The Role of Age Moderating Perceived Brand Personality and Team Identification of Premier Soccer League Teams

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of age as a moderator between brand personality and team identification of Premier Soccer League teams in South Africa. The study employed a descriptive research and quantitative method. Data was collected using a self-administrated method. The results of this study revealed that age moderates only two brand personality factors, namely success and sincerity. Therefore, age moderates the relationship between success and sincerity to influence team identification among Premier Soccer League teams. Regarding the other two brand personality factors, namely sophistication and ruggedness, age was found not to be a moderator influencing team identification among Premier Soccer League (PSL) teams. Therefore, the PSL teams' brand managers are advised to be very careful in planning and managing their teams' brand performances linked to these two factors of brand personality (successful and sincerity) as moderated by age influencing team identification among PSL teams. In doing so, the level of team identification will continue to grow and be balanced, as all age groups are accommodated.

Key words: Brand, Brand Personality, PSL, Team Identification, Age, South Africa

Introduction

The Premier Soccer League (PSL) was established in 1996 and is named after a sponsor. As a result, the PSL was known as the Castle Premier Soccer League from 1996 to 2007 and the Amalgamated Banks of South Africa (Absa) Premier Soccer League from 2007 to 2020 (News24, 2020). Currently, the league is called the Digital Satellite Television (DStv) premiership (Ditlhobolo, 2020). There are 16 teams participating in the PSL. Each team plays away and home games with other teams every season. The PSL awards three points to a team for winning a game and one point to both teams for a draw.

Since the PSL was established, Mamelodi Sundowns has won 12 championship titles, while the two Soweto giants, namely Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs, have won four championship titles each (SoccerWay, 2022; Radebe, 2021). Besides the main championship title, the PSL presents two knockout competitions, namely the Nedbank Cup and the MTN 8 Cup, all presented in the name of their sponsorships. The Nedbank Cup started in 2008, featuring teams from the PSL and the lower division. Mamelodi Sundowns is currently the leading team, having won the Nedbank Cup four times (Lambley, 2022). The MTN 8 Cup also started in 2008, featuring the eight teams finishing in the top eight spots in the previous season (Lambley, 2022). Orlando Pirates is the only team that has won this competition more than any other

team in the PSL, with a record three wins (Makhanya, 2021). The teams' success in winning the PSL titles and other knockout competitions or domestic competitions contributes to team identification and perceived brand personality among the PSL teams.

The fan base of PSL is large featuring old and young fans. For example, Kaizer Chiefs F.C is 7.4 million; Orlando Pirates F.C 4.7 and Mamelodi Sundown's F.C 2.3 million fans . This study is focusing on Generation Y fans. Generation are individuals born between 1986 and 2005 (Markets, 2004). These individuals are aged between 18-37 years of age in 2023. Given that Generation Y is the largest group in the population of south Africa (Statista, 2013). In addition, majority of Generation Y are at university and some of them are university graduates. In other words, Generation Y cohort attracts the interest of marketers. Therefore, this study will be focusing on Generation Y students registered at two Public higher education institutions.

Literature Review

Brand Personality

It is important to understand the individual terms "brand" and "personality" before discussing the concept of brand personality. A brand is a name, logo, colour, slogan or tagline used to set apart one company's product or service from those of other competing companies (American Marketing Associations, 2023). "Personality" refers to the characteristics of a person. In the field of marketing, the brand is given characteristics of a human being for the purpose of promotions. Such applications have resulted in the concept of brand personality. Aaker (1997) defines "brand personality" as assigning a set of human characteristics to a brand. Aaker was the first author to develop a scale to measure brand personality of a brand featuring five dimensions namely: Sincerity; Excitement; Competence; Sophistication and Ruggedness. Professional sports teams in South Africa all have names, logos and colours assigned to them. For example, Kaizer Chiefs is the name of a club and it features yellow and black colours and the face of a person with dreadlocks. Such elements confirm that Kaizer Chiefs is a brand. A sports team's brand is like any other brand and has a personality (Ahmad, 2022). Braunstein and Ross (2010) developed a scale to brand personality of sport a professional sport team featuring six dimensions. Successful; Sophisticated; Sincerity; Rugged; Community Driven and Classic. Perceptions of some PSL teams in South Africa are linked to the brand personality dimensions from both studies of Aaker (1997) and Braunstein & Ross (2010). Kaizer Chiefs is known as the team that has won the most trophies in South Africa. In other words, Kaizer Chiefs is perceived as being successful. This perception is derived from the concept of a personality.

