), Major League Baseball ($101.1 million) and National Basketball Associations ($31.2 million). This practice is also visible among Indian Premier League teams who had sold their Jersey rights for huge amount. We, thus, argue that teams with high Viewer-based brand equity can attract prominent and International brands for buying the Jerseys rights of the teams.

Media Exposure

Gladden, Milne, and Sutton (1998) defined media exposure as "live television coverage, televised stories during live broadcasts or pre-game/post-game programs, national coverage in newspapers, magazines, and sports talk radio shows". High viewer-based brand equity of a team laid a strong foundation for the mass media offer making broadcasters interested in signing multibillionaire contracts with the teams for becoming the official broadcaster of the teams matches as well as the highly valued teams are also able to get a larger part of the minutes during the television news, newspapers, radio programmes (Villarejo-Ramos and Martin-Velicia, 2007) and social media. Interestingly, most valued and famous soccer teams such as Manchester United, Bayern Munchen, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Chelsea (Brand Finance Report, 2012) and cricket clubs in India like Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings, Kolkata Knight Riders have very high global fans and, thus, global viewership of fans who are interested in listening, reading and seeing the news of their favorite teams. Broadcasters are aware of the fact that a team with high viewer-based brand equity will enjoy high fan viewership and thus they will try to leverage the bonding between the fans and the team by making teams matches center of attraction on their channel earning billions as advertising dollars for broadcasters.

Increased Viewers

Consumption of sports on television in on rise in this decade. During 2009 in USA, sports live broadcast on television; cable television was about 43,700 hours. The growth of satellite television gives more freedom to viewers to follow their favorite teams in amazing high

definition clarity irrespective of the location of viewers. Sport teams are also using innovative methods to stay in touch with their fans by creating official websites, fan-pages and keeping their presence on social networking sites, smart phones for creating a buzz for major sporting events. It is argued that fans will try to stay as close as possible to their favorite teams and will search additional channels or sources to watch the matches of their teams. Also by creating a buzz about their teams, fans can help to further increase the number of subscribers of a team and a team with a high subscriber/fan base can seal highest broadcasting deals for showing the matches of the team. Thus, a team with high viewer-based brand equity can help to increase the subscribers earning heavy income, indirectly, for the teams.

Ticket Sales

Cialdini et al. (1976) argued via their basking-in-reflecting glory theory that there exists a correlation between a teams' winning and the attendance of its fans. We argued that a team with high viewer-based brand equity could convert viewers into spectators when the match is played in nearby locations. For example, taking the case of Indian Premier League we argued that fans of Chennai Super Kings (South Indian team) residing in Punjab or Jammu and Kashmir may not be able to see the matches in stadiums as they would prefer to see them on television but if these viewers associate strongly with Mumbai Indians then high viewer-based brand equity could convert these potential viewers into spectators when Chennai Super Kings is playing at approachable locations (North India) causing an increase in the sale of tickets. Importantly, the support and enthusiasm of the fans will also provide a psychological benefit to players enhancing their performances.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our model of Viewer-based brand equity presents an initial step into brand-equity research in team sports from viewers' perspectives by making an attempt to make understand the antecedents and consequences of brand equity in professional team sports taking into consideration the viewers perspective for the first time. In an era of extreme competition in sports, financial as well as fans retention is becoming difficult for teams/clubs and gone are the days when only performance of a team was helping it attract fans in masses. Importantly these days, teams having a deep understanding of fans are successful in modern sports and had created history in terms of their valuation like Manchester United, Real Madrid etc. At the same time, sport managers should know that not only those fans who watch matches of their favorite teams live in stadiums contributes to the financial success of the team but also those, numbered more than spectators, watching the matches on television are more responsible for the financial performance of the teams and their contribution to a team financial performance cannot be ignored. Future researches should be undertaken for empirical validation of the VBBE framework and more researches should be undertaken for highlighting the importance of viewers in professional sports.

