

Understanding Corporate Social Irresponsibility on Sports Organizations

Jersan Hu¹, Chien Hsien Lee¹, Haw Ran Wong¹ & Tzuyi Kao¹

¹ Graduate Institute of Business Administration, Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan

Correspondence: Chien Hsien Lee, Graduate Institute of Business Administration, Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan. E-mail: bria912@ms41.hinet.net

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Abstract

For this study, we sought to understand the conceptualization of sports organizations in the CSR context from the customer perspective. Previous studies have mainly focused on the positive effect of CSR and neglected the negative effect of irresponsible behaviors. The associations on these entities are often treated discretely, whereas the interrelatedness of the associations are overlooked. This research employs the brand concept map (BCM) method to elucidate the complex and interconnected associations of how a sports organization is perceived, and presents these findings in a graphical network structure. The aggregated network of associations in people's memory, consisting of performance, setting, and auxiliary elements, constitutes the core (brand) images and relevant patronage values of an organization. This research contributes to the understanding of sports brand on the association and network levels. This study identifies useful individual associations such as baseball, players, mascots, related products and corporations, CSR-related behaviors, and the interconnection patterns between elements. These identified factors are useful in detecting and developing patronage and in identifying incongruence in the conceptualization of brand and organization image. The interconnectivity and network structure of people's associations are considered by the employed in this methodology in this study. This study identifies the framework of relevant associations, elements, values, and interconnection patterns, which not only provide comprehensive information in understanding complex conceptual perceptions, but might also be leveraged and focused on by marketers for an enhanced creative marketing and communication strategy.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR), brand concept map (BCM), brand image

1. Introduction

Managing sports entities such as teams, leagues, and major sports events from the perspective of brand management has received considerable attention from scholars and practitioners in the past decade. Research has been conducted on the role of team brand on fan attitudes and behavior (Gladden & Funk, 2001, 2002). Studies show that a winning team does not guarantee a strong balance sheet, but rather a strong brand that brings various benefits (Bauer, Sauer, & Schmitt, 2005). Involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important means for sports entities to simultaneously fulfill their social goals and improve their organizational image or brand equity, consequently building reputation, loyalty, patronage intention, and financial performance. Therefore, CSR may have the potential to offer strategic direction to managers to enhance organizational performance and competitiveness (Brietbarth & Harris, 2008).

The strategic approach of CSR in sports entity brand management may be understood from the resource-based view (RBV) and institutional theory perspectives. According to the RBV, resources and capabilities provide firms with a competitive advantage to pursue opportunities or avoid threats (Barney, 1991). Reputation or image in this case is an intangible resource leading to sustained competitive advantage (Deephouse, 2000), which may be related directly to social responsibility (Fombrun, 1996). From the legitimacy perspective, society grants legitimacy and power to business. Therefore, those who do not use power in a manner society considers responsible tend to lose it (Porter & Kramer, 2006). Reputation is used to justify CSR initiatives on the grounds that they improve company image, strengthen its brand, enliven morale, and even raise its stock value. The notion of legitimacy is derived from every company needing tacit or explicit permission from governments, communities, and numerous other stakeholders to do business.

Previous studies on how CSR affects sports entities have only considered the affirmative effect and the positive

attributions. However, what would happen to a sport entities or a sports brand if corporate socially irresponsible (CSiR) behavior occurs? Research on how perceived corporate social irresponsible incidents, such as game fixing and involvement in illegal gambling, affect the brand image of sports entities is rare. Therefore, this study examines the effect of these incidents on sports entities, particularly from the brand management perspective. The brand associations on sports entities are often treated discretely, and the interrelatedness of the associations are overlooked (Gladden & Funk, 2002). The experiences of consumers are frequently organized as a network of associations that combine to form consumer perception. Brand equity forms the foundation of brand image of uniqueness and value (Aaker, 1996), and is related to consumers' networked perceptions of strong, favorable, and unique brand associations (Keller, 1993). Organizations that can measure this network of associations are in a position to leverage brand equity. The brand concept map (BCM) proposed by John et al. (2006) is suitable for measuring these complex associations (i.e., attributes, benefits, and attitudes) because they can be presented visually within the network structure. The approach is appealing from a management perspective because the BCM provides a graphical aid, flexible incorporation of data from previous research, and a simple aggregation process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Brand Image and Brand Equity

Scholars and practitioners are beginning to view sports entities such as teams, leagues, and properties as "brands" to be managed. Sports business shows numerous instances of sports entities being treated as brands (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Treating a sports entity as a brand is based on the understanding that an organization may possess brand characteristics, and consequently, brand equities. Gladden and Funk (2001) indicated that sports entities have the potential to possess brand equity by the possible added meaning fans and consumers attach to their names and logos. Teams such as the New York Yankees and Manchester United are good examples of brand equity.