The concept of brand personality has been used extensively by marketers and brand managers and has assisted them in positioning their brands successfully in the market. According to Sung and Kim (2010), marketers use brand personality to set their brands apart from those of their competitors. Furthermore, marketers use brand personality to evaluate the consumer's relationship with a brand (Sung, et al., 2009), adjusting the brand thereafter, if necessary. A unique brand personality creates a strong competitive advantage for a brand, as it is difficult to be copied by other brands (Ang & Lim, 2006). For example, Jeep is known as a tough and strong brand and no other brand can easily take such personality traits from Jeep. It is important for marketers to understand and create a unique brand personality for their brands. Brands with exclusive brand personality can encourage brand preferences among consumers. Furthermore, brand personality can attract new customers to try a new brand extension by paying higher prices and remaining loyal to the brand (Farhat & Khan, 2011; Li et al., 2014). Brand personality is also important for professional sports teams, given that they, too, are brands. Individuals often select brands that reflect their own personalities (Lin, 2010; Arora & Stoner, 2009). Consequently, brand personality influences team identification.

Team Identification

"Team identification" is defined as a positive attitude that shows that a person strongly identifies, associates and feels a sense of oneness with a particular team of choice (Trust Capital Institute, 2012). Professional sports teams benefit greatly from identification by the fans. A team with a high level of identification has a

financial benefit, such as ticket sales from the match day and purchasing of team merchandise (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). Team merchandise includes all products sold under the sports team's brand name, such as a team jersey (Fullerton, 2010). Some fans are willing to pay higher prices to own the merchandise of their favourite sports team (Kwon et al., 2007). Others buy season tickets to watch all the matches of their favourite sports team (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007).

Individuals identify with a sports team because of certain common characteristics between them and the sports team (Know *et al.*, 2007). For example, a person might identify with a team because it has a history of winning the championship often (Shojaei *et al.*, 2011). while others may identify with a sports team because it is classic, community-driven or successful. Such traits may not be perceived in the same way by all individuals, especially if the latter differ in terms of age. For example, an older person would probably prefer a team that is a bit old-fashioned and family-oriented, rather than one that is all about success – which would be more appealing to younger individuals. The older generation may perceive brand personality based on the team's past and present performance, while the younger generation may perceive brand personality solely in terms of the present. However, there are some individuals from the younger generation with past records of their favourite team that can be incorporated to the present times to perceive brand personality of a sport team. Such personalities are linked as a decider from fans to identify a sport team or not. Consumers associate aspects of their personality with the personality of the sports team brand, thereby causing them to identify with the brand (Ahmad, 2022). Thus, age might influence individuals' perceptions of a brand.

"Age" is defined as the number of years a person has lived on earth. Young customers react differently to a brand from those of the older generation (Bekk *et al.*, 2017). PSL fan base is large featuring both young and old fans. Its unknown if age plays a role between perceived brand personality and team identification of PSL teams. Such information is crucial for marketing perspective. Marketers will know whether to develop one marketing campaign directed to both young and old fans or a separated campaigns directed to young and old. Therefore, the research objective of this study was to determine the role of age as a moderator of the relationship between perceived brand personality and identification with the PSL teams in South Africa.

As mentioned previously, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the role of age moderating perceived brand personality and team identification of premier soccer league teams. The current study is line with other studies from the literature conducted similar studies investigating the age moderating the relationship between variables (Rojas-Méndez et al., 2019; Gilal et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2019; Hayat et al., 2020). Rojas-Méndez et al., 2019 investigated a role of age moderating the relationship between brand personality (competence; assertiveness and sincerity) and purchase intentions. The study revealed that age can moderated only one relationship between competence and purchase intentions. Gilal et al (2021) examined the role of age enhancing Service Brand Passion through Self-Congruity featuring Actual self-congruence; ideal self-congruence; brand user-congruence and brand user image congruence assuming age moderate relationship towards service brand relationship. Two relationships were significant (ideal self-congruence and brand user imagery congruity), while the other two relationships were not significant (impact of actual self-congruity and brand user image congruity). Ye et al (201) examined whether age moderates the relationships between social website interactivity (SWI) and brand experience; brand choice and price premium; brand experience and buying intention, and brand choice and buying intention. The results of the study revealed that age does moderate relationship between all relationship formulated in the study. Hayat et al. (2020) conducted a study investigating the moderation of age between brand personality and customer satisfaction. The measurements for brand personality included Sophistication; Sincerity and Excitement. Two out of three measurements namely Sophistication and Sincerity were significant and confirmed that age moderates the relationship between brand personality and customer satisfactions. The current study substituted customer satisfaction with Team identification. In addition, brand personality measurement for this study included success; sophistication; ruggedness and sincerity. Therefore, this study hypothesis that age moderates the relationship between brand personality and team identification.

