

# Association of Spectators Based Brand Equity (SBBE) and Fans Attendance: A Case of Selangor Football Fans



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**Abstract** The concept of brand equity is often used to analyze how a brand can add value to a product or service. Brand researchers have developed several conceptualizations of brands equity in understanding consumer behavior in different industry. However, there is a paucity of research utilizing the brand equity concepts in comprehending sports consumer in supporting successful sports team. Thus, the present study aims to examine the relationship of brand association and brand awareness with the attendance of Selangor football fans, utilizing the Spectator-Based Brands Equity (SBBE) model. Convenience sampling technique was used to involve 150 Selangor football fans attending football matches in Stadium Shah Alam, as respondents. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaire. In brand association, three dimensions with the highest mean are team history ( $M = 5.99$ ), followed by commitment ( $M = 5.81$ ), and team success ( $M = 5.68$ ). As for brands awareness, identification ( $M = 5.78$ ) has a higher mean than internalization ( $M = 5.37$ ). Both brand awareness ( $r = 0.638, p < 0.001$ ), and brand association ( $r = 0.572, p < 0.001$ ) are significantly related to attendance of fans. In conclusion, brands awareness plays a more important role in influencing the attendance of Selangor Football fans. Several suggestions are discussed and recommended for Selangor FA to attract more supporters and sustain fans attendance.

**Keywords** Brand equity · Brand association · Brand awareness

## 1 Introduction

Football is the most popular sport not only in Malaysia but also in the world. Professional football (soccer) is recognized as the sport with the most followers (and viewers) on the planet [1]. The most popular football league tournament among Malaysian spectators is the Malaysia Cup, which is managed by Malaysia Football

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© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2019  
N. Sulaiman et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 3rd International Colloquium on Sports Science, Exercise, Engineering and Technology*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6772-3\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6772-3_17)

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Association (FAM). Malaysia Cup is contested by the top sixteen football clubs in the country. Selangor Football Association (SFA) has won this Cup for 23 times (until 2015) since the cup have been introduced in 1921, and is the most successful team in Malaysia. The Selangor team has a large number of supporters and fans that indirectly contributed to the success of the team over the years. In Malaysia Cup, football spectators are increasing every season. It reflects a good development process of Malaysian football industry. To enhance positive behavior and attract more people to support the teams, the associations and the management need to improve their quality in all aspects to ensure consumers or spectators will continue buying their products and support the football teams. This is one of the essential marketing strategies that need to be emphasized in order to warrant that the product meets consumer's choice.

Building a strong brand in consumer's mind is one of the most important ways for marketers to achieve the goal of product and brand management [2]. Many companies use the concept of brand equity to understand the success of their product among the consumers. Brand researchers have developed several conceptualizations of brands and how brands affect consumer behavior of current and future purchases [3]. Earlier models—such as Aaker's [4] brand equity model and Keller's [5] customer-based brand equity model—have focused heavily on how consumer perceive and evaluate brands by investigating certain knowledge structures such as loyalty, awareness, and perceive quality [4]. Ross [6] has introduced the Spectator-Based Brands Equity (SBBE) model with an attempt to comprehend how consumer evaluates and choose a sports service. The SBBE model consists of two components: brand association and brand awareness. In relation to a sports team, this could be an evaluation tool for the marketers or sport manager to evaluate and develop strategies which can be beneficial in developing an effective brands equity for the team. It is also possible to identify the consumer choice when they support their team based on the elements outlined in brand association and brands awareness.

Many previous researches on brand equity study have focused on the sports products such as replacement on brand lining [7]. There is a paucity of research on brands equity in relation to spectators. Previous research by Ross et al. [8] has involved consumers from a National Basketball Association. There are also other studies using customer-based brand equity (CBBE) which focus on European Clubs, focusing on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and engagement impact [1]. Though Spectator-Based Brand Equity (SBBE) model has been introduced in understanding professional soccer spectators in Portuguese league [9], the model has not been applied to the local Malaysian soccer spectators or fans. In terms of methodology, previous research has been conducted using online survey technique [9]. The researcher also suggested that collecting additional data at the actual stadium may contribute to a more representative sample of the club's fan base. Thus, the present study aims to examine the relationship between SBBE and attendance of sports fans involving Selangor football fans attending matches at the stadium. Specifically, the SBBE model examines the relationship of brands awareness and brands association toward the behavioral intention of Selangor football fans to watch matches of Selangor team at the stadium.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The survey method was used to gather information from the Selangor football fans involving close-ended questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was utilized, whereby self-administered questionnaire was distributed to 150 Selangor fans who came to Stadium Shah Alam to support their team. Respondents were met on-site and were kindly asked to participate in the survey voluntarily. The researcher was present throughout the session to answer any question from the respondents, relating to the questionnaires. No time limit was placed on the respondents to complete the inventory. The age of the respondents in the study was at least 18 years old and above.

