Symbolic purchase in sport: the roles of self-image congruence and perceived quality

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to discuss the notion of "symbolic purchase" which has long been documented in the management and marketing literature. In particular, self-congruity theory has been examined in various domains of consumer behavior. However, little attention has been paid to the area of sport. In sport business, licensed-merchandise (i.e. team apparel) has become an increasingly important revenue source and it strengthens fan identity and brand loyalty. Therefore, based on the self-congruity theory, the aim is to investigate the effect of self-image congruence on sport team-licensed merchandise evaluation and purchase.

Design/methodology/approach – A proposed model incorporates self-image congruence (SIC), perceived quality, and purchase intention of team-licensed merchandise. The reliabilities of the scaled measures were established in a pilot study ($n = 66$). Data ($n = 260$) for this study were collected at two professional basketball games using a convenient sampling method.

Findings – The results of the structural model indicated that the model fits the data well and constructs of self-image congruence and perceived quality combined explained 43 per cent of the total variance in purchase intention. The findings revealed that both SIC and perceived quality had a direct positive effect on purchase intention while perceived quality also acted as a mediator between SIC and purchase intention.

Research limitations/implications – The findings imply that SIC can be useful in predicting sport fans' quality perception and purchase decisions on the team-licensed merchandise. Future studies need to replicate this study in different regions and using different sports (i.e. soccer, baseball, etc.).

Originality/value – The findings extend the literature by incorporating self-image congruence and perceived product quality in the purchase decision-making process. This is the first known effort to apply self-congruity theory in the spectator sport consumption context.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Sales campaigns, Sports, Consumer marketing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The present study investigates the implications of self-image congruence (SIC) on sport team-licensed merchandise consumption. Licensing trademarks and copyrights have become an essential part of the business mix for sport properties (e.g. collegiate athletic department, professional teams/leagues) (Kolah, 2005). Specifically, sport properties have strategically implemented licensing business not only to increase sales but also to establish brand awareness in the marketplace (Sherman, 2003). From the consumers'

perspective, consuming team-licensed products (i.e. wearing team jerseys, hats) creates or maintains their connection with the team (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). Given that licensing business can be a viable revenue source and create opportunities for brand extensions, it is imperative for managers to understand how consumers make decisions to consume team-licensed merchandise. However, little research has been conducted to examine antecedents of team-licensed merchandise consumption from consumer behavior perspective.

In the consumer behavior literature, the notion of symbolic purchase (Levy, 1959) has long been documented how symbolic meaning (i.e. images) of the product motivates purchase decisions. In particular, self-congruity theory postulates that self-expressive motivation often triggers consumers to purchase goods and services (Sirgy, 1982). Thus the greater the match between the brand-user image with the consumer's self-image, the more likely that consumers will make favorable brand evaluations or preferences. Much of the consumer behavior research in self-image congruence has predicted various consumer behaviors, including product/brand preference (Fitzmaurice, 2005; Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Heath and Scott, 1998; Jamal and Goode, 2001), brand/service attitude (Hogg *et al.*, 2000), consumer satisfaction (Jamal and Goode, 2001), and loyalty (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006; Sirgy and Samli, 1985). However, little attention has been paid to applying the self-congruity theory in the spectator sport consumption domain. Furthermore, there has been a call for studies to apply self-congruity to the spectator sport consumption setting (Kang, 2002).

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the significance of image congruence between the consumer's self-concept and brand-user (i.e. team follower) image within the context of team-licensed merchandise consumption. Previous research suggested that self-congruity is positively associated with consumers' product evaluation and purchase behaviors (Graeff, 1996). It has also been consistently evidenced that consumers' subjective evaluation on the product quality has a direct impact on purchase decision (Tsiotsou, 2006). Therefore, the present study proposed a model that incorporates self-image congruence, perceived quality, and purchase intention of sport team-licensed merchandise. Specifically, the model conceptualizes that self-image congruence has positive and direct impacts on both perceived quality and intention to purchase the team merchandise while indirectly influence purchase intentions through perceived quality.

