

# **The impact of need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness, and identification on the likelihood of brand extension purchases.**

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## **Abstract**

*As sport organizations seek new ways to generate revenue and interact with their fans, brand extensions will continue to be a popular strategy to do so. While research has examined how consumers evaluate brand extensions in sport, little is known as to what impacts a consumer's decision to purchase team related extensions. This study examined the impact on potential brand extension purchase of three factors suggested to influence consumer purchase behavior (need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness and identification). Respondent-driven sampling (RDS) was used to collect 509 useable surveys through a paper-based instrument. The results of the study suggest that of the three constructs only identification had a significant impact on the likelihood of brand extension purchase. This finding was consistent for brand extensions that were considered to be both a high and low fit with the team introducing the extension. The results provide important theoretical and managerial implications.*

## **Introduction**

In a difficult economic state, sport organizations continually seek new and innovative ways to interact with their fans and generate additional revenue. One potential tactic, in order to accomplish these two goals, is to introduce new products which bear the name of the team. When these new products are introduced in a new product category, this is known as a brand extension (Aaker, 1991). For example, if the Minnesota Twins were to open a merchandise store called The Minnesota Twins Locker Room, they have extended their brand from the professional sports and entertainment category to retail. Developing brand extensions is popular as they allow teams to potentially have a positive impact on revenue, enhance team image, and interact with the team's fan base outside of the walls of an arena or stadium (Walsh & Ross, 2010). While previous research has examined how consumers evaluate brand extensions, very little research has determined what ultimately leads to brand extension purchase. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine if three psychological constructs that have been suggested to influence purchase decisions (consumer need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness and identification) also have an impact on the likelihood of purchasing professional sport team related extensions.

## **Literature Review**

Most current research on brand extensions has focused on how consumers evaluate the new products and service offerings. For example, it is generally supported that how a consumer evaluates a brand extension will rely heavily on attitudes and associations that they currently

hold for the parent brand which introduces the extension (e.g., Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Bhat & Reddy, 2001). If the parent brand is perceived to be high in quality then the brand extension will likely be considered a high quality product, and vice versa (Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Bottomley & Holden, 2001). In addition, consumer evaluations of a brand extension will tend to be more positive if there is a perceived fit between the product category of the parent brand and the product category of the brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Apostolopoulou, 2002; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Volckner & Sattler, 2006). Emotional attachment to the parent brand has also been determined to be a key factor in influencing positive evaluations and purchase intentions of brand extensions (Fedorkhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008).

Another line of research on brand extensions has examined the impact that brand extensions have on the parent brand that introduces the extension. Generally it has been determined that if a brand extension is not seen as a perceived fit of the parent brand, and/or fails in the marketplace, consumers may alter their image of the parent brand and thus increase the potential of damage to the parent brand's equity (e.g., John, Loken, & Joiner, 1998; Loken & John, 1993).

When examining sport related extensions, Apostolopoulou (2002) determined that loyal fans of a team are more likely to have favorable attitudes and opinions about a team's brand extension as opposed to those at lower levels of identification or loyalty, regardless of the perceived fit of the product categories. Papdimitriou, Apostolopoulou, and Loukas (2004) also determined that perceived fit for team related extensions was higher for those that would be considered to be sport related, and consumers were more likely to purchase these types of extensions. In examining the potential impact of brand extensions on the parent brand of a professional sports team, Walsh and Ross (2010) determined that brand extensions showed minimal evidence for potential dilution to team brand equity among teams with a highly identified fan base. Most recently, Walsh, Chien, and Ross (2012) examined the unique perspective of professional baseball teams in Taiwan that were considered to be extensions of corporate brands. Their results suggest that it was difficult to establish a perceived fit between the teams and the corporate parent brand, and if the team was successful it could positively impact the image of the corporate parent brand. While research on brand extensions in sport is limited, the studies mentioned above have made significant progress in determining the nature of sport related brand extensions and how team related extensions might impact the parent brand. However, what has yet to be examined is how factors which have been shown to influence consumer purchase behavior might affect a sport consumer's likelihood of purchasing brand extensions.