Theoretical Background

Consumers use brand personality to express their actual or idealised self-image to a specific brand (Keller & Rickery, 2006). Self-congruence theory claims that consumers prefer those brands having symbolic value, which enable them to represent or enhance their actual or desired self-image to derive emotional (that is, non-functional) benefits (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010). As such, this theory supports the fact that brand personality influences brand identification (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010). This is applicable to fans in selecting a sports team in the PSL, as each team has a different brand personality. For example, Kaizer Chiefs Football Club (FC) and Mamelodi Sundowns FC are perceived as successful teams and this has the potential to influence individuals' identification with a team because they express or idealise their self-image as being successful. The self-congruence theory clearly shows that the brand personality of PSL teams influences team identification among PSL teams in South Africa where individuals identify with a particular PSL team in South Africa.

Individuals identifies a group to become a member and results to social identification (Leaper, 2011). Social identification occurs when individuals identifying a sport team to become part of the group. A team is classified as a social group where individuals sense oneness in that group and will be identified in the form of team identification (Gundlach et al., 2006). Mofokeng et al. (2015) highlighted that team identification is a manifestation of the social identity theory. By identifying with a sports team, individuals claim membership in a particular social category, therefore supporting social identity (Carlson et al., 2008). In other words, people associate themselves into different social groups. For instance, PSL teams have groups or branches of different supporters. Kim et al. (2001) highlighted that groups include a reference group, but not limited to groups to which people belong to but also to a group to which they aspire to belong. Individuals desire to belong to a specific group because that group reflects personalities that match their own personalities. Similarly, sport fans may stop identifying with a sports team and associate with another team that reflects their personality traits more closely (Carlson et al., 2008). For example, a fan may stop supporting Orlando Pirates and switch their allegiance to Mamelodi Sundowns or Kaizer Chiefs. Individuals are usually attracted to sports teams that are perceived as prestigious and distinctive, which leads to team identification (Carlson et al., 2008). According to social identification theory, individuals tend to identify themselves with a team and become a member of a group because they share characteristics with that sports team. Consequently, the theory of social identification is considered relevant in understanding team identification among PSL teams in South Africa.
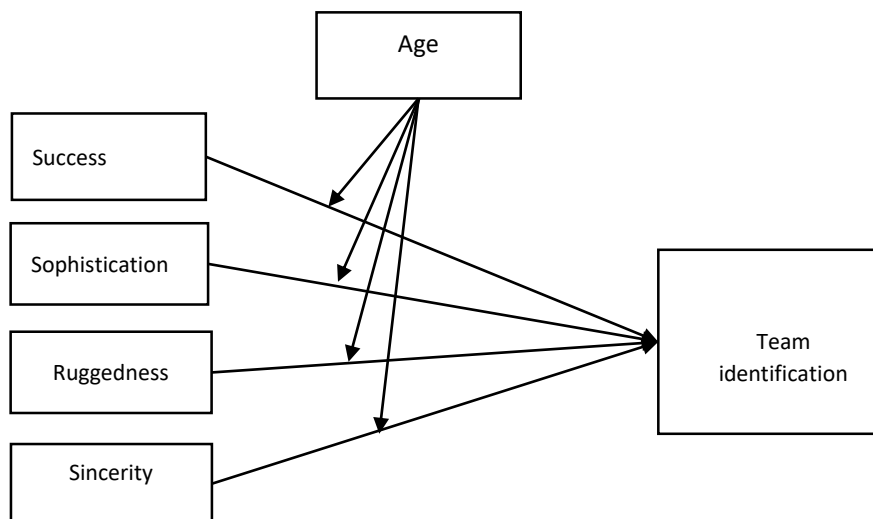

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

                                                   Source: Author's own compilation

Hypothesis testing
H1: Age moderates the relationship between success and team identification.
H2: Age moderates the relationship between sophistication and team identification.
H3: Age moderates the relationship between ruggedness and team identification.
H4: Age moderates the relationship between sincerity and team identification.

Methodology

A non-probability convenience sample of 450 respondents was drawn from the target population. Convenience sampling was selected for this study because of the cost- effectiveness of this sampling method. The sampling frame of the study comprised undergraduate students, labelled as "Generation Y", from two higher education institution (HEI) campuses based in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Gauteng is the province with many individuals than any other province in South Africa. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25 was used to perform the analysis for this study.