Theoretical backgrounds
Team-licensed merchandise
One area that sport franchises or intercollegiate athletic program can maximize the benefits of a team merchandise contract is through licensing (Hinckley, 2004). Licensing is a contractual method of developing and exploiting intellectual property by transferring rights of use to third parties (e.g., sub-licensees) without transfer of ownership (Sherman, 2003). Trademark and copyright owners are motivated to license for a variety of reasons. First, licensing generates a revenue stream from royalty remunerated by licensees (Sherman, 2003). For example, Ohio State University earned $5.2 million in royalty profits after its national football title in the 2002-2003 season (McCarthy, 2006). In professional sports, the National Football League Properties Division leads the US professional sport licensing industry by generating $3.1 billion

annually (Johnston, 2003). Second, from the consumer's perspective, purchasing and using team-licensed merchandise can strengthen the relationship between fans and the team (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). Fans can express their commitment and team loyalty by wearing team-licensed apparel. Kolah (2005) also argued that the consumption of team-licensed merchandise underpins fan identity and sense of belonging. Lastly, licensing can provide sport properties an opportunity to build their brand. For instance, Sherman (2003) suggested that the licensing of a trademark for application on a line of apparel helps to establish and increase brand awareness.

To date, however, only a few theoretical studies have been conducted on the consumption of team-licensed merchandise. For instance, Kwon and Armstrong (2002, 2006) conducted a study on team-licensed merchandise from a consumer behavioral perspective. They examined which factors are associated with impulsive purchase of licensed merchandise among college students by employing situational factors (e.g. time/money availability) and cognitive evaluative variables (e.g. sport team identification, shopping enjoyment). They found that the sport team identification (see Cialdini *et al.*, 1976) was the only significant antecedent to impulsive buying of team-licensed merchandise. Although their study contributed to our understanding of team-licensed merchandise consumption, they focused exclusively on the impulse aspect of buying behavior. Furthermore, it should be noted that only 30 per cent of respondents from their study (Kwon and Armstrong, 2002) reported to be involved with such impulse buying experience. Therefore, it remains to be explained what other factors (i.e. perceived product quality) are related to the consumers' decision to purchase team-licensed merchandise in a general consumption setting.

In addition, Kwon and Armstrong (2006) argued that sport consumers typically are motivated to purchase team-licensed products for their symbolic meaning rather than their functional attributes. This assertion provides rationale for the consideration of self-congruity theory, which has been well documented in the consumer behavior literature to explain symbolic purchase phenomena (Levy, 1959; Sirgy, 1982). Self-image congruency was preferred to fan identity in this study because the former may reflect the typical team-licensed product user as well as the typical fan of the team depending on the individual[1].

Self-congruity theory
The notion that people engage in behavior in a way that maintains or enhances their self-concept is based on the Rogers' (1951) self theory. Self theory posits that individual's behavior will be directed toward the protection and enhancement of his or her self-concept. Grounded in the self theory, marketing researchers have investigated a similar phenomenon in consumer behavior referred to as self-image congruity. The self-concept has been employed as a way of explaining product symbolism based on the notion that consumers are attracted to products that have a symbolic image most similar to their own self-concept. Levy (1959) contended that consumers are not functionally oriented and their behavior is significantly influenced by the symbols of products/brands as perceived in the marketplace. The symbolic meaning, associated with brands (i.e. teams, sponsors), is often expressed through the consumption and use of brands (Gottdeiner, 1985; McCracken, 1986). For example, fans can express their support for the team by purchasing and wearing their favorite team's apparel.

Based on Levy's proposition, the symbolic-purchase phenomenon has long served to enlighten consumer behavior researchers about the precise role of consumer's self-concepts on consumption behavior. While the term self-concept has long been considered from various perspectives, consumer behavior domain defines it as one's beliefs in the images that an individual has about one's self (Sirgy, 1982, 1986). Sirgy (1982) argued that the images encountered with product cues (e.g. names, logos) activate relevant self-image beliefs. The self-image beliefs evoked by product cues affect the perceived value or meaning of a product image. For example, if the brand image of a certain sport team provides an individual with a positive value for the relevant self-image, an individual would purchase the product and associate him- or herself with the team.

In the context of sport consumption, very few researchers (Brooks, 1998; Kang, 2002) have applied the notion of self-congruity. While Brooks (1998) suggested the applicability of using self-congruity theory in the study of sport consumers, Kang (2002) first empirically examined the theory in the participant sport consumption context. Kang developed a decision-making process model that integrates self-participant image congruency (i.e. actual and ideal), attitude, and intentions towards a given participant sports consumption setting. The study employed the consumption stereotype measure to gauge the degree of congruency between one's self-concept and the stereotypical participant's image in a given context of participant sport service. Findings indicated that both actual and ideal self-concepts are significant in one's decision to engage in sport or exercise participation. Although his study supported the findings from previous literature, he called for further studies to apply image congruence theory in the spectator sport consumption domain (see, Kang, 2002).