### ***Need for uniqueness (NFU)***

The concept of consumers' need for uniqueness derives from Snyder and Fromkin's (1977) theory of uniqueness that postulates people have a desire to be viewed as unique. Furthermore, individuals with increased need for uniqueness view high similarity with others as unpleasant, and often attempt to make themselves different from others (Fromkin, 1972; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Strategies intended to reclaim self-esteem and reduce negative affect are often accomplished through self-distinguishing behaviors (Tian & McKenzie, 2001), and vary across individual situations (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; 1980). As research suggests (Belk, 1988), possessions are often viewed as extensions of the self, and one strategy to appease need for uniqueness is to purchase unique consumer products (Snyder, 1992). In the current study, a consumer's need for uniqueness (NFU) refers to the concept that individuals will seek to acquire

and utilize goods to develop their own personal and social identity in an effort to distinguish themselves from others (Tian & McKenzie, 2001).

It has routinely been suggested that there are three behaviors which consumers engage in to attempt to fulfill this NFU: creative choice counterconformity, unpopular choice counterconformity, and avoidance of similarity (Tian, Bearden & Hunter, 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Creative choice counterconformity relates to an individual attempting to express his or her image through the purchase of material products, in hopes of obtaining the perception of being a unique individual. In our context, this could potentially include individuals purchasing a new team related extension in order to display their affiliation with a team that represents unique personality traits relating to how they would like to be portrayed. The premise of this view is based on the idea that new products rarely benefit from instantaneous widespread acceptance, but rather are first accepted by a small group of early adopting consumers who then serve as influencers for later users. As such, one method in which to satisfy the need for uniqueness would be for individuals to consume new products before others (Burns & Krampf, 1992; Fromkin, 1971). Early research by Burns (1990) found that consumers with more developed motivations to be unique likely display a heightened sense of awareness of new products. Perhaps more importantly, this research suggests that individuals with a greater need for uniqueness show more interest and willingness to purchase new products than those individuals with weaker desire for uniqueness.

Unpopular choice counterconformity refers to individuals purchasing products that are not entirely within social norms. This allows an individual to set themselves apart from others within a defined group. Consumers of team related extensions might behave in this way if they purchase extensions from teams other than the team having the largest following in the community. While this choice may be unpopular with the surrounding community, it allows individuals to distinguish themselves from their peers. Finally, avoidance of similarity means that consumers will discontinue using brands when they feel the brands have become too popular. This could potentially have a negative effect on a consumer's intention to purchase team related brand extensions. If a team introduces a brand extension that becomes extremely popular, individuals who tend to follow this avoidance of similarity behavior might stop purchasing the extension.

### ***Loyalty proneness***

Loyalty proneness is viewed as a customer's tendency to continue relationships with a specific brand (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer & Burton, 1990; Parish & Holloway, 2010). The concept of loyalty proneness is chiefly concerned with the inclination to continue the relationship with a brand rather than the desire to increase the relationship. In the sport literature, research has indicated that individuals tend to exhibit greater loyalty towards professional sport teams than they do towards general consumer based goods (Sebastian & Bristow, 2000). In addition, consumers exhibit greater loyalty to an inferior/low-quality professional sports team than to an inferior/low-quality consumer good (Sebastian & Bristow, 2000). What has yet to be examined is if this loyalty proneness will translate towards the purchase of a team's brand extensions.

The concept of loyalty proneness has grown out of the study of optimum stimulation levels (OSL), and characterizes an individual in terms of their general response to environmental stimuli (Raju, 1980). In a seminal study, Hebb (1955) argued that every organism needs some level of stimulation. Furthermore, when the needed stimulation provided by an experience is less than optimal, individuals will attempt to increase levels of stimulation by finding new and



novel experiences. In contrast, when an experience reaches levels of stimulation above the perceived optimal intensity, individuals will seek to reduce stimulation.

When discussing the marketing implications of OSL, Raju (1980) suggested a sub-scale called Loyalty Proneness to describe high and low OSL individuals. The OSL literature often describes individuals with high OSL as those who are likely to engage in exploratory and switching behaviors, seek new brand experiences or sample new service providers (Patterson, 2000) and thus can be described as having low levels of loyalty proneness. People characterized by a high degree of loyalty proneness are likely to feel more secure with familiar situations. By staying with a regular brand or service provider, perceived uncertainty is reduced by knowing exactly what is expected with an organization (Zeithaml, 1981). These individuals are found to be more constant and loyal in their consumption behavior (Raju, 1980; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1992), and often reject the opportunity to try novel experiences.