### **2.2 Instrumentation**

For better comprehension of the respondents, the research questionnaire was prepared in both English and Malay language and was designed in four sections. The first section is about demographic background of the respondents, with questions related to gender, age, race, marital status, and occupation. The second section consists of 29 items, adapted from the Spectator-Based Brand Equity Scale [9], which measures the nine dimensions of brand association. The nine dimensions were brands mark, rivalry, social interaction, team history, team success, non-player personnel, stadium community, commitment, and stadium community. In the third section, eight items were used to measure brand awareness, which comprises two dimensions (identification and internalization). For the final section, behavioral intention of fans was measured by four items. Seven-point Likert scale was used for the entire questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted with 40 respondents to test the validity and reliability of the survey instrument. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for brand association was  $\alpha = 0.94$ , brand awareness was  $\alpha = 0.90$ , and behavioral intention was  $\alpha = 0.87$ . The instrument was considered to have acceptable reliability, with alpha value greater than 0.70.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Ver.21). For demographic variables (gender, age, race, marital status, and occupation) of respondents, descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequencies, mean, and ranking was used to explain and describe the findings. Pearson correlation was used to examine the strength of the relationship between the independent variables (brand association and brand awareness) and dependent variable (behavioral intention).

**Table 1** Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic characteristics		Frequency ( <i>N</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 150)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	121	80.7
	Female	29	19.3
Age	18–24 years	54	36.0
	25–31 years	62	41.3
	32 years and above	34	22.7
Marital status	Single	103	68.7
	Married	47	31.3
Ethnicity	Malay	120	80.0
	Chinese	15	10.0
	Indian	15	10.0
Occupation	Public sector	26	17.3
	Private sector	37	24.7
	Self-employed	31	20.7
	Unemployed	10	6.7
	Student	46	30.6

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The results of the demographic background of respondents were summarized in Table 1. In terms of gender, majority of the respondents were male (80.7%), while 19.3% of the respondents were female.

With regards to age group, most of the respondents were young adults with 77.3% aged from 18 to 31 years old. Corresponding to marital status, single respondents (68.7%) were more than respondents who are married (31.3%). In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents were Malays (80%), followed by Chinese (10%), and Indian (10%). The result reflects the true composition of ethnic groups in Malaysia, whereby Malay is the dominant ethnic group followed by Chinese and Indian. Among the respondents, student has the highest percentage (30.6%), followed by fans from the private sectors (24.7%), and self-employed (20.7%).

#### 3.2 Dimensions of Brand Association and Brand Awareness

Table 2 below depicts the descriptive statistic for nine dimensions of brands association that includes team history, commitment, rivalry, team success, brands mark, stadium community, organizational attributes, social interact, and non-player per-

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of brands association and brand awareness

Dimensions	Mean	Std. deviation	Rank
<i>Brand association</i>			
Team history	5.99	0.87	1
Commitment	5.81	0.81	2
Team success	5.68	0.83	3
Brand mark	5.66	0.35	4
Stadium community	5.64	0.52	5
Organizational attributes	5.52	0.84	6
Social interact	5.52	0.98	7
Non-player personnel	5.52	0.93	8
Rivalry	4.94	0.77	9
Overall mean	5.58	0.76	
<i>Brand awareness</i>			
Identification	5.78	1.08	1
Internalization	5.37	1.21	2
Overall mean	5.57	1.45	

sonnel. Team history dimension has the highest mean of 5.99 compared to other dimensions in brands association. As for brand awareness, there are two dimensions identification and internalization. Comparatively, identification dimension has the higher mean value ( $m = 5.78$ ), than internalization dimension ( $m = 5.37$ )

### 3.3 Correlation Between Dimensions of Brand Association, Brand Awareness, and Behavioral Intention

From the result in Table 3, the highest correlation between the dimensions of brands associated with behavioral intention is “organizational attributes” ( $r = 0.543$ ). The second and third highest dimensions are “social interaction” ( $r = 0.537$ ), and “team success” ( $r = 0.507$ ). For the dimensions of brand awareness, “internalization” ( $r = 0.583$ ) has a higher correlation with behavioral intention compared to “identification” dimension ( $r = 0.583$ ).