The data collection instrument used in this study was a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised four sections, namely demographic information in section A; participants' sports interest in section B; team identification in section C; and brand personality in section D. Both sections C and D used a six-point Likert scale to measure the level of team identification and perceived brand personality among the participants. The Likert scale ratings were as follows: 1= Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Disagree slightly; 4 = Agree slightly; 5 = Agree; and 6 = Strongly agree. All items featured in the questionnaire were borrowed from the existing scale found in the literature, while team identification (5 items) was adopted from Swanson et al. (2003) and brand personality (Success-9 items; Sophistication-5 items; Ruggeness-5 items and Sincerity-3 items) was adopted from Braunstein and Ross (2010).

Results and analysis

This section presents the empirical findings of the study.

Reliability and validity
500 questionnaires were distributed and 435 were completed and declared usable for data analysis. In other words, the study had an 87% response rate. The Cronbach alphas were calculated for all constructs to determine the internal consistency of the items in the scale. Table 1 presents the results of Cronbach alphas and correlation coefficients of the study.

Table 1.

Cronbach alphas and correlation coefficients

Variables	(α)	TI	BP 1	BP 2	BP 3	BP4
Team identification	0.788	1000				
Success	0.916	0.372	1000			
Sophistication	0.836	0.311	0.604	1000		
Ruggedness	0.805	0.316	0.508	0.592	1000	
Sincerity	0.785	0.341	0.478	0.524	0.526	1000

As shown in table 1, Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients for all the constructs (team identification; success; sophistication; ruggedness; and sincerity) were above the 0.70 threshold level (Hair, et al., 2010), which indicates a good internal consistency and reliability of the scale items used. In addition, statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$) positive relationships between constructs were identified, confirming a nomological

validity of the measurement theory (Malhotra, 2010). Another important interpretation can be made regarding the correlation of the variables. None of the correlation coefficients are 0.90 or above, Therefore, there are no multicollinearity issues between the variables (Hair et al., 2010).

Regression Analysis

Results for regression analysis are presented in table 2-9. Four factors, namely success; sophistication; ruggedness; and sincerity, were used as independent variables, with team identification as the dependent variable.

Factor 1: Success

Table 2.

Model

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	F	P
.390	.152	.147	1.09369	25.780	<,001

Table 2 summarises the regression analysis and Anova results. Success is statistically significant, influencing PSL team identification (F-value 25.780; P=0.000). In other words, success has a direct impact on PSL team identification.

Table 3.

Interaction of age in the relationship between success and team identification

	Standardised coefficients beta	T-values	P-values
Constant		-1.568	.118
Age	.694	2.436	.015
F1=success	.647	5.099	<,001
Interaction	-.680	-2.268	.024

Table 3 summarises the results of the regression analysis after the interaction of age as a moderator in the relationship between success and team identification. Age (P=0.024) has a significant positive impact in the relationship between success and team identification. Therefore, H1 is accepted. This hypothesis suggested that age moderates the relationship between success and team identification among PSL teams in South Africa.

Factor 2: Sophistication

Table 4.

Model

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	F	P
.316	.100	.094	1.12701	15.929	<,001

Table 4 summarises the regression analysis and Anova results. Sophistication is statistically significant, influencing PSL team identification (F-value 15.929; P=0.000). In other words, sophistication has a direct impact on PSL team identification.

Table 5.

Interaction of age in the relationship between sophistication and team identification

	Standardised coefficients beta	T-values	P-values
Constant	.543	.604	.546
Age	.213	.975	.330
F2=Sophistication	.621	3.467	<,001
Interaction	-.041	-.950	.343

Table 5 summarises the results of regression analysis after the interaction of age as a moderator in the relationship between sophistication and team identification. Age (P=0.343) does not have a significant positive impact in the relationship between sophistication and team identification. Therefore, H2 is rejected. This hypothesis suggested that age does not moderates the relationship between sophistication and team identification among PSL teams in South Africa.

Factor 3: Ruggedness

Table 6.

Model

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	F	P
.348	.121	.115	1.11361	19.784	<,001

Table 6 summarises the regression analysis and Anova results. Ruggedness is statistically significant, influencing PSL team identification (F-value 19,784; P=0.000). In other words, ruggedness has a direct impact on PSL team identification.

Table 7.

