



## Effects of Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Perceived Quality, and Brand Loyalty on Overall Brand Equity in Sport. A Case Study of an Amateur Football Sports Club

### Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
- C) analysis and interpretation of data
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### Abstract

The primary objective of this research endeavor outlined in the thesis was to evaluate the impact of the individual dimensions of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) – brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality and brand loyalty – on the overall brand capital of the researched amateur football club Talent Warszawa. The author sought to discern which among the individual dimensions of CBBE exerted the most significant influence on fostering the overall brand capital of the club under examination. A questionnaire was distributed amongst the constituents of Talent Warszawa, including players, parents and guardians, players' families, and supporters of amateur football. The survey garnered responses from a total of 102 stakeholders affiliated with the club. The reliability of the measurement scale was validated through Cronbach's Alpha analysis.

The findings of the study evince a positive correlation among all variables under scrutiny, encompassing brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and the overarching construct of CBBE. Notably, perceived quality emerged as the factor showing the highest positive correlation (0.88), thus indicating the most robust positive association with CBBE. However, despite the observed positive relationship, brand awareness manifested the lowest correlation with the overall consumer-based brand equity (0.70), relative to the other investigated factors.

Using the insights from this study, amateur sports clubs can strategically manage brand elements to foster brand equity, emphasizing the importance of brand awareness as an initial step in building a positive brand image and fostering fan engagement and loyalty. Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into effective brand management strategies for amateur sports clubs to enhance their brand equity and foster enduring relationships with fans.

**Key words:** Customer-Based Brand Equity, CBBE, sports clubs, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty

### Introduction

The rapid development of the sports market has created strong competition, with the emergence of a sport's brand serving as a distinguishing factor among its counterparts. Various entities contribute to the construction

of a sports brand, including sports organizations, events, equipment manufacturers, clubs, and individual athletes (Karg & Funk, 2020).

The cultivation of brand capital in sports constitutes a crucial aspect for both professional sports entities and individual athletes. The utilization of brand equity within

sports clubs is substantiated by numerous significant justifications and advantages, benefiting both the club itself and its stakeholders (Chadwick, 2022). Building brand equity in a sports club is construed as an investment in its continuing development. A robust brand serves as the bedrock for the stability and sustained advancement of the club, enabling its resilience in the ever-evolving sports environment (Smith et al., 2017). Moreover, a recognizable brand attracts talented players and coaches to the club (Parmentier & Fisher, 2012), while fostering an emotional connection with fans (Martín et al., 2020). Fan allegiance, thereby, translates into a reliable source of financial and emotional support for the club (Mansouri et al., 2024). Often serving as a cornerstone of the local community, sports clubs can use a strong brand to strengthen community ties by involving local residents in club activities and endorsing local initiatives (Misener et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a popular and respected sports club brand garners attention from sponsors (Cobbs & Groza, 2022), as companies are more inclined to invest in clubs with a robust brand to capitalize on their visibility and positive image (Tsordia, 2018). A strong brand also stimulates the sale of branded merchandise, which creates a significant revenue stream for sports clubs (Singh & Basu, 2022).

Utilizing brand equity within sports clubs yields numerous benefits that can bolster their achievements within both the athletic and commercial domains. Prioritizing investments in branding is a fundamental component of any sports club's strategic development plan (Karg & Funk, 2020). As posited by Blumrodt et al. (2012), a brand stands as a fundamental asset for every professional football club, prompting inquiry into its applicability across both professional and amateur fields. The question of whether amateur sports clubs can also cultivate a robust sports brand and its associated capital prompts investigation into the landscape of amateur football clubs. Consequently, this article endeavors to elucidate the intricacies of brand capital predicated on the consumer base of Talent Warszawa amateur football club. Research pertaining to this domain serves as the foundational step towards delineating the desirability, avenues, and efficacy of brand establishment, management, and image communication within non-professional football contexts.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of a Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model