Research has shown that team brand has a positive effect on fan attitudes and behavior (Gladden & Funk, 2002). Strong positive association is found between brand image and fan loyalty, which can be explained by the need of fans or sports consumers to affiliate with something/someone successful, such as a brand (Bauer, Sauer & Exler, 2005). A strong brand provides various benefits to sports entities that are independent of field performance. Identification, peer group acceptance, escape, socializing, companionship, emotions, nostalgia, and entertainment are benefits that have been identified as relevant for brand image (Bauer, Sauer & Exler, 2005).

Keller (1993) conceptualized consumer-based brand equity in two components: first, consumer awareness of the brand, and second, the positive and unique image of the brand in the consumer's mind. This image is the cumulative product of brand associations, a network of informational nodes linked to consumer brand image. The quality of brand associations is determined by their degree of favorability, uniqueness, and strength. Therefore, customer-based brand equity develops if a consumer is familiar with the brand and holds favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory.

Brand associations are anything in the consumer's memory linked to a specific brand (Aaker, 1991), and team sports consumers form various brand associations based on their consumption experience. Gladden and Funk (2002) indicated that brand associations, which capture the experiential and emotional aspects of consumers in sports consumption, can be operationalized under the categories of attributes, benefits, and attitudes toward a product that may exist in the minds of consumers and affect their brand evaluation. According to certain scholars, because the consumer controls the creation of brand equity, it is particularly important to study brand equity from the consumer perspective (Gladden & Funk, 2002).

However, sports brands are unique. Unlike a mainstream product, the sports product is unpredictable (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). Brand performance varies and is ultimately difficult to control. Sports product consumption also provides no tangible benefits and is relatively experiential and emotional (Mullin et al., 2000). This parallels the contention of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) that the symbolic benefits derived from the consumption experience of leisure activities may be particularly acute.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR has become increasingly prevalent in the sports industry. The reason most often cited is that involvement in CSR is financially beneficial for an organization and can lead to greater profits or greater public support, which may in turn bolster profits. However, Walker and Kent (2009) indicated that in the sports industry, where cultivating an affective connection to the organization is critical, CSR may provide extra organizational value, compared to other industries.

Research has shown that CSR associations have a strong and direct effect on consumer attribution, which in turn

influences brand evaluation and purchase intention (Mohr & Webb, 2005). For the role of CSR in professional sports teams, Walker and Kent (2009) suggested that sports organization involvement in CSR has a positive effect on their corporate reputation and patronage intentions of fans or sport consumers, from a consumer perspective. Therefore, CSR involvement may have the potential to offer strategic direction to managers to enhance organization brand image, and thus, performance and competitiveness (Brietbarth & Harris, 2008). The study of CSR should therefore not only define and identify CSR activities, but should also include the role of CSR in a broader organizational and strategic management context (Husted & Salazar, 2006).

Walker and Kent (2009) argued that sports industry CSR differs from other contexts because this industry possesses attributes that are distinct from those found in other business segments. For example, athlete “star power” is the connections sports teams have to local communities, and the level of affect displayed by its many consumers distinguishes the sports industry from most others, and may provide novel perspectives for the study of CSR.

For Carroll (1979), business firms have four responsibilities: the baseline responsibilities of profitability and conformance to laws (economic and legal responsibilities), the obligation to conform to ethical business norms in their environment (ethical responsibility), and the exercise of discretionary responsibilities (philanthropic responsibility). The four responsibilities create a meaningful and helpful parsing of a firm’s responsibilities to differentiate among the essential (economic), obligatory (legal), contextual (ethical), and optional (discretionary) dimensions of CSR (Godfrey, 2009).

The sports industry has been characterized as a lens through which to see the larger social perspectives of symbolism, identification, community, and sociability (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999), which is related to the strong affective connections of sports fans. Following this notion, Godfrey (2009) suggested the affective component of consumer interest in sports as a significant factor that affords practitioners and scholars an opportunity to examine socially responsible initiatives that may be unique to the sports industry.

2.3 Brand Concept Map (BCM)

Concept interrelatedness is assumed to be a necessary property of knowledge by the majority of cognitive theories. Knowledge structures are frequently understood by apply two primary sets of techniques. Perceptions may elicited indirectly by identifying specific word associations, similarities in judgment, and the way in which people categorize concepts. Techniques such as concept maps provide a more direct approach by developing visual representations that explicitly identify links between concept pairs (Ruiz-Primo & Shavelson, 1996). However, concept maps rely on content domain knowledge being centered on specific core concepts. Valuations, judgments, and inferences are only a few of the wide range of information-processing activities that are influenced by these knowledge structures (Markus & Zajonc, 1985).

The perceptions, preferences, and choices that consumers associate with specific brands combine to form brand associations (Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998). Brand association has been defined as information nodes that are linked to a memorized brand node containing brand meaning for a consumer (Keller, 1993). Product attributes, features, usage situations, representatives, or logo may be associated by consumers with a particular brand. Therefore, a greater understanding of consumer perceptions can be established and reinforced by marketing practitioners who employ a network representation of consumer brand associations (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994).