### **Team identification**

Team identification refers to a psychological attachment that fans experience with respect to a larger social structure (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). Copious research has shown that an individual's level of identification will influence a number of important outcomes (Apostolopoulou, 2002; Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Mahony, et al., 2000; Funk & James, 2001; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; Trail & James, 2001; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). For example, highly identified fans are more likely to engage in sport consumptive behavior, attend games and spend time and money to watch their favorite team play (Fink, et al., 2002; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003; Trail & James, 2001; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Highly identified fans also have very strong positive attitudes about their favorite teams and are extremely resistant to change (Funk & James, 2001; Mahony et al., 2000).

As it relates to brand extensions, team identification has a significant positive effect on a fan's evaluation of a sport related brand (Apostolopoulou, 2002; Walsh & Ross, 2010). Walsh and Ross (2010) suggested that those with higher levels of team identification are more likely to be motivated to process extension information presented to them by the brand with which they identify. Furthermore, previous research has found that those with higher levels of identification are more likely to purchase and wear licensed team merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002), which suggests that identification impacts brand ownership. Kirmani, Sood, and Bridges (1999) determined that owners of brands tend to have favorable responses to extensions introduced from the owned brand because they are familiar, knowledgeable, and involved with the parent brand.

### **Perceived fit and brand extensions**

While it appears as though there is an indirect link between team identification and the processing of extension information and favorable responses to extensions, it is also necessary to examine if identification then has a positive impact on purchase intention of a team's brand extensions. However, identification is not the sole factor that influences a consumer's evaluation of a brand extension. The fit between the product class of the brand, which introduces the extension, and the product class of the new extension often has an impact on evaluation. It is generally supported that an extension will receive a better consumer evaluation if there is a high perceived fit (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Apostolopoulou, 2002; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Bottomley & Doyle, 1996; Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Volckner & Sattler, 2006). For example, Gatorade's primary product category may be considered to be that of sport rehydration and nutrition, with its

primary product being sport drinks. Therefore, when Gatorade introduced new extensions such as protein drinks and energy chews these would likely be seen by consumers as being a perceived fit as the product classes are the same, or very similar, and each of the products are designed to meet the same needs of the consumers. As such, consumers would generally have a more positive evaluation of these types of extensions. However, if Gatorade were to introduce an extension such as a candy bar this would not be considered to be a strong fit with their original product category and lead towards unfavorable consumer evaluations. Outside of product category fit, perceived fit may be established in other ways as well such as if the parent brand is seen as having the expertise needed to produce the new extension, or if the extension can be used as a substitute for the original product or in the same type of usage situation (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

In the sport context, perceived fit has been examined in a variety of different ways in sport brand extension research. For example, Papdimitriou et al. (2004) determined that when a sport team introduces a sport related extension, such as a team camp, as opposed to an extension which does not have any connection to sport, there will be a high perceived fit and a greater likelihood for purchase. Further research by Walsh and Ross (2010) examined the likelihood of team brand extensions diluting the team's overall brand image. After exposing consumers to different brand extensions of varying levels of perceived fit, they found minimal evidence of dilution to the team's brand, which occurred regardless if the brand extensions were a fit with the team's brand or not. This is contrary to research outside of sport which indicates that brand extensions which are not a fit with the parent brand generally will dilute parent brand equity (Loken & John, 1993), and suggests that team brand extensions are unique and warrant individual examination. Perceived fit has also been suggested as one of the key factors that professional sport teams need to consider when they are developing brand extensions (Walsh & Lee, 2012).