Sports marketing literature, till date, lacks an appropriate framework which could help sport managers to know how viewers could affect the finances of their teams. In addition, with increased global consumption of sports on satellite and cable television and rising broadcasting rights, one cannot ignore the role played by viewers of sports. Thus, there arises the need of a framework which could explain team sports from viewers perspective and was named as "Viewer-based Brand Equity Model (VBBE)" arguing the difference between spectators and viewers and explaining the antecedents and consequences of a teams' Viewer-based brand equity. In addition, the consequences of VBBE maintain that VBBE should not be ignored for attracting and retaining fans. It's a known fact that sport teams which are economically sound and have high revenues had to keep on attracting new fans in order to maintain the flow of finances and staying in business and since television provides a wider reach to the sport managers thus it becomes important for sport managers to have an understanding of viewers. Future researches are welcomed to explore additional associations of viewers with the passage of time. Our framework of VBBE is a general one and it should be extended more specifically to teams from different sports like football, basketball, cricket etc.

The antecedents of VBBE of a team were defined by two main constructs: brand associations (10 sub-constructs) and brand awareness (2 sub-constructs). On the other hand, the resultant outcomes or consequences of VBBE were named as Fan loyalty, media exposure, jersey rights, merchandise sales, increased viewers, and ticket sales. Importantly, all these consequences again have an impact on the antecedents of teams' brand-equity, through a feedback loop, making VBBE a cyclical phenomenon. It was argued that high VBBE will result in an enhanced 'teams image' coupled with increased fan loyalty and rising revenues. VBBE framework will help sport managers of professional team sports for efficiently and effectively manage their teams creating positive associations creating team differentiation. This study illuminates the previous darkness existing in terms of research on team sports from viewers perspective and, thus, provides a good understanding of viewer-based brand equity, its antecedents, consequences and how managers can leverage VBBE through fans associations. It, thus, becomes very important for future researchers to highlight which dimension of VBBE framework contributes more in building the brand-equity of teams from viewers perspectives.

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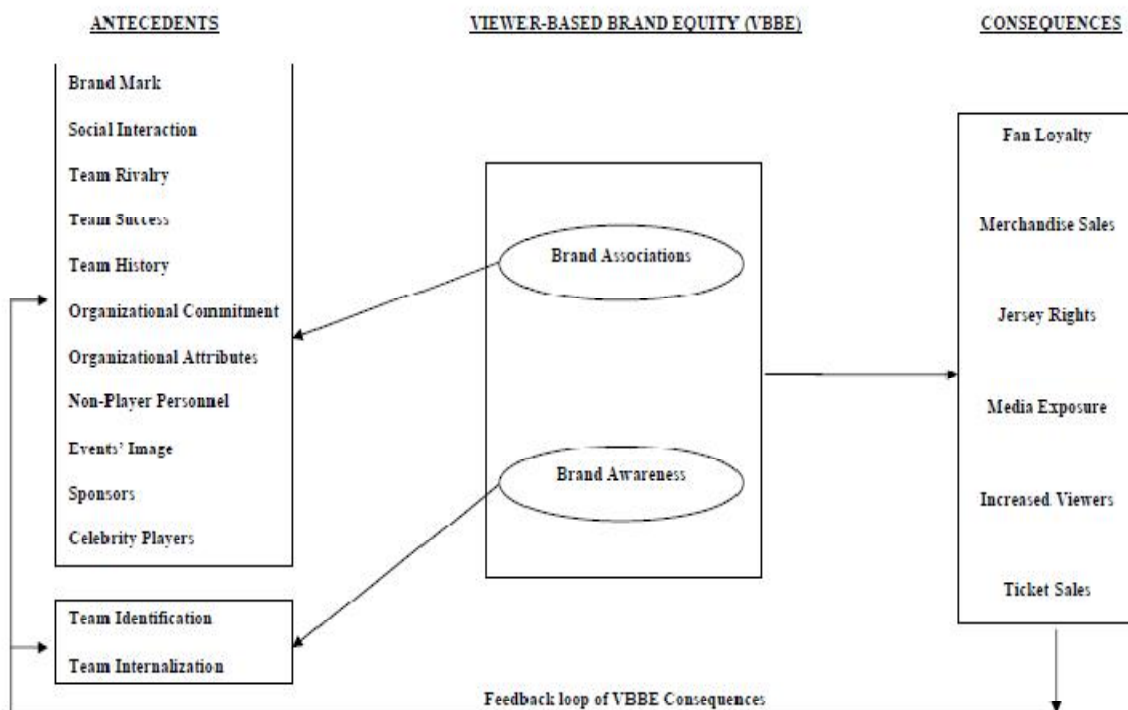
Figure1 - Viewer-based brand equity in sports

Fig. 1: Viewer-Based Brand Equity (VBBE) Framework