The BCM can be employed to identify specific brand associations and determine the connection of these associations with the brand, as well as how they are interrelated. The majority of extant research on concept maps fails to provide a process to aggregate individual maps into consensus maps. However, the BCM provides an approach that is simpler to manage and analyze because structure is incorporated into the elicitation, mapping, and aggregation stages. The primary advantage of this method is that interviewers typically require only a minimal amount of training, and the procedures are generally brief for respondents. This makes the BCM highly suitable for situations involving larger samples during data collection. The flexibility of this method improves the time- and cost-efficiency of research because it allows data from previous studies to be used during the elicitation stage. The more standardized aggregation processes included in this method enables firms to collect brand maps for various market segments (John et al., 2006).

3. Research Method

Sports as a cognitive institution (Scott, 2001) involves the shaping of how people think and view the world and create orthodoxy; therefore, value, character, and conscience framing should be its fundamental social responsibility (Godfrey, 2009). This research investigated two baseball teams, the Brother Elephant (Elephant) and Uni-President 7-Eleven Lions (Lions), of the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL). The CPBL is the

only professional league in Taiwan that has attracted a large numbers of fans. The two teams were chosen because of their similar backgrounds. Both teams were in the league for 20 years; they were team sponsored by related corporations; they both won the league championship seven times and the seasonal championship ten times; and they were involved in various CSR activities such as baseball classroom for elementary school children, fundraising for a health foundation, and in promoting local festivals. However, on October 26, 2009, when the Elephant team scandal of game-fixing and illegal gambling broke, the incident hit the teams involved, and almost ended the league. These teams were also chosen for comparison purposes because one was involved, whereas the other was not. The testing of complex salient associations is possible with this sample because attributes, personality traits, and emotions specifically related to the public and sports fans were affected by the scandal.

3.1 Elicitation Stage

This study selected a set of salient brand associations for the Elephant and Lions teams by conducting a survey, focusing on the responses to the open-ended question, "What comes to mind when you think of the Elephant/Lions baseball team?" This study developed a frequency count, selecting surveys with a minimum of 10% response. In total, 220 (110 for each brand) participants were selected from several colleges and universities in Northern Taiwan through convenient sampling.

3.2 Mapping Stage

The respondents in the one-on-one interviews conducted in this study were informed that they were participating in a baseball team study. First, participants were requested to contemplate the following question: "What comes to mind when you think of Elephant/ Lions baseball team?" The respondents were provided with eight associations for each team that were printed on cards. They were informed that they could answer the question using any of the cards they were provided with or by adding their associations. Second, participants were shown a previous associations to demonstrate the BCM concept and its purpose. Third, participants were given a blank whiteboard with the brand (Elephant/Lions) at the center, and instructed to develop their own map for their team. They were requested draw lines (single, double, or triple) on the whiteboard to connect the cards they had selected. Participants completed several demographic questions, including whether they were a baseball fan. A total of 240 (120 for each team) university students and staff in Northern Taiwan were randomly selected as participants.

3.3 Aggregation Stage

This information obtained from each respondent's map in this study was coded as follows: perceived associations; the line type (single, double, or triple); the level on the map at which each association appeared; and the brand associations linked above or below individual associations on the map. Tables 1a and 1b show the aggregated data. The "core" association in this study is based on the research of John et al. (2006), in that interconnectivity is indicative of how "central" an element is within an overall belief system. The core associations to be placed on the consensus map and linked directly to the brand are indicated by the following three measures: "frequency of first-order mentions" "ratio of first-order mentions," and the "type of interconnections," or the frequency of an association placed super-ordinate or subordinate across maps. Associations with more super-ordinate than subordinate connections were strong candidates for direct connection to the brand.

3.4 Developing Consensus Map

First, core brand associations to be placed on the map were identified. As recommended by previous research (John et al., 2006), we selected core brand associations by including associations that were at least 40% of the maps mentioned. Based on the concept that high interconnectivity indicates centrality of associations or beliefs, associations that ranged between 35% and 39% were included if the number of interconnections was equal to or greater than that of other core brand associations. Second, we employed the following three measures to identify core brand associations that should be linked directly to a brand: associations with first-order mentions that accounted for at least 80% of total mentions, those with more super-ordinates, and as first-order associations. Third, the remaining core brand associations were placed on the map. Fourth, we added critical links between core and non-core (dotted lines) brand associations. Finally, we signified the intensity of the connections between each association by placing a single, double, or triple line (represented by different boldness) on the map. The number of lines to be used on the consensus map was determined by averaging the number of lines used by respondents and rounding the result to the nearest integer.

4. Results

After finalizing the exact wording of the elicitation stage survey and rejecting associations that were overlapped, repeated, or mentioned by less than 10% of respondents, we identified eight associations for the Elephant and Lions teams (Table 1a and 1b). The associations were elicited as participants thought of the two baseball teams.