Measuring brand equity is extremely important because it allows brands to compare their value with their competitors (Aaker, 1996). This assessment serves a dual purpose: for financial evaluation, and for enhancing marketing endeavors (Keller, 1993). For the latter objective,

the construction of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is undertaken, in order to gauge the brand's value to consumers. Research in this domain provides organizational managers with insights into the mechanisms for cultivating brand value for consumers (Swaminathan, 2016). Employing the CBBE model facilitates the development of more efficacious marketing strategies and a deeper comprehension of consumer behavior (Keller, 1993), thereby fostering enhanced brand management and competitive advantage within a specific operational sector (Lassar et al., 1995).

One of the initial attempts to delineate consumer-based brand equity was undertaken by Farquhar (1989, p. 24), who defined it as "the consumer's perceived value that the brand adds to the product." This concept drew upon the theory of Brand Concept Management (BCM) articulated by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986), who suggested a normative framework for selecting, implementing, and controlling brand image over time. These authors outlined three distinct stages for managing brand equity; namely, introduction, development, and reinforcement. During the introductory stage, an emphasis is placed on showcasing the product's quality as a basis for fostering a positive consumer perception, thereby laying the groundwork for brand image construction. This phase involves strategizing how the brand can serve as a platform for new products and extensions. Subsequently, in the development stage, efforts are directed towards solidifying and establishing the brand's position in the consumer's psyche, necessitating easy brand recall. At this juncture, the objective is to cultivate a distinctive bond between the brand and the consumer, with efforts focused on engendering brand loyalty. The final stage entails reinforcement.

The strategic approach involves leveraging the inherent equity of a brand by extending it to additional products. To attain a suitable competitive advantage, a brand association strategy must be formulated. This approach gave rise to the inaugural CBBE model, as articulated by Aaker (1991, p. 15), defining it as "a set of brand assets and liabilities, its name and symbol, which can be added to or subtracted from the overall value of the product/service to the company and its customers".

Within this model, Aaker (1996) delineates five dimensions of brands:

1. brand awareness,
2. brand association,
3. perceived quality,
4. brand loyalty,
5. other assets such as patents, trademarks, and distribution channel relationships.

The initial premise of the CBBE model (Aaker, 1996) stipulates that customers must possess awareness of the brand (*brand awareness*) for it to be entrenched in their consciousness and recognizable. Brand awareness can be cultivated through the implementation of effective market-

ing strategies such as advertising, promotions, and public relations. Another dimension of the model pertains to the establishment of positive and distinct *brand association*. A brand ought to exhibit clearly defined values, attributes, and characteristics with which customers can readily identify, aiding in contextualizing the brand for consumers. The third dimension pertains to perceived quality, wherein the brand must be perceived as offering high quality and value. Customers should harbor the belief that the brand is credible and capable of meeting their expectations. *Perceived quality* is contingent upon customers' encounters with the brand and their assessments of the products or services offered. Subsequently, the emphasis is on fostering customer loyalty to the brand, as loyal customers are inclined to engage in repeat purchases and advocate for the brand. Establishing an emotional connection and engendering trust between the brand and customers are pivotal in nurturing *brand loyalty* (Aaker, 1996; Akoglu & Özbek, 2021; Li et al., 2020). The fifth dimension is oftentimes overlooked in research as it does not directly address the consumer's perspective, primarily pertaining to the company (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). The components of the CBBE model can also be viewed collectively as a singular CBBE variable, referred to as Overall Brand Equity (Aaker, 1996).

Keller (1993, p. 8) introduces a conceptual framework of brand value centered on the perspective of the individual consumer. He defines CBBE as "the differential impact of brand knowledge on consumer response to brand marketing." Keller elucidates that a brand possesses positive (negative) customer-based brand equity when consumers react more (less) favorably to a marketing mix element associated with the brand compared to the same element attributed to a fictitious or unnamed version of the product or service. Brand knowledge is conceptualized within the associative network model of memory, comprising two components: brand awareness and brand image, which constitute a collection of brand memories. CBBE emerges when consumers possess awareness of the brand and harbor positive, robust, and distinctive brand associations within their memory. In Keller's framework, CBBE encompasses brand knowledge, comprising brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 1993).