### **Purpose and Hypotheses**

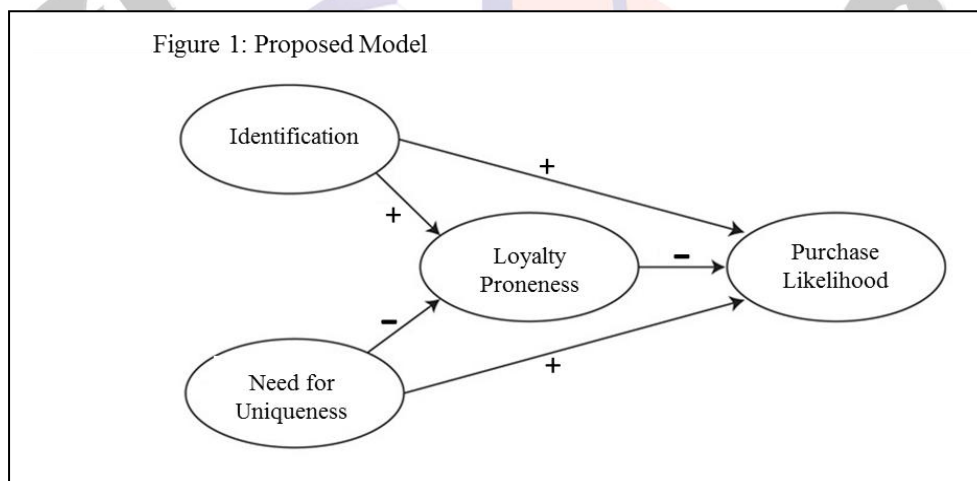
The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of consumer's need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness, and level of identification on the likelihood of brand extension purchase. In general, the pre-existing attitudes and associations that one has for the parent brand will influence how consumers evaluate a brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994). That is, if a consumer has favorable attitudes and a strong brand image about a particular team, they will then have a strong image of and favorable attitudes towards brand extensions that the team introduces, thus leading to a stronger possibility of brand extension purchase. In addition, highly identified fans have a strong relationship with their team, which influences their attitudes and behaviors, and identification has a strong positive influence on brand extension evaluation regardless of whether the extension is perceived to be a high or low fit with the parent brand (Apostolopoulou, 2002). This in turn could lead to a greater chance of brand extension purchase, as those highly identified fans have formed a strong bond with a team and will likely exhibit a desire to maintain or increase that relationship.

The literature reviewed for need for uniqueness would also suggest that this construct has an impact on brand extension purchase and loyalty. One component of a consumer's need for uniqueness suggests that individuals attempt to express their image through the purchase of products, which will allow them to satisfy their need to be viewed as a unique individual (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). In addition, those that search for a greater need for uniqueness also have been shown to have a greater propensity to purchase new products. Purchase of team related brand extensions may offer these individuals the opportunity to satisfy

this need, while at the same time expressing one's loyalty to a team allows the individual to become part of a unique social group. Based upon this literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Identification will have a significant positive influence on the likelihood of purchasing extensions that are viewed as being high fit and low fit.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Identification will have a significant positive influence on loyalty proneness.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Need for uniqueness (NFU) will have a significant positive influence on likelihood of purchasing extensions that are viewed as being high fit and low fit.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Need for uniqueness (NFU) will have a significant negative influence on loyalty proneness toward extensions that are viewed as being high fit and low fit.
- H<sub>5</sub>: Loyalty proneness will have a significant negative influence on likelihood of purchasing extensions that are viewed as being high fit and low fit.

The hypothesized relationships are illustrated in Figure 1. As illustrated within the figure, three positive relationships and two negative relationships were expected.



## Method

### Sample

Measurements of need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness, and identification were distributed and collected from 544 individuals. These individuals were identified utilizing a modified respondent-driven sampling method (Heckathorn, 1997), where students affiliated with a large Midwestern university served as the seed recruits. Respondent-driven sampling assumes that the best group able to access members of a population with no sampling frame are their own peers (Heckathorn, 1997). Typically, the use of a student only sample is considered appropriate given that they are significant consumers of sport (Biswas & Sherrell, 1993), and student samples have also been utilized in previous examinations of brand extensions in sport (Walsh & Ross, 2010). However, the use of respondent-driven sampling allows for more variation of respondent characteristics, thus allowing the study sample to be much more representative than a narrowly defined, homogeneous convenience sample of college students. Specifically, students enrolled in kinesiology and sport management courses served as first wave seed recruits. The seed recruits were instructed to first complete the study instrument, and then distribute ten additional instruments to consumers of sport within their social network. The



distribution of the study instrument to others allowed for a more diverse sample than the initial group of homogeneous seed recruits. The fact that initial seed recruits are not asked to identify their peers to the principal investigator sets this sampling method apart from snowball sampling (Heckathorn, 2002).