Perceived quality
Some researchers (e.g. Olshavsky, 1985; Holbrook and Corfman, 1985) view quality as a form of overall evaluation of a product, suggesting that quality is relatively a global value judgment. In conceptualizing perceived quality, Zeithaml (1998, p. 3) defined perceived quality as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority", suggesting that perceived quality can be subjective and differs from objective or actual quality. Extensive literature (Dodds and Monroe, 1985; Garvin, 1983; Holbrook and Corfman, 1985; Jacoby and Olson, 1985; Mitra and Golder, 2006; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996) has documented the difference between objective and perceived quality. For example, objective quality refers to the mechanistic and technical superiority or excellence of the product (e.g. Hjorth-Anderson, 1984; Monroe and Krishnan, 1985), whereas perceived quality involves subjective evaluation of the product from the consumer's perspective. However, it has been well established that it is not an objective quality but the customer's perception of quality that lead to preference and consequently satisfaction, loyalty, sales, and profitability (e.g., Aaker and Jacobson, 1994; Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Mitra and Golder, 2006; Zeithaml, 1998). Yet little is known about the significance of the consumers' quality perception of team-licensed merchandise on a purchase decision.

Among various antecedents of consumer's perceived quality of the product, previous studies (e.g. Chang and Wildt, 1994; Dodds, 1991; Dodds *et al.*, 1991) have tended to focus on the product's extrinsic cues (e.g. price, brand, advertising). In addition to certain product-specific information, however, a cognitive relationship

between consumers and products (i.e. image congruence) has been found to be a significant factor associated with consumers' perceptions of a given product's quality (Graeff, 1996; Pascale *et al.*, 2000). For example, Graeff (1996) found that subjective product evaluation is a positive function of the degree of congruence between a consumer's self-image and the image of the product or retail outlet. In a more recent study, Pascale *et al.* (2000) also found that product evaluation was a positive function of self-image congruence. Therefore, the more closely the consumer perceives him or herself with the stereotypic image of the product user, the more likely that he or she will possess favorable evaluative judgments about the product's quality.

A number of studies have examined empirically the effect of perceived quality on purchase intentions (Chang and Wildt, 1994; Dodds *et al.*, 1991; Monroe and Krishnan, 1985; Rajendran and Hariharan, 1996; Tsiotsou, 2006). Some studies have found an indirect relation between perceived quality and purchase intention mediated by perceived value (Chang and Wildt, 1994; Dodds *et al.*, 1991; Rajendran and Hariharan, 1996) and satisfaction (Tsiotsou, 2006). In some studies, perceived quality has been found to have a positive direct effect on purchase intentions (Boulding *et al.*, 1993; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996).

Therefore, based on previous research, the present study examined the effect of self-image congruence on perceived quality on purchase intentions of team-licensed merchandise. A proposed structural model is represented in Figure 1.

Methods
Pilot study
Prior to actual data collection, the pilot study ($n = 66$) was undertaken for several purposes. Since the measures were translated into Korean and the data were collected at the arena during a professional basketball game, the pilot study focused on evaluating internal consistency of the scale, factor structure, and time spent to answer. Data for the pilot study were collected at a Korean Basketball League (KBL) game during 2003-2004 Season using the convenience sampling procedures. The questionnaire included four constructs (i.e. actual SIC, ideal SIC, perceived quality, and purchase intentions). Reliabilities of the instruments were examined using Cronbach alpha and the items showed a very good reliability, ranging from 0.92 to 0.97 for each construct. In addition, exploratory factor analyses were performed for all latent variables to explore the factor structure of the constructs under investigation.
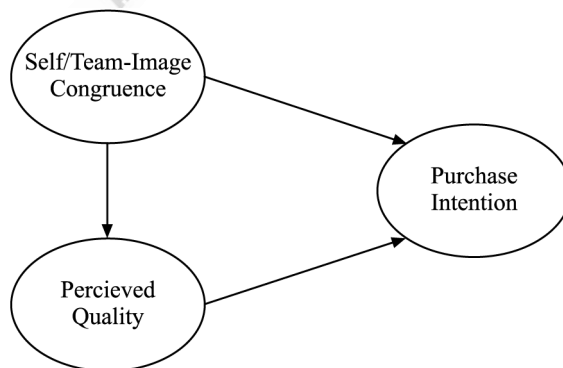

Figure 1.
Proposed structural model

The findings revealed that all the items for each latent variable loaded on the single factor as expected. On average, respondents spent about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Overall, the pilot study findings suggested that multi-item scales were reliable and each item loaded on the single latent factor.