Among these, two were common for both teams, the “Baseball” and “Game fixing” associations. Associations specifically for the Elephant team were the Brother Hotel (Hotel), Medicine for liver (Medicine), the mascot “Elephant,” the yellow color jersey (Yellow), and name of the players “CY” and “CW.” For the Lions team, the associations were the championship won “Champion,” the mascot “Lion,” the related “7-11” convenient stores (7-11), the discount given for champions (Discount), Uni-President food products (Food), and Uni-President-related corporations (Corporation). These mapping associations were then used for the mapping process.

The following information was coded from the respondents’ maps to identify the presence of the eight brand associations for the aggregation stage: the line type (single, double, or triple), the level that each association had been placed on the map, and which brand associations had been linked above or below each association on the map. The brand associations that participants had added during the mapping procedure were also considered to determine whether frequently occurring associations were suitable for inclusion with the original set. However, all the additional associations were thus excluded from analysis because achieved the required frequency.

Table 1a. BCM Measures for Lions

Associations	Fans			Non-Fans		
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Inter.</i>	<i>1st order</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Inter.</i>	<i>1st order</i>
Baseball	26	17	25	83	58	81
7-11	25	28	20	79	79	52
Discount	23	26	16	68	77	30
Champion	19	16	13	42	42	21
Corporation	17	11	11	66	60	34
Lion	16	4	15	45	8	41
Food	15	11	8	51	49	24
Game-fixing	13	13	5	43	31	18

Note: Fans n=33; Non-fans n=87.

Table 1b. BCM Measures for Elephant

Associations	Fans			Non-Fans		
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Inter.</i>	<i>1st order</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>Inter.</i>	<i>1st order</i>
Baseball	53	40	52	66	36	65
Game-fixing	51	40	45	54	29	44
CY	50	48	40	57	29	48
Yellow	49	10	49	54	11	51
CW	49	37	49	46	29	37
Hotel	45	6	45	30	5	30
Medicine	36	15	33	23	15	22
Elephant	33	3	32	38	3	37

Note: Fans n=53; Non-fans n=67.

This study used a five-step process in developing consensus brand maps for the “Elephant” and “Lions.” All of the associations elicited for the Elephant team were included as core associations in the consensus map of fans (Figure 1). However, only seven associations, excluding “Medicine,” were included in the non-fan consensus map (Figure 2). All eight associations elicited were included in the consensus maps for both fans and non-fans of the Lions team (Figures 3 and 4).

The associations of “Baseball,” “Game-fixing,” “CY,” “CW,” “Yellow,” “Hotel,” “Medicine,” and “Elephant” were found to be directly connected to the Elephant brand concept in the fans consensus map. For the non-fans, all seven associations were found present and directly connected to the Elephant brand concept, other than “Medicine.” In both team-consensus maps, the “Baseball” association had the strongest brand connection, which might indicate the centrality of the associations. The associations of “Baseball,” “Game-fixing,” “CW,” “CY,” and “Yellow” were interconnected. The first-order position and high connectivity might be a sign of centrality of these associations in the brand concept.

Although all of the eight associations were included as core associations for the Lions’ fans and non-fans maps, not all of the associations were at the first level directly connected to the brand. In the case of the fans’ map, four of the associations, “Baseball,” “7-11,” “Champion,” and “Lion,” were at the first-order level, and the remaining

associations were at the second-order level. For the non-fans, only three associations were directly connected to the brand. They were “Baseball,” “7-11,” and “Lion” associations, and the remaining were at the second-order level. Associations such as “Baseball,” “Game-fixing,” and “Champion,” “Discount,” and “Champion” “7-11,” “Discount,” “Food,” and “Corporation” were found to be interconnected. Again, the interconnectivity of these associations might indicate their centrality in the brand concept.