### ***Instrument***

Consumer's need for uniqueness was measured using the Consumer Need For Uniqueness (CNFU) scale developed by Tian, et al. (2001). The scale assesses the degree to which consumers evaluate the similarity or dissimilarity to others and act on such evaluations. The 31 items include three intercorrelated dimensions: creative choice counterconformity (11 items), unpopular choice counterconformity (11 items), and avoidance of similarity (9 items). The 31 items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Strongly Disagree* and 7 being *Strongly Agree*. Proneness to product loyalty was assessed using the Loyalty Proneness scale suggested by Sebastian and Bristow (2000). The Loyalty Proneness scale is a seven-item measure that examines the tendency for consumers to stick with the same brand over time, and switch brands for the sake of variety (Raju, 1980). The seven items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Strongly Disagree* and 7 being *Strongly Agree*. A modified version of the Sport Spectator Identification Survey (SSIS), developed by Wann and Branscombe (1993), was used to measure the level of team identification with a professional hockey and professional baseball team. The seven SSIS Likert-scale items assessing identification with a sport team were used, with response options ranging from 1 to 7.

The dependent variable, likelihood of purchasing a brand extension, was measured with a one-item response for both high-fit and low-fit extensions. Fit of the extensions was identified based upon previous research on congruency of sport team brand extensions (Walsh, 2008). This research by Walsh (2008) previously examined the perceived fit of a number of different types of brand extensions with the same professional hockey team that was utilized in this study. As it was the same team used in the present study, the use of the same extensions were deemed appropriate. Respondents were asked to rate the likelihood of purchasing a high-fit brand extension (hockey or baseball equipment) with response categories ranging from 1 *Extremely Unlikely* to 7 *Extremely Likely*. Respondents were also asked to rate the likelihood of purchasing a low-fit brand extension (perfume/cologne) with response categories ranging from 1 *Extremely Unlikely* to 7 *Extremely Likely*. In addition to using the results from the previous study (Walsh, 2008) to determine the extensions, perfume/cologne was chosen as the low-fit brand extension because the parent brand (i.e., a professional hockey team and professional baseball team) cannot transfer its expertise to the extension category (i.e., perfume/cologne) or act as a complement of or substitute product for the parent brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990), while hockey and baseball equipment was likely rated as a high-fit extension as consumers could understand this transfer of expertise between a professional hockey/baseball team and hockey/baseball equipment. Institutional approval for research containing human subjects was attained prior to commencing research.

### ***Data analysis***

Reliability for the constructs under investigation was established through an examination of Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient and the average variance extracted (AVE). Cronbach's coefficient serves an assessment of internal consistency focused on the homogeneity of items within an instrument subscale. The AVE for each construct was also examined as a measure of

reliability as it explains the variance for each of the constructs relative to the variance attributed to measurement error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

A path model analysis was conducted using LISREL 8.7 to estimate the structure of the proposed relationship among the variables of interest. Specifically, the proposed model examined the relationship and influence of an individual's need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness, and identification with team upon the likelihood of purchasing team related brand extensions. In order to explore potential differences between high and low fit brand extensions congruent and non-congruent brand extensions, two models were examined when analyzing the data. The first model assessed the influence of the three constructs of interest on the purchase likelihood of a congruent fit team brand extension. Conversely, the second model assessed the influence of the same constructs on the purchase likelihood of a non-congruent fit extension. In both instances, the covariance matrix from the sample was used as the input data (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2009).

Several researchers (Kline, 1998; Jaccard & Wan, 1996) have suggested using multiple fit indices in order to generate adequate information as to assess the overall fit data, and this is now common practice in the evaluation of models. As such, several measures assessing the adequacy fit were examined to provide support for the initial validity of the proposed models. Specifically, the goodness-of-fit measures used in the current study were the normed chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2/df$ ), root-mean-square-error of approximation (RMSEA), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean squared residual (RMR), and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI).

## **Results**

### ***Sample profile***

Of the 544 surveys distributed, 509 surveys were deemed useable for data analysis after data screening (93% effective completion rate). Thirty-five surveys were eliminated from the data set due to the large number of occurrences of missing data. Ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 68 years, with a vast majority (77.0%) falling in the 20 to 29 age bracket. Just over one-half of the respondents were male (52.7%), while 47.3% were female. Over three-quarters (83.0%) of the respondents were Caucasian, with the next largest ethnicity group being Black/African-American (6.8%), followed by Asian/Pacific Islander (4.4%).