Among the dimensions of brands association, “organizational attributes” has the highest correlation with behavioral intention. Organizational attributes encompass values and behavior that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization. It was found that Selangor football team had regularly organized meetings and great session with their fans. This kind of program depicts the symbolic appreciation of the Selangor to their football fans for their all-time support. Biscaia et al. [3] has highlighted the importance of non-product-related attributes in sports organizations. McAlexander et al. [10] agree that implementing annual fan

**Table 3** Correlations between dimensions of brands association, brand awareness and behavioral intention

Brands association	Behavioral intention	
	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Organizational attributes	0.543**	0.000
Social interaction	0.537**	0.000
Team success	0.507**	0.000
Non-player personnel	0.492**	0.000
Rivalry	0.458**	0.000
Stadium community	0.419**	0.000
Brands mark	0.325**	0.000
Team history	0.309**	0.000
Commitment	0.295**	0.000
<i>Brands awareness</i>		
Internalization	0.583**	0.000
Identification	0.537**	0.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

satisfaction survey may prove to be crucial in designing marketing programs that strengthen fans' connection with the team, and positively influence their perception about the organizational attributes.

The "social interaction" dimension of brands association has the second highest correlation with behavioral intention. Social interaction is recognized as an exchange between two or more individuals and is a building block of society. In the current study, respondents indicated that the team offers a place to meet other people and spend times with friends. It means that many Selangor fans came to the stadium with their friends to build a positive relationship with others and provide opportunity interacting with their friends. Spectating alone would be boring even the match is interesting. This is related to the previous study that sharing the sports experience with other fans is another way of contributing to leveraging the sports team's brand [11]. The present finding is consistent with prior research by Bauer et al. [12], who found that social interaction was a significant predictor of brand association. Thus, suggesting that the experiential benefits are an important aspect of spectator's consumption experience.

"Team success" was the third highest related dimension with behavioral intention. Team success reflects the glory that the team has achieved in past and present, in which fans can remember and cherish. Selangor football team has proven its supremacy in the Malaysia Cup when the team had won the title for the 33rd time in 2015. With this unprecedented achievement, the team, in return, has showed their appreciation

for the support they had received from the fans over the years. As highlighted by Ross et al. [8], the consistency of a winning team and team success can influence the brand association dimension.

In terms of correlation between brand awareness and behavioral intention, internalization dimension ( $r = 0.583$ ) possess a stronger relationship than the “identification” dimension ( $r = 0.560$ ). The present finding supports the previous study which found that identification and internalization are important components of brands association [9, 12]. For internalization, Ross et al. [8] noted that an individual’s psychological connection with a team serves as a gage to his/her awareness of the sport brand. Keller [5] explained that brand awareness plays an important role in consumer decision making. In addition, Ross et al. [13] found that identification has a positive relation with social interaction. Their study suggested that by improving the quality of concession areas (e.g., partnerships with food companies that fans appreciate), the teams will boost opportunities for fans to socialize and consequently increase their levels of identification.

The present research findings support the spectator-based brand equity model that has been proposed by Ross [6]. Brand association and brand awareness are highly correlated with the behavioral intention of Selangor football fans’ attendance to the stadium. Recognizing the important role of “organizational attributes” in influencing attendance of football fans, managers should consider to promote more meaningful community program to attract and show appreciation to their fans. Activities such as hosting charity programs to raise fund helping the community in need, natural disaster victims or underprivileged community should be promoted. Fulfilling the community social responsibility (CSR) can indirectly influence the perception of the fans toward the team and enhance its brand image. This could generate the sense of belonging of the fans, which further develop a feeling of strong internalization towards the team.

For future study, it is recommended that more variables could be attempted using the SBBE model. For example, studies on impact of outcome variables such as media contracts, media consumption, and merchandise purchase behavior can be investigated. In the present research, female respondents were very limited. Previous research has mentioned that spectators perception about sporting events tends to vary according to gender. Thus, the future study based on gender difference is recommended. In addition, using SBBE model to examine on other sports and their attendance could also be attempted.

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