By scrutinizing the individual dimensions of CBBE concerning brand image, brand perception, the associations evoked in consumers, and brand loyalty, it becomes feasible to investigate which brand values and characteristics hold significance for customers and the emotions evoked by the brand with its target audience. According to Sharp's (1995) conceptualization, factors such as brand/company awareness, brand image, and consumer relationships can exert an influence on CBBE. The brand equity model has undergone refinement and reinterpretation by numerous scholars (Kotler & Keller,

2016; Swaminathan, 2016; Keller & Brexendorf, 2019). Recent studies have pointed toward novel avenues for future CBBE research, addressing methodologies for measuring and managing brand value utilizing contemporary technologies and social media platforms (Vazquez et al. 2002; Keller, 2016; Swaminathan, 2016; Machado et al. 2019; Algharabat, 2020). For instance, social media platforms should be harnessed for more effective customer relationship management and relationship marketing to aid brands in delivering enhanced value to their customers (Keller, 2016).

### Brand Awareness

As posited by Aaker (1996, pp. 114–115), brand awareness is defined as "the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand belongs to a particular product category." In each instance, brand awareness pertains to the extent of recognition, acceptance, and recall of a brand by consumers (Perreault et al., 2013). Keller (2009) further elucidates that brand awareness encompasses the strength of attraction or affinity towards a brand, indicative of consumers' capacity to remember or recognize the brand. Kotler and Keller (2016) underscore the significance of brand awareness in fostering brand value, highlighting its role in the consumer's ability to identify a brand. This entails establishing meaningful distinctions between products or services. For branding strategies to yield efficacy and engender brand value, consumers must be persuaded of substantial disparities between brands within a given product or service category. Consequently, objects (e.g., Nike sports shoes), services (e.g., a ticket to a Champions League match or personal training at a gym), establishments (e.g., Nike or Adidas stores), individuals athletes (e.g., footballer Leo Messi), sports facilities (e.g., Wimbledon courts), organizations (e.g., Real Madrid football club), or even concepts (e.g., fair play) can be branded.

If consumers have encountered or heard of a brand at any point, they are capable of recognizing it (Brewera and Zhao, 2010). Therefore, brand awareness is intertwined with consumers' capacity to identify brands across diverse circumstances. Furthermore, as posited by Aaker (2015), brand awareness constitutes an asset that shapes consumers' perceptions, preferences, and behaviors. Hence, brand awareness assumes a pivotal role in consumer decision-making processes. Elevated brand awareness heightens the likelihood of selecting a specific brand and augments the level of brand loyalty (Mathewet et al., 2014). Brand awareness mitigates the time and risk consumers expend in seeking out a product for purchase. Consequently, consumers are inclined to opt for a brand they are acquainted with and knowledgeable about. Previous research has underscored the positive influence of brand awareness on brand loyalty (Bilgin, 2018; Kim & Petrick, 2018; Su & Chang, 2018; Tran et al., 2019).

Keller (1993) delineates brand awareness as the extent to which customers recognize and recall a brand across various purchasing contexts. In the context of sports clubs, brand awareness encompasses familiarity not only with the club name but also with its history, values, culture, and athletic accomplishments.

Currently, consumers acquire brand awareness through effective marketing communications (Rubio et al., 2014), with social media advertising serving as a prominent avenue. Well-crafted messages instill confidence in the product's quality and credibility, thereby mitigating the risk associated with judgment and product selection during purchase decisions. Brand awareness significantly influences consumer decision-making processes, thereby benefiting customer-based brand equity management (Chung et al., 2013; Sasmita et al., 2015). Consequently, brand awareness also exerts an impact on CBBE (Pina & Dias, 2021).