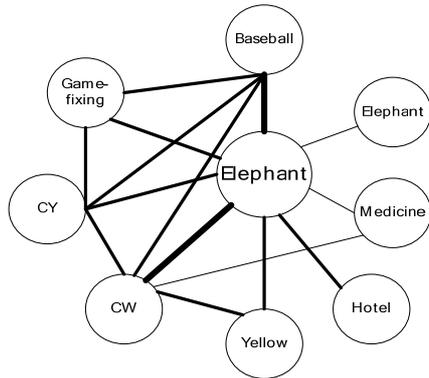


Figure 1. Elephant Fans

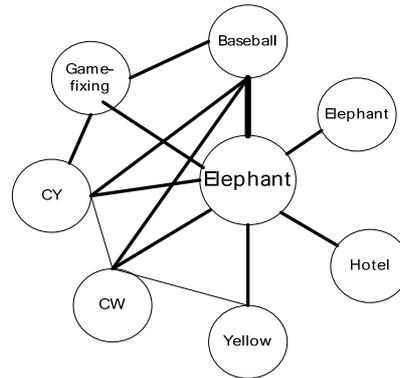


Figure 2. Elephant Non-Fans

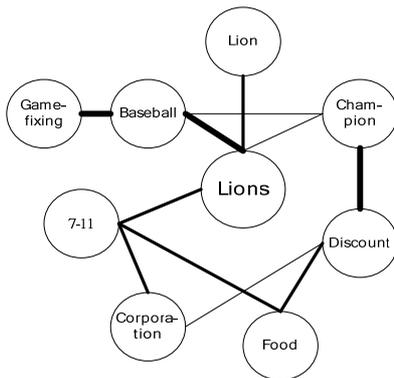


Figure 3. Lions Fans

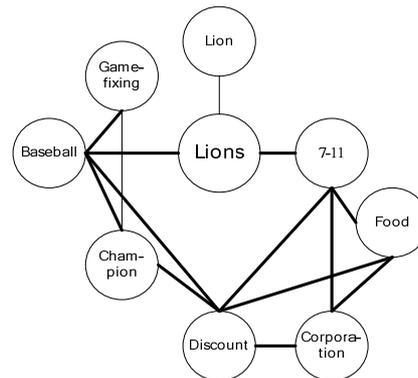


Figure 4. Lions Non-Fans

Comparing the four consensus maps of fans and non-fans for both brands, certain identified associations were more specifically related to either team performance or the game, including the well-known players “CY/CW,” the achievement “Champion,” and the sport “Baseball.” We also identified associations that were related directly to the team, but not directly related to performance or the game, such as the mascot “Elephant/Lion,” related to the ethics and social responsible/irresponsible behaviors of “Game-fixing” and the jersey color “Yellow.” Certain associations were also indirectly related to the teams, such as related business or corporations (7-11/Hotel) and related products (Food/Medicine), and benefits from the Lions winning the championship (Discount).

As a check on the aggregation procedures, we compared individual brand maps with consensus brand maps. We determined the number of randomly selected individual maps required to capture a minimum of 70% of all core-brand association links observed in the consensus maps for fans and non-fans in accordance with previous research by John et al. (2006), which followed the procedure of ZMET (see Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). This approach was based on the logic that a successful aggregation procedure should allow a small number of individual maps to be sufficient in reproducing any association links within the consensus map. In this study, it took three Elephant (6%) fan maps and four (6%) non-fan maps, and for Lions, three fans maps (9% of maps) and three (3%) non-fan maps, to reproduce at least 70% of the core brand association links found in the consensus map.

4.1 Reliability and Validity Analyses

To measure the consistency of the obtained consensus brand maps across multiple administrations of the technique, this research employed a split-half reliability method. We also compared the consensus map produced by the respondents in the BCM condition with the rating-scales data obtained in the survey condition to assess the convergent validity. The results support that the BCM has achieved its measurement objectives.

4.2 Split-half Reliability

We employed the split-half reliability quantitative measures by coding each split-half map for the presence or absence of (a) each association being core association, (b) each association being first-order association, and (c) any potential links among all associations. We coded the presence brand association or association as 1, and 0 for those with no association. Table 2 shows the computed correlations across split-half maps. The split-half reliability levels shown in the Table 2 are considered acceptable.

Table 2. Split-half Reliability

	Elephant	Lions
Core Associations	0.657*	0.559*
First-order	0.816**	0.826**
Total links	0.321**	0.229**

Note: * $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$.

4.3 Nomological Validity

Because familiarity is a dimension of expertise, and experts inherently possess more complex and integrated knowledge structures, the maps were compared to identify two familiarity groups: familiar and less familiar (we assumed fans were familiar). Our comparison of the maps showed that more first-order associations were possessed by the familiar group, who exhibited stronger connections with their team, and more frequent and obvious interconnections among brand associations. An analysis of the means and significant differences is shown in Table 3a. The evidence of nomological validity is provided by the acceptable differences among the expected differences in expert-novice associations (Table 3a). In this research, we further compared the fan and non-fan groups; however, the difference was not significant. This might be because a person who was not a fan of a team did not necessarily imply his or her unfamiliarity of the particular team. The result indicated that the fan and non-fan groups shared a similar level of team familiarity (Table 3b).

Table 3a. Comparison of different Familiarity Groups

	Elephant	Lions
Number of association	3.23(6.26)*	4.13(5.22)**
Number of lines	9.31(15.58)*	8.25(11.94)**
Number of links	5.54(4.66)*	4.25(5.77)**

Note: Number in parentheses is the average of less familiar groups, * $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$.

Table 3b. Comparison Between Fans and Non-Fans

	Elephant	Lions
Number of association	5.59(6.94)	5.11(5.83)
Number of lines	13.02(17.89)	11.71(13.83)
Number of links	6.21(8.41)	5.54(6.83)

4.4 Convergent Validity

We compared brand maps produced by the respondents in the BCM condition by using the rating-scales data obtained in the survey condition to assess the convergent validity in this study. Highly rated brand associations were similar among survey participants, as shown by the frequency correlation of mention; valued brand associations were similar among individual brand maps. The weighted association frequencies were also considered by correlating the placement level and numbers of line factors with the corresponding mean-scale rating. The results show a good convergence of the brand association hierarchy and selection of connecting lines on brand maps with the survey data brand association ratings (Table 4).