Sample and data collection
The respondents ($n = 284$) for the main study were spectators at two professional basketball games (e.g., Korean Basketball League) during 2003-2004 Season. Two games were randomly chosen in two different metropolitan cities. Among 284 spectators received questionnaires a total of 260 respondents completed them, and were included in the actual data analysis. Female respondents made up of 48.7 per cent and males 51.3 per cent of the total sample. Respondents' ages ranged from 15 to 62 and 59.3 per cent of the total respondents were in the age group between 19 and 24 years old. Trained graduate students were located at in alternating seating sections to ensure more varied representation among spectators (i.e. floor seats, season ticket holders' seats, and regular seats). The same data collection protocol was used in two arenas. Graduate students distributed the questionnaires, along with a clipboard and pen, to the spectators before the game. They asked respondents to complete the scales measuring self-team image congruence, perceived quality, and purchase intentions, and then collected the questionnaires when the spectators had completed them. A free pen (with the university logo) was given to respondents for their participation. The purpose of the study and the instructions for completion of the survey were included with the questionnaire.

Instruments
The questionnaire included:

- SIC;
- perceived quality;
- purchase intentions; and
- background information.

Self-image congruence. A four-item SIC scale was adopted from Kang's (2002) self-participant image congruence scale. Based on Sirgy *et al.*'s (1997) study, Kang employed a direct measure to gauge the degree of image congruence between self and stereotypic image of sport participants. In order to address potential measurement problems with traditional methods, Sirgy *et al.* (1997) proposed a new method of measuring self-image congruence. The new method induces respondents to conjure up the product user images at the moment of response rather than through the use of some predetermined images. They then compared the predictive validity of the two methods and their findings showed a high predictive validity of the new method over and beyond the traditional one. As suggested by that research, the present study utilized a direct measure with two items for the actual self-concept and two items for the ideal self-concept. One item for the actual self-concept asked: "How much does your own actual self image (who do you think you actually are) and the perceived overall image of the typical team follower overlap?" The ideal-self concept is as follows: "How much does your own ideal self image (who you want to be) and the perceived overall image of the typical team

follower overlap?" The answers appear on a five-point scale from "not at all" to "nearly overlap." Another item with a similar question involved an eight-point scale with both diagrams and text. The SIC based on the actual self-concept is named actual-SIC (image congruency between the actual self-concept and the team follower image) and self/team-image congruence for the ideal self-concept is called ideal-SIC (image congruency between the ideal self-concept and the team follower image), respectively.

Perceived quality. Perceived quality was measured by three items selected from Dodds *et al.* (1991) and Zeithaml's (1998) perceived quality scales. Participants responded to the following questions: "The team-licensed merchandise should be of (very good quality to very poor quality)", "The likelihood that the team-licensed merchandise would be reliable is: (very high to very low), and "The workmanship of team-licensed merchandise would be: (very high to very low)" on a seven-point Likert-type scale.

Purchase intention. Purchase intentions were gauged by two items: "The likelihood of purchasing team licensed merchandise is: (very high to very low)", "My willingness to buy this product is: (very high to very low)" on seven-point Likert-type scale.