### Brand Association

Brand association pertains to the consumer's perception of the brand, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions (Dada, 2021). It encompasses a spectrum of feelings, opinions, thoughts, experiences, images, or attitudes linked with the brand (Gawrysiak et al., 2020). The more favorable these association, the greater the likelihood of consumer recall and the establishment of brand loyalty (Parganas et al., 2017). Marketing initiatives can thus be construed as a means of cultivating pertinent brand association by engendering positive experiences that resonate with consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

### Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is construed as "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service relative to its intended purpose vis-à-vis alternatives" (Aaker, 1996, p. 109). It furnishes consumers with compelling reasons to opt for a particular brand and enables it to distinguish itself amidst competition (Hu et al., 2024). Research underscores the affirmative influence of perceived quality on purchase intention (Tsiotsou, 2006; Jang et al., 2018).

### Brand Loyalty

Consumers' purchase decisions regarding a product or service are predominantly influenced by brand loyalty (Khandai et al., 2023). Brand loyalty stems from a strong sense of brand affiliation (Naghbi & Sadeghi, 2011) and is positively correlated with users' consistent purchasing behavior over time (Sheth, 1974). This loyalty denotes a consumer's commitment to persistently procure an organization's products and services despite competitive actions (Anagnostou & Tzetzis, 2021), indicating a dedication to remain a customer of the organization in the future (Chung & Welty Peachey, 2022). Jang et al.

(2008) contend that brand loyalty is linked to sustained usage or a commitment to acquire a favored product or service. Consumers exhibiting brand loyalty consistently repurchase their preferred product, thereby fostering repeat purchases of the same brand (Rincón et al., 2023).

Moreover, customers displaying brand loyalty have the potential to draw in new customers (Maderer & Holtbrügge, 2019) by recommending the brand to potential consumers, advocating for their purchase, and expressing favorable opinions about the brand (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). To enhance the overall brand equity, brand loyalty should be continuously reinforced (Keshtidar et al., 2018). Research underscores that a well-established level of brand loyalty positively impacts the CBBE and fosters brand preference over competing brands (Vogel et al., 2008; Severi & Ling, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014).

### Conceptualization and Hypotheses

The researcher aims to investigate the impact of individual CBBE constructs on the overall brand capital of the chosen amateur football club, Talent Warszawa. The central inquiry revolves around whether a consumer-based brand capital model can be constructed within amateur sports clubs. The research seeks to evaluate the influence of specific dimensions of consumer-based brand capital, namely brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, on the overall brand capital of the targeted amateur football club. The study endeavors to determine which of these dimensions exerts the most significant influence on shaping the overall brand capital of the club under examination. Additionally, the research aims to assess the overall brand capital of Talent Warszawa. The core objective is to ascertain whether amateur sports clubs can leverage consumer-based brand capital for marketing initiatives and relationship-building endeavors.

In line with the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Brand awareness positively impacts the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club.
- H2: Brand association exhibit a positive interaction with the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club.
- H3: Perceived brand quality demonstrates a positive interaction with the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club.
- H4: Brand loyalty positively influences the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club.

## Material and Methods

### Research Context

A significant gap exists within the sports marketing literature concerning branding initiatives and brand anal-

ysis within the realm of non-professional sports. Amateur sports clubs serve as the cornerstone of professional sports. The pronounced commercialization of professional football postulates a surge in the growth of the amateur sports market, particularly in urban locales where competition is fierce, necessitating adept marketing endeavors. Consequently, the researcher opted to investigate the extent of customer-based brand capital within an amateur football club situated in a metropolitan area, given the heightened competition that mandates professional marketing strategies.