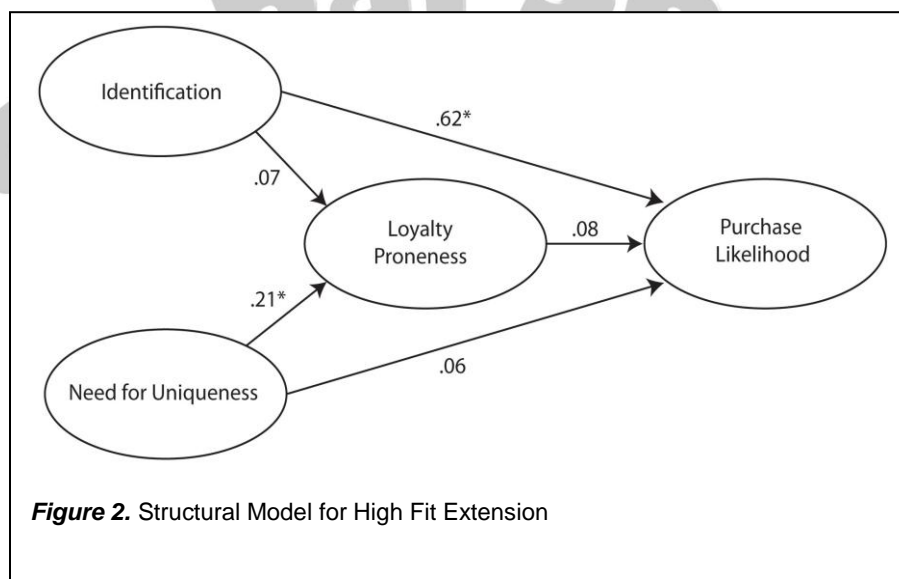
### ***Reliability estimates***

Cronbach's alphas ranged from .81 to .96, with all variables meeting the recommended criteria set by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Although Cronbach's alpha coefficient represents a measure of internal consistency, and is commonly relied upon for establishing reliability, the AVE provides a measure for the amount of variance explained by the construct relative to the attributed to error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In terms of evaluation of values, the AVE of each construct should be greater than the unique variance and should exceed .50. The AVE for each variable was derived by averaging the squared multiple correlations derived from the reported standardized loadings. The values in the current study, ranging from .52 to .61, all met the recommended criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity of the measures was accepted as none of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values for each associated construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Overall, the measurement model was within the required criteria and showed good psychometric properties.