Data analysis
A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine psychometric properties of the measures using the EQS 6.1 statistical package. After CFA was conducted, general structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to examine the relationships among SIC, perceived quality, and purchase intentions. SEM was employed because it allowed the researchers to specify and test both the path (structural) model of the latent variables and the measurement model between the latent variables and the observed variables (see, Bollen, 1989; Kline, 1998). The use of SEM is justified given that the purpose of this study is to examine the relations among the psychological factors with measurement errors. For each scale, internal consistency measures (Cronbach alpha) were reported to indicate reliabilities. Univariate normality of the data was determined by examining skewness and kurtosis values. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) value was measured, which demonstrates whether each of the items contribute to the scale's underlying theoretical construct. AVE values above 0.50 indicated that the scales have good reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Results
The measurement model
Table I shows correlations, means, and standard deviations of the measures. In the measurement model, each indicator variable was predicted to load just one factor. CFAs for the measurement model of actual SIC, ideal SIC, perceived quality, and purchase intentions yielded a satisfactory fit. The chi-square value for the measurement models was significant ($\chi^2 = 40.92$, df $= 21$, $p = 0.00$), and standard root mean square residual (SRMR) $= 0.02$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) $= 0.06$, non-normed fit index (NNFI) $= 0.98$, comparative fit index (CFI) $= 0.99$. The selection of fit indices and their cutoff criteria was based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) suggestions, and the results indicated that the measurement model fit well to the data. The reliability of the measures was assessed using Cronbach alpha and average variance extracted (AVE) estimates. Table II presents Cronbach alpha and AVEs for each construct. All reliabilities are very high ranging from 0.87 to 0.96 and

	A-SIC 1	A-SIC 2	I-SIC 1	I-SIC 2	PQ1	PQ2	PQ3	PI1	PI2
A-SIC 1									
A-SIC 2	0.78*								
I-SIC 1	0.63*	0.56*							
I-SIC 2	0.52*	0.57*	0.85*						
PQ1	0.23*	0.16*	0.17*	0.14**					
PQ2	0.26*	0.16*	0.22*	0.16*	0.83*				
PQ3	0.30*	0.21*	0.24*	0.19*	0.76*	0.83*			
PI1	0.33*	0.29*	0.27*	0.25*	0.51*	0.52*	0.50*		
PI2	0.32*	0.26*	0.27*	0.26*	0.55*	0.57*	0.54*	0.92*	
Mean	4.55	4.22	4.7	4.46	4.3	4.21	4.4	4.01	4.16
SD	1.72	1.4	1.73	1.46	1.28	1.3	1.34	1.78	1.76

Table I.
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the measures

Note: * $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$. A-SIC, I-SIC, PQ, and PI stand for actual self-image congruence, ideal self-image congruence, perceived quality, and purchase intention

Construct	Cronbach alpha	Average variance extracted
Actual SIC	0.87	0.79
Ideal SIC	0.91	0.86
Perceived Quality	0.93	0.84
Purchase Intention	0.96	0.92

Table II.
Reliability and variance extracted of latent variables

Note: SIC = Self-image congruence

percentages of variance extracted by the latent construct ranged from 0.79 to 0.92 (greater than 0.50). Given the acceptable CFA model fit, high factor loadings (0.83 to 0.99) demonstrate that the measures of each construct possess convergent validity. In all cases, correlation among the constructs ranged from 0.28 to 0.67, providing evidence that actual SIC, ideal SIC, perceived quality, and intentions are distinct constructs.

The structural model
The second-order factor was introduced for SIC while specifying a structural model (see, Kang, 2002). The higher order latent factor was named overall SIC and encompasses both actual SIC and ideal SIC. The purpose of introducing the second-order factor is to examine the effect of overall image congruency in relation to perceived quality and purchase intentions.

   The results of the structural model indicate that the model fits the data well ($\chi^2 = 40.997$, df = 21, $p < 0.01$; CFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.023; RMSEA = 0.061, CI = 0.032, 0.088). Figure 2 demonstrates standardized parameter estimates for the structural model incorporating actual SIC, ideal SIC, perceived quality, and purchase intentions. The results indicate that the impact of overall SIC on intention is significant (0.19, $z = 2.66$). Overall SIC also showed the significant impact on perceived quality (0.32, $z = 4.45$). With respect to the perceived quality effect on purchase intention, the results were supportive (0.57, $z = 9.32$). The comparison of
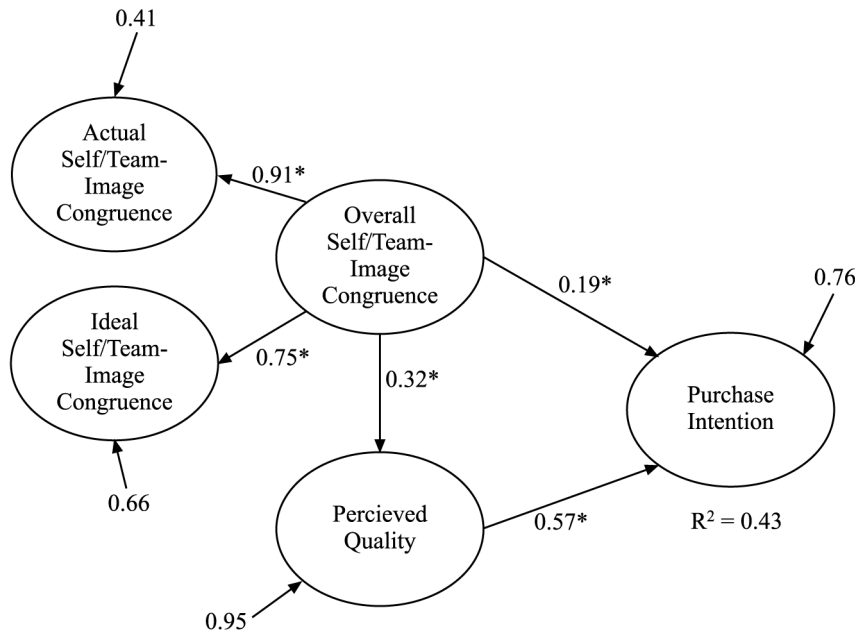
Note: *P < 0.05