The study was conducted among stakeholders of the amateur football club Talent Warszawa. Established in 2013, the club was founded with the primary objective of nurturing young talent. However, since 2019, a senior team has been incorporated into the club structure. Consequently, two distinct entities can be discerned within the Talent Warszawa framework: the Talent Warszawa club and its Academy. The senior team of Talent Warszawa has consistently achieved promotion each season since its inception, ascending from the B class (the 9th level of competition) by securing top positions in the district league. The junior teams enjoy widespread popularity among their peers, competing in premier provincial leagues and taking part in international tournaments. Currently, the most senior team within the Academy training setup is the U16 team, while the youngest team is the U7 team, comprising individuals born in 2016. Additionally, teams corresponding to various age groups are present, each consisting of approximately 20 actively training players.

### Research Instrument

Utilizing the conceptual framework of CBBE proposed by Aaker (1996), a survey questionnaire tailored to the amateur football club Talent Warszawa was devised. Each construct of the CBBE model was represented by three questions. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, where a score of 1 indicated 'definitely yes' and 5 corresponded to 'definitely no'. Additionally, demographic inquiries were included in the questionnaire, addressing respondent characteristics such as gender, age, education, income, and occupational status.

The reliability of the research instrument was assessed through scale reliability analysis employing Cronbach's Alpha index. This index serves as a measure of the internal consistency of the measurement scale, gauging the extent to which the questions within the instrument are interrelated. The analysis demonstrated satisfactory scale reliability, yielding an average Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.83.

### Data collection

Data were gathered through an online survey questionnaire targeting the community affiliated with the amateur football club under investigation, including players,

parents and guardians, players' families, and supporters. The survey was administered during the months of March and April 2023.

### Participants

A total of 102 stakeholders of the club participated in the study. The socio-demographic composition of the study population is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants' socioeconomic profile

Gender	N=102	%
Male	57	56.0
Female	45	44.0
<b>Age</b>		
0–18	18	18.0
19–26	15	15.0
27–36	17	17.0
37–54	50	49.0
55+	2	2.0
<b>Education</b>		
Primary	17	17.0
Vocational	3	2.0
Secondary	17	17.0
University	65	64.0
<b>Employment</b>		
Student	26	25.0
In full-time employment	76	75.0
Unemployed	0	0
<b>Income</b>		
Less than 1500 zł	21	21.0
1501–2500 zł	2	2.0
2501–3500 zł	11	11.0
3501–4500 zł	15	15.0
4500 zł +	49	50.0

The data analysis revealed that 56.0% of the study cohort were male participants, while 44.0% were female. The predominant age bracket among respondents was between 37 and 54 years, accounting for 49.0% of the sample. Comparable percentages were observed across other age groups: 18.0% fell within the 0–18 range, 15.0% within 19–26, and 17.0% within 27–35. A minor proportion of respondents (2.0%) were aged 55 or above.

In terms of educational attainment, 64.0% of respondents held a university degree, while 17.0% each possessed primary or secondary education qualifications. The majority of respondents (75.0%) were employed on a full-time basis, with the remaining 25.0% comprising students or pupils. Regarding income distribution, half of

the respondents reported earning more than PLN 4500 per month. Notably, 21.0% earned less than PLN 1500, 2.0% fell within the range of PLN 1501–2500, 11.0% between PLN 2501–3500, and 15.0% between PLN 3501–4500. Based on the socio-economic profile of the respondents, it can be inferred that the largest proportion consists of parents and guardians of children and young individuals affiliated with the Talent Warsaw club.

### Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis of quantitative variables involved computing the mean, standard deviation (SD), and median, as well as determining the frequency and percentage distribution of each value. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) was employed to assess the magnitude of the relationship between individual constructs of the CBBE model. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was adopted for all statistical tests, whereby values below 0.05 were deemed indicative of statistically significant relationships. The analyses were conducted utilizing the Statistica 13 software package.

### Results

An examination of the data pertaining to the constituents of the CBBE model, along with their indicators of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and statistical parameters (Mean, SD, Median), is delineated in Table 2.

The findings reveal a Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of 0.86 for brand awareness, indicative of a high level of consistency among respondents' responses to the inquiries regarding brand