Table 4. Convergent Validity

	Elephant	Lions
Frequency	0.872**	0.982**
First-order	0.810*	0.976**
Lines	0.810*	0.976**

Note: * $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$.

5. Discussion

In this study, individual associations and the relative level of these associations with the teams were identified in accordance with the BCM. The relationship level among these various associations is also analyzed by this method to facilitate analysis at the network level. By comparing the consensus maps between fans and between fans and non-fans of the two teams, we identified a framework of elements for these significant associations. Despite variation among the involved associations across the consensus maps, the elements involved possess specific similarities.

5.1 Individual Associations Level

From the elicitation stage, eight associations were elicited from the participants. These associations share certain common elements, such as performance, setting, and auxiliary elements. Associations such as the players "CY/CW," the game "Baseball," and the achievement "Champion" are all related to the performance element. The performance element is related to factors that are necessary for performing functions and contribute directly to the game or the team. However, associations such as the mascot "Lion/Elephant," the "Yellow" color jersey, and the socially responsible/irresponsible behavior "Game-fixing" share the setting element. This element is related to factors that may affect product delivery, and thus, affect purchase or consumption, but do not directly affect overall team performance. The auxiliary element is shared among associations such as the related product and corporation associations of "Food," "Medicine," "7-11," "Hotel," and "Discount." The auxiliary element refers to factors that are indirectly related to the team (through either the main sponsor or individual players) and may enhance brand concept and delivery, but are not related to brand/team purchase and performance.

The elements of performance and setting are in line with the concepts of product and non-product attributes proposed by Gladden and Funk (2002), and Bauer, Sauer and Exler (2005), which are core to respective brands. Indirectly related associations, which can be grouped under the auxiliary element, however, are new findings of this study. When handling team or brand associations, previous studies have limited themselves to the associations or factors that are directly connected to the team or brand alone, which could be a consequence of the method used. In contrast to this study, which takes the customer-based conceptual map approach, where the associations are directly elicited from the fans and non-fans, the indirectly related associations are found to be significantly present in the brand concept of sports teams. The significant presence of these associations may also be because these associations are significant brands. Associations such as "7-11" convenience stores, the Brother "Hotel," and medicine for the liver "Medicine" are well-known brands, which are either companies under the same sponsoring corporations or products endorsed by team players. Therefore, in contrast to the associations of performance and setting elements, the associations under the auxiliary element are relatively peripheral to the brand.

The presence of the "Game-fixing" association that is an association directly related to the CSR issue is notable. This association, which comes under the obligatory (legal) or contextual (ethical) dimensions of CSR as proposed by Carroll (1979), is consistently present in all the consensus maps of fans or non-fans. Its first-order presence and its interconnections to other associations such as "Baseball," "CY/CW," and "Champion" may also signal its importance in the brand concept and its effect on the brand. This agrees with the finding by Walker and Kent (2009) on the role of CSR on sport organization, where CSR plays an important role in consumer evaluations of reputation and patronage toward sports organizations. Godfrey (2009) further indicated that sports institutions, as a dynamic social institution imbued with values (e.g., education, spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play) and as a fixture of social life, are continually seeking and redefining legitimacy within the social order. In this sense, CSR may be viewed as a relevant issue for sports institutions. Placing the "Game-fixing" association under the setting element is also consistent with the understanding of Gladden and Funk (2002), who viewed ethical management tradition as a non-product attribute of a sports entity.

The consistent presence and connection strength of the "Game-fixing" association in all the consensus maps may indicate its centrality. Fans and non-fans have included this association in their brand perceptions. Although these teams are involved in various CSR activities, only the negative aspect is remembered. This may be because of the effect of the "Game-fixing" incident on the game and team. However, it may also be due to low media coverage and low awareness of people on CRS activities.

Keller (1993) suggested that brand associations may represent the meaning and value consumers attach to a product. Bauer, Sauer, and Exler (2005) indicated that, similar to consumers of other products and services, sports consumers do not buy product features and attributes as such, but instead buy the values and meanings consumers attach to the brand to satisfy their underlying consumption needs and motivations. This is consistent with Levitt (1980), who stated that a product often represents a complex cluster of value satisfactions to consumers, who attach value to the product according to its perceived ability to meet their needs. Woodruff (1997) also proposed

that customer value can be viewed as customer-perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate achieving customer goals and purposes in use situations.

For values that consumers attach to a brand, Sheth et al. (1991) identified five consumption values—"functional," "social," "emotional," "epistemic," and "conditional"—that influence consumer purchase and choice behavior. Functional value is related to the perceived utility of a product or service in achieving personal goals. Sargeant et al. (2006) referred to this as "demonstrable utility." Epistemic value is associated with benefits derived from how a product or service can effectively incite curiosity, provide novelty, or satisfy desire for knowledge. Emotional value relates to the benefits obtained through the capability of products and services to incite feelings and affective states. Social value is the benefits derived from the association of the consumer to certain social groups. Lastly, conditional value corresponds to benefits that reflect the fit between the consumer and the specific situation faced. Khalifa (2004) proposed that a brand that satisfies the practical needs of a customer delivers functional value, whereas a brand that satisfies the self-expression needs of a customer delivers symbolic value. Therefore, in this research, we propose considering symbolic value related to sports brand.