standardized values of the parameter estimates suggests that perceived quality has a stronger impact on purchase intentions than overall SIC

Both actual SIC and ideal SIC play an important role in building the overall SIC as indicated by the path coefficients from overall SIC to actual SIC (0.91, $z = 4.03$) and from overall SIC to ideal SIC (0.75, $z = 4.38$). Figure 2 also shows that overall SIC explained 83 per cent of the variance in actual SIC and 56 per cent of the variance in ideal SIC respectively. The standardized parameter estimates in Figure 2 show that actual SIC is more important than ideal SIC in forming overall SIC. Taken together, the constructs of overall SIC and perceived quality explained 43 per cent of the variance in purchase intention. The study findings were all supportive of the proposed model incorporating SIC, perceived quality, and purchase intentions.

Discussion
Theoretical implications
The purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of SIC and perceived quality on purchase intentions of sport team-licensed merchandise. Although previous studies have examined the role of SIC on various consumer behaviors (i.e. brand preference, store loyalty, brand loyalty) (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006; Sirgy and Samli, 1985), the present study is the first known attempt to utilize the self-congruity theory in the framework of spectator sport consumption. The findings of the present study

contribute to the literature by providing implications of SIC on sport team-licensed merchandise consumption behavior.

In line with previous literature, the current findings lend support to the notion that matching consumer's self-concept and team follower's image can positively impact buying decision (Ericksen, 1996; Tsiotsou, 2006). Furthermore, the results of the study suggest that SIC has a biasing effect on product evaluation (see, Graeff, 1996). Thus, the results of the study provide additional evidence that SIC affects both quality perception and purchase intention of the team-licensed merchandise. The findings also suggest that perceived quality acted as a mediator between SIC and purchase intention. Perceived quality also had a direct positive impact on purchase intention which supports existing findings in the literature (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996).

In addition, the results of the study provide some new evidence on the antecedents of team-licensed merchandise purchase intentions. Although several studies have examined the role of self-image congruence on product evaluation and purchase intention (Fitzmaurice, 2005; Graeff, 1996), the present study conceptualized the model that incorporates both SIC and perceived quality as antecedents to purchase intention while perceived quality mediating between SIC and intentions. The current study findings indicated that both SIC and perceived quality explained 43 per cent of the variance in purchase intention and perceived quality had a stronger impact than SIC on intention.

Considering that SIC is the basis of both quality perception and purchase intention, the current study manifests the significance of SIC on sport team merchandise consumption. Therefore, it is conceivable to argue that sport team-licensed merchandise consumption phenomenon can be explained by the notion of symbolic purchase (e.g. Kwon and Armstrong, 2006; Wattanasuwan, 2005), which implies that consumers are motivated to purchase the product for its symbolic meaning (i.e. showing support for the team or desire for being part of the team).

Managerial implications
Our findings suggest that self-congruity plays a significant role in sport team-licensed merchandise consumption. Therefore, managers need to understand the important role of SIC on both perceived quality and intentions in order to better utilize their trademarks (i.e. name, symbol) in the marketplace. Sport fans consume the merchandise (i.e. team jersey) to identify themselves as a specific team's follower and also distinguish themselves from fans of other teams. Therefore, managers should conduct a market research to identify self-concepts of their target consumers and develop communication strategies to match the images of their fans. Specifically, the team personality should be tailored to meet the desired images of target segments.