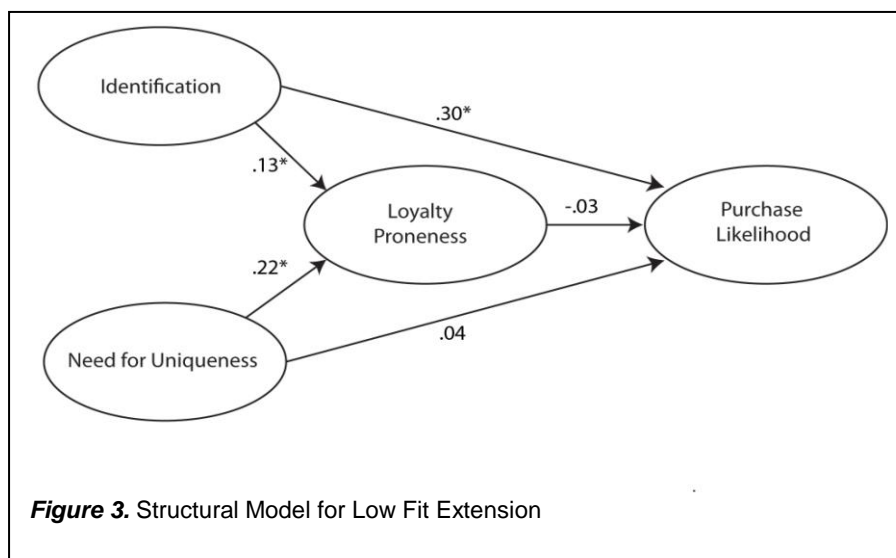
### **High fit extension**

Path analysis was utilized to analyze the data, and examine the relationships between the constructs of interest and the likelihood of purchasing the high fit extension. The results of the analysis suggest the model had an adequate fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df=3.8$ , RMSEA=.079, TLI=.959, CFI=.965, SRMR=.060, GFI=.900). The significance of regression weights was examined for all constructs (see Figure 2), and relationships were deemed significant at  $p < .05$  level. The results indicate that Identification had a significant influence on purchase likelihood ( $p < .05$ ), but had small insignificant influence on loyalty proneness. NFU had a moderate and significant influence on loyalty proneness ( $p < .05$ ), but a weak, insignificant influence on purchase likelihood. Lastly, loyalty proneness had a weak and insignificant influence on purchase likelihood.



### **Low fit extension**

Path analysis was also utilized to analyze the data, and examine the relationships between the constructs of interests for the low fit extension. The results of the analysis suggest the model had a good fit to the data ( $\chi^2/df=3.8$ , RMSEA=.079, TLI=.955, CFI=.962, SRMR=.060, GFI=.900). The significance of regression weights was examined for all constructs (see Figure 3), and relationships were again deemed significant at  $p < .05$  level. The results indicate that identification had a significant influence on purchase likelihood ( $p < .05$ ), and also had a significant influence on loyalty proneness. NFU had a moderate and significant influence on loyalty proneness ( $p < .05$ ), but a weak, insignificant influence on purchase likelihood. Lastly, loyalty proneness had a weak and insignificant negative influence on purchase likelihood.



### Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of the current study was to examine three psychological constructs (consumer need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness and identification) that have been shown to influence purchase decisions, and to investigate the impact of these variables on the purchase of professional sport team related extensions. While previous research has examined how consumers evaluate brand extensions, very little research has determined what ultimately leads to brand extension purchase. Additionally, while sport marketing research on brand extensions is relatively scant and in its developmental phases, how factors such as a consumer's need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness and level of identification affect purchase decisions have yet to be examined until now. The current study represents the first known effort to investigate these constructs in relation to brand extension consumption behavior among sport consumers.

The results of the analysis suggest that of the three constructs examined, only identification with team had a significant impact on the likelihood of purchasing sport team extensions. This finding held true for both the likelihood of purchasing high fit extensions and the likelihood of purchasing low fit extensions, and supports the acceptance of Hypothesis 1. Not surprisingly, these results lend support to the extensive line of literature suggesting the strong impact identification has upon purchasing behavior among sport fans (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002;2004; Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003). When inspecting path coefficients for the hypothesized relationship between identification and loyalty proneness, it was revealed that identification only had a significant positive influence within the low fit brand extension model. That is, the findings indicated that level of identification positively impacts the levels of loyalty proneness when considering purchasing low fit extensions. One potential reason for this finding is that consumers of all levels of identification are more likely to support a brand extension which is a higher fit with the parent brand as the new product is seen as a logical extension of the parent brand. However, when the extension is a low fit and there is not a natural connection between the extension and the parent brand, identification may play a larger role in support of the brand extension as those that have higher levels of identification are more going to be more likely to support the extension regardless of fit (Walsh & Ross, 2010). While this finding was revealing, the failure of identification to also have a significant positive influence on loyalty proneness within the high fit brand extension model led to the rejection of Hypothesis 2.

Need for uniqueness did not have a significant impact on the likelihood of purchase in both high and low fit cases, suggesting the rejection of Hypothesis 3. In the context of this study, previous literature suggesting a strong relationship with these two variables was not supported. This likely occurred as their identification with the team may have already satisfied the consumer's need for uniqueness, as it allows a fan to become part of a unique social group. In terms of identification, consumers' need for uniqueness may play a significant role in people's sense of identity (Belk, 1988) and potentially has strong implications for the study of sport brand extensions. More specifically, being part of a fan base is one way in which individuals might express their uniqueness. As such, purchase of the extension would not be necessary for the consumer to meet this need. However, as an identified fan, these individuals may be more likely to purchase brand extensions as a way to support both the team and the unique fan group to which they are affiliated.