Interaction of age in the relationship between ruggedness and team identification

	Standardised coefficients beta	T-values	P-values
Constant		.847	.397
Age	.270	1.069	.286
F3= Ruggedness	.459	3.494	<,001
Interaction	-.255	-.923	.357

Table 7 summarises the results of regression analysis after the interaction of age as a moderator in the relationship between ruggedness and team identification. Age (P=0.357) does not have a significant positive impact in the relationship between ruggedness and team identification. Therefore, H3 is rejected. This hypothesis suggested that age does not moderates the relationship between ruggedness and team identification among PSL teams in South Africa.

Factor 4: Sincerity

Table 8.

Model

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	F	P
.336	.113	.107	1.11891	18.244	<,001

Table 8 summarises the regression analysis and Anova results. Sincerity is statistically significant, influencing PSL team identification (F-value 18,244; P=0.000). In other words, ruggedness has a direct impact on PSL team identification.

Table 9.

Interaction of age in the relationship between sincerity and team identification

	Standardised coefficients Beta	T-values	P-values
Constant	-.597		.508
Age	.503	.646	.020
F4=Sincerity	.855	.573	<,001
Interaction	-.098	-.675	.024

Table 9 summarises the results of regression analysis after the interaction of age as a moderator in the relationship between sincerity and team identification. Age (P=0.024) has a significant positive impact in

the relationship between sincerity and team identification. Therefore, H4 is accepted. This hypothesis suggested that age moderates the relationship between sincerity and team identification among PSL teams in South Africa.

Summary of the Results

Table 10.

Summary of the Findings

Proposed hypotheses	Results	Decision
H1: Age moderates the relationship between success and team identification.	**.024**	**Accepted**
H2: Age moderates the relationship between sophistication and team identification.	**.343**	**Rejected**
H3: Age moderates the relationship between ruggedness and team identification.	**.357**	**Rejected**
H4: Age moderates the relationship between sincerity and team identification	**.024**	**Accepted**

Discussions and Managerial Implications

The study presented findings and revealed that the age of sports fans moderates the relationship between brand personality (success and sincerity) and team identification. This is line with the results of Hayat et al., (2020) where age found moderating the relationship between sincerity a construct of brand personality and customer satisfactions. In this study customer satisfactions construct is substituted by team identification. Similarly, the study of Rojas-Méndez et al. (2019) age was significant moderating competence a construct of brand personality and behavioural intentions. Competency is the ability to compete and can be linked to success. Therefore, it is related to the relationship of success and team identification moderated by age in the current study. The results of the current suggest that to attract and keep sports fans of all ages, sports marketers must try to incorporate many different traits of success and sincerity to accommodate all age groups. For example, success relating to the older group could be the team's winning records of the past; for the younger generation, success could be the team's recent victories in the Premier Soccer League titles and other competitions. Sincerity relating to the older group could be evident when the team is upholding sports ethics, promoting fair play and engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate social investment (CSI) activities; for the younger generation, it could be a professional media address or press conference by the team and appropriate communications on social media sites. In this way, all age groups will be accommodated and it will help to create a strong identification with PSL teams. Failure to do so will mean that the marketing strategies of a sports team will not reach the entire target market and will harm the marketing communications of the sports team.

In contrast with the above discussion, the findings of the study revealed that the age of sports fans does not moderate the relationship between brand personality (sophistication and ruggedness) and team identification. This is in line with the study of Hayat et al., (2020) where age found not to be significant moderating the relationship between sophistication a construct of brand personality and customer satisfactions. Therefore, this study suggest that sports team marketers should not be concerned about the age of sports fans regarding brand personality perception in the relationship between sophistication and ruggedness in terms of influencing team identification among PSL teams. In other words, sophistication and ruggedness can be featured in all marketing communications and campaigns of a sports team, since the

age of sports fans does not moderate the relationship between (sophistication and ruggedness) sports team brand personality and team identification.

Limitation and future research

The limitation of this study was the application of the non-probability method and the quantitative method. Furthermore, the study selected sports fans only from Gauteng province, which is not a true reflection of the entire South African population. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies include sport fans from other provinces and include other sporting codes, such as cricket and rugby.

CONCLUSION

This study presented the importance of understanding the impact of age in the relationship between brand personality and team identification among PSL teams. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the role of age as a moderator in the relationship between perceived brand personality and identification among Premier Soccer League teams in South Africa. Out of four dimensions of brand personality, namely success; sophistication; ruggedness; and sincerity, only two dimensions (success and sincerity) were found to be moderated by age in influencing team identification. The results of this study are important for sports team marketers and general marketers to understand the role of age in moderating the relationship between brand personality and team identification so that they can structure an effective marketing campaign for a professional sports team.

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