Therefore, we propose a conceptualization framework for a sports brand as follows (Table 5): The framework for understanding a sports brand is intended to link the core concepts and peripheral associations, which are related to the elements of performance, setting, and auxiliary, to the possible values they represent for people. Differentiating between core and peripheral associations are potentially critical to the segmenting of and communication with specific markets. Core associations are more closely related to those factors of a particular brand, which is within the direct control of team management that can be leveraged. Peripheral associations, which are supplementary and often are beyond the direct control of the management, must be closely monitored and leveraged because they may be crucial to consumer concepts of a brand.

Table 5. Brand Conceptualization Framework

Category	Elements	Associations	Determinants
Core	Performance	Baseball, CY, CW, Champion	Symbolic value, Social value, Emotional value
	Setting	Lion, Elephant, Yellow, Game-fixing	Symbolic value, Social value, Emotional value
Peripheral	Auxiliary	7-11, Food, Medicine, Hotel, Corporation, Discount,	Functional value, Conditional Value

5.2 Network Level

Comparing the consensus maps, the fan and non-fan maps, and the Elephant and Lions team maps shows similar patterns, despite the slight difference in interconnections between associations. This may indicate a relatively high consensus among people as to whether they are a fan or non-fan of a particular team, in their concepts of these well-known baseball brands. These findings are consistent with the low differentiation shown in the nomological validity analysis between fans and non-fans. This uniformity among fan and non-fan consensus maps may be because baseball is the most popular sport in Taiwan, where people may have relatively high awareness of the sport and a team, although they may not be a fan of the sport or a particular team. This research not only identifies similar patterns existing on the interconnections of associations, but also on the elemental level.

This study observes the following two key elements that are frequently linked in consensus maps: performance and setting. Performance elements such as "Baseball," players "CS/CW," and "Champion" are often connected to the setting element such as "Game-fixing" and "Yellow." These two elements of performance and setting are the core elements of a sports brand, which are factors directly related to teams and sports. Therefore, they are often connected in brand concepts as indicated by Bauer, Sauer, and Exler (2005) and Gladden and Funk (2002). The connections at the first-order level may also indicate the centrality of these elements in the brand concept. Therefore, the pattern of performance and setting elements may be used in combination to draw up a workable marketing strategy.

Regarding the Lions team maps, the performance element is also connected to the auxiliary element. Associations such as "Champion" and "Baseball," which belong to the performance element, are connected to the association of "Discount" of the auxiliary element in the case of the Lions. This may be because when the Lions previously won the league, 7-11 convenience stores, which are under the same corporation, gave discounts nationwide. In the Elephant case, the association of "CW" has also been frequently connected to the association of "Medicine." The player "CW" is the one who has endorsed liver medication, a well-known advertisement. This combination of performance and auxiliary may therefore be another marketing combination that is useful for marketers in

enhancing brand concept and image.

The patterns of “Game-fixing”-”Baseball” or “Game-fixing”-”CS/CW” related to brand are frequently connected. Regarding the Elephant team, who was involved in the game-fixing incident, the “Game-fixing” association is directly connected to the brand, whereas for the Lions team, the “Baseball” association is indirectly connected. In the Elephant team case, the “Game-fixing” association is also directly connected to the player associations “CY.” These observations may be a significant indication of the effect of socially irresponsible behavior on brand image. The first-order connection of an association is considered a central association to a brand according to BCM theory. Management should consider the implication of this connection pattern, where a negative association is formed, directly connected to the brand, as in other significant associations of a brand concept. As indicated, the game-fixing incident has hit the league hard; therefore, the “Game-fixing” association is connected to the sport “Baseball” is all the consensus maps. This may be why the Lions were not involved directly in the incident on the association existing in both of the consensus maps at the second-order level. However, this may have a relatively less effect on the brand because the association is at the second-order level. The interconnectivity of this association of “Game-fixing” to the game “Baseball,” to the achievement “Champion” and the players “CY,” could indicate the directions and factors involved in restoring the reputation and image of the team and the game. Therefore, measures such as players’ positive image, regulated contract, commitment to discipline, and game ethics may be partial management considerations.

The associations of the auxiliary element are often either directly connected to the brand without being connected to other associations, or connected among themselves, forming a subnetwork. The “7-11” association, which is a significant brand, is frequently connected to the Lions team. Similarly, the “Brother Hotel,” which is also a well-known hotel, is also connected directly and consistently to the Elephant team. The subnetwork formed by the associations that belong to auxiliary elements such as “7-11,” “Discount,” “Corporation,” and “Food” can be another sign of the familiarity and centrality of these associations to people. Previous studies have neglected the possible roles and contributions of these associations from related corporations, products, and benefits. However, in this study, the constant presence and interconnectivities of these associations show that the functional and conditional values or the utility aspect cannot be overlooked in brand concepts. These associations can be a useful supplement in enhancing the brand concept other than the core associations.