The current study also found that quality perceptions of the products are likely to enhance purchase intentions and perceived quality had a stronger impact than SIC. Thus, managers are advised to recognize perceived quality as an important predictor of merchandise consumption. Given that most of the licensing business operates with the licensing agreement between the licensor (i.e. teams or properties) and the licensee (i.e. manufacturers), potential threats exist that the licensors cannot directly control the manufactured product quality (Cohen, 1986). Nevertheless, managers (i.e. licensors) should make every effort to exercise an adequate degree of quality control on the licensee to maintain or improve the quality of the merchandise. Quality control issue

seems to be particularly important for the developing leagues (i.e. KBL) as their licensing program is fairly new and has not firmly established yet. In addition to the effort for ensuring objective quality, strategic communications (i.e. advertisement) would help increase the quality perception of the merchandise (Kirmani, 1997).

Limitations and future research

There are obvious limitations to the study which limits the generalizability. Although respondents were attendants from two actual professional sporting events, the sample is not representative of the general spectator sport population. Thus, future studies should employ more diverse sports (i.e. football or baseball), varying playing levels (i.e. collegiate sports), and in different cultures (i.e. North America or Europe). Another conclusion that requires some caution is that the current study limited the category of team-licensed merchandise to physical goods (i.e. apparels). Although today's team-licensed merchandise categories have been diversified so much that they range from physical goods (i.e. accessories, apparel, etc.) to intangible products such as information products/services (e.g. internet and mobile services), the present study limited the category of licensed products to physical goods in order to clarify the meaning of the term (e.g. "licensed merchandise") to respondents. Therefore, the implications of this research should pertain to tangible product categories (i.e. apparel) as different product categories might have different relations among constructs.

Another consideration in evaluating our results concerns the direct measurement of the self-image congruence. Although the global and direct measure of self-image congruence uses parsimonious scale and more predictive than traditional approaches (i.e. Sirgy *et al.*, 1997), one can argue that it is difficult to identify which image property accounts for the congruity. Even though the current study supports that SIC was a significant predictor of both perceived quality and purchase intentions, the measure employed in the study does not provide further information on what specific image dimensions marketers should target for (i.e. Kang, 2002; Sirgy *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, future investigations should incorporate relevant image dimensions in measuring self-image congruence to explore which image characteristics are responsible for consumption behavior (see, Kressmann *et al.*, 2006). Conducting a pilot study would reduce the potential problem of selecting irrelevant image dimensions.

To be more consistent with Levy's (1959) proposition, future studies would need to consider using perceived value along with perceived quality (Zeithaml, 1998). Given that perceived quality is often converted to a utilitarian/functional aspect of a product, employing perceived value would provide additional information by capturing hedonic/symbolic characteristic of a product (see, Rajendran and Hariharan, 1996).

Although the primary focus of this study was to investigate the role of self-congruity in spectator sport consumption setting, it would be interesting to further examine the relationships between self-image congruence and some other theoretically relevant constructs. In the sport marketing literature, previous studies have well examined the marketing consequences of various fan and team relationship paradigms (i.e. fandom and team identification) (Funk and James, 2001; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Kwon and Armstrong, 2006; Madrigal, 2001; Wann *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, incorporating some other theoretically relevant constructs grounded in sport phenomena would further our understanding of symbolic purchase in spectator sport.

Overall, our study represents the first known effort to examine self-image congruence in the realm of spectator sport domain (see, Kang, 2002). The study advances the self-congruity literature by establishing the link between self-image congruence and team-licensed merchandise consumption behaviors. We found that matching consumers' self-concept and team personality is important in enhancing both perceived quality and purchase intention of the team-licensed merchandise.

Note

1. Fan identity is a kind of social identity. The first element of social (collective) identity is self-categorization, which is characterized by goodness of fit, perceived similarity, or prototypicality (Ashmore *et al.*, 2004). Prototypicality is defined as "a person's subjective assessment of the degree to which he or she is a prototypical member of the group." Meanwhile, self-image congruency is an individual's perception of the degree of similarity between the self and the prototypical product user (Bacon, 1989). Self-image congruency appears to be very similar to fan identity in that both are an individual's subjective perceptions of the self in relation to a stereotypical person. However, it is believed that self-image congruency is more general and more flexible.

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