Need for uniqueness did, however, have a moderate and significant positive influence on loyalty proneness for both high fit and low fit model estimations, thereby contradicting Hypothesis 4. These results contradict previous literature suggesting the strong relationship between these two constructs. These results might be explained in terms of an individual's perceptions and attitudes towards in-group favoritism (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; 1995). That is, an individual's need for uniqueness among a social group might be based on the perceptions of those individuals within a rival group (Brewer, 1979). As the literature suggests, one component of a consumer's need for uniqueness is that individuals attempt to express their image through the purchase of products allowing them to satisfy the need to be viewed as a unique individual (Tian et al., 2001). Specifically, these results might indicate that individuals seek to be unique from the behavior and attitudes of those in rival groups rather than fellow fans, and hence increase their loyalty proneness with extension within the social group to which they belong. For example, New York Yankee fans may support the team and their extensions in order to allow themselves to be unique in comparison to fans of their rival, the Boston Red Sox. While this support may not allow the Yankee fans to be considered a unique fan within the Yankee social group where individuals hold similar attitudes and behaviors, this behavior does allow them to distance themselves from rival Red Sox fans.

Similar to need for uniqueness, loyalty proneness had no significant impact on the likely purchase decisions in both the high and low fit cases. Given these results, Hypothesis 5 was rejected in the current study. Interestingly, however, loyalty proneness did have a negative influence purchase likelihood for low fit extensions (albeit non-significant). By staying with a regular brand or service provider, perceived uncertainty is reduced by knowing exactly what is expected with an organization (Zeithaml, 1981). These individuals are found to be more consistent and loyal in their consumption behavior (Raju, 1980; Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1994), and often reject the opportunity to try novel experiences.

The findings strongly suggest that when developing brand extensions, professional sport teams be keenly aware of the identification levels of the target market. This suggestion for marketers supports the research by Walsh and Ross (2010) suggesting that teams can often introduce extensions without worrying about the impact on the parent teams brand associations. This is especially true when there are many customers who have high levels of identification. In the current study, it seems possible that individual's need for uniqueness may have been satisfied through an attachment to team, and the need for novel brand extensions to express individuality was diminished.



Another important marketing implication for this research pertains to the trait of need for uniqueness and market segmentation. Specifically, younger demographics typically lean towards the need for differentiation. As such, the need for uniqueness becomes particularly important when attempting to reach youth through marketing. It would therefore be extremely worthwhile for sport marketers to focus on grassroots level marketing efforts in order to attract those individuals into a loyal customer segment. The findings suggest that need for uniqueness is not influential in the likelihood of extension purchase, and therefore youth (typically with higher levels of NFU) would not be impacted by the fit of an extension. This is particularly important when planning for future fan succession, and teams need to be consistently aware of how they develop new fans.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The sampling method, and potential for the respondents to be very similar in nature, may lead to a lack of generalization. Future studies should replicate this study using other samples in specific settings other than that of the current study. For example, this study could be replicated using a sample of season ticket holders from one specific professional team. Additionally, it is suggested that future research be undertaken to investigate the specific subscales of need for uniqueness. The various subscales of need for uniqueness might play a differing role in terms of predicting need for uniqueness, and the impact of this construct on purchase decisions.

This study also only focuses upon the brand extensions of two professional sport teams. Future research would be wise to investigate the relationships with these constructs in other levels of competition across the globe. For example, lower division clubs looking to establish additional avenues of revenue generation might be served well by developing brand extensions. Future research needs to replicate the current study in the context of collegiate sport, as it represents another major form of leisure time in the United States. Additionally, this research only focuses on men's sports and does not address the likelihood of extension purchase among fans of women's sports. As such, it would be appropriate to replicate this study with samples from the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) or Euroleague Basketball. Also, research has suggested that cultural differences may impact how consumers respond to brand extensions (Bottomley & Holden, 2001; Han & Schmitt, 1997; Monga & John, 2007). Therefore, this study could be replicated with different teams and leagues across the globe to determine if consumers will respond in a similar fashion.

This study also utilizes one established measure for both need for uniqueness and loyalty proneness. While the reliability and validity checks in the current study suggest the measures are useful, additional research should be conducted in order to further establish the viability of using these instruments in the context of professional sport. In addition, it may be useful to develop sport specific need for uniqueness and loyalty proneness scales that take into account the unique relationships that sport fans form with teams and sport brands.

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