As indicated, a frequently mentioned association with numerous interconnections is considered a “core” association if the frequency of interconnections is understood as the degree of centrality that an association has within a complete belief and attitude system (John et al., 2006). From the consensus map, “Baseball,” “CY/CW,” and “7-11” are these core associations, with high interconnections. Therefore, these associations can be employed by marketers in communications with various market segments and as a means of connecting other attributes. The associations, other than “Baseball,” “CY/CW,” and “7-11,” “Yellow,” “Medicine,” “Champion,” and “Discount,” are also useful associations in marketing segmentation because of their centrality and interconnectivity in conceptualizing respective brands. Therefore, the direct and indirect connections provide links to specific brands, thereby making these elements useful for differentiating between consumers. The “association rule” employed in data mining association analysis is in agreement with the concept proposed here. On the negative side, the “Game-fixing” association may be a key association that marketers should not overlook and should overcome to communicate a more positive brand image.

Finally, the conceptual combination of applying basic mental operations to existing knowledge structures is significantly related to Ward’s (2004) proposal that creativity is the source of novel and useful ideas; two previously separate concepts (or associations) can be synthesized into a new unit. Therefore, the results of this study provide possible candidates for this type of combination, leading to creative communication and marketing appeals and an advantageous brand image that has a positive effect on people’s attitudes and behaviors. In addition, Ward (2004) also indicated that another potential element for creativity is analogical reasoning that applies or projects existing structured knowledge from a known domain to a novel or obscure one. The potential paths or directions for this application are provided by the interconnections of associations in the BCM maps.

5.3 Contributions and Limitations

The research contributes to an understanding of the CSR effect on the sports organization image from a marketing perspective and adds to its knowledge from a customer perspective to enhance understanding of brand concept. Second, in this research, we also identify the associations, elements, and values useful in communicating and maintaining interest group relationships. These identified factors could also be useful in detecting and developing prospective fans and patronages. The consistency and stability of these relevant factors should be maintained; furthermore, these findings are potentially useful in the identification of factors that are inconsistent with how

organizational image is perceived and those that are incompatible with brand concepts. Third, this study attempts to provide methodological advancements by introducing the BCM. The customer concept is viewed as a network of interconnected associations that indicate potential attribute combinations in donor segmentation and communication, and provides enhanced information in understanding complex conceptual perceptions. This study employs the BCM to develop a structural and visual representation of brand associations and provides a simple management tool.

However, several issues remain. Although this study investigates how CSR and other factors may affect sports organizations, this is by no means an exhaustive one. This study uses Taiwanese baseball teams as a sample and is based on the findings of in-depth studies that have examined features that are common of core and peripheral factors. However, further testing may be required before these findings can be generalized. Specifically, further empirical testing must be conducted on the associations and elements related to sports brand concepts, as well as their weight to the brand, and how the image of the organization is perceived. Similarly, although this research has shown substantial evidence that the CSR aspect plays an important role in the sports brand concept, it is limited to the negative effect of socially irresponsible behavior. The positive effect of CSR to a brand is unclear and may need further investigation. Furthermore, future research can also consider procedures that assess the nature of a relationship, as indicated by John et al. (2006). Determining the type of relationships (i.e., causal, correlations, or other) among associations or between brands and associations will be useful information for improving the accuracy of decisions made by management. The inclusion of teams from different sports, countries, or of different sizes as moderating variables will enrich this study by providing a greater understanding of the relationships of these factors to sports brand concepts and how organizational image is perceived.

6. Conclusion

CSR is an important means for sports organizations to simultaneously fulfill their social goals and improve their brand equity, consequently leading to building reputation and patronage intention. For sports institutions, viewed as a dynamic social institution seeking to redefine its legitimacy within society, the CSR issue is unavoidable. This study elicits seven significant associations, together with the “Game-fixing” association, which belongs to the CSR realm, which is found to have a direct brand effect. Despite the differences among BCM maps in how these associations are related to the brands and how they are interconnected, a conceptual structure is identified. These associations can be grouped under the elements of performance, setting, and auxiliary because their close relationship with the associations. These are significant elements in a sports brand concept, and these associations may indicate different perceived values that people hold in considering a sports brand. The presence of setting and auxiliary elements in the sports brand concept is consistent with the findings that team performance is no longer a guarantee of a strong balance sheet. Various network patterns of these elements are also identified in this research, where the CSR factor plays a significant role in contributing to the setting element. Although the auxiliary element may not directly affect brand purchase and consumption, the evidence supports that it is crucial in supplementing the brand concept. From a marketing perspective, individual and network level associations are valuable for developing effective strategic-marketing plans such as loyalty development and fans preservation. The BCM assists in identifying and graphically representing critical associations and their interconnections, thereby providing management with practical features to develop, leverage, and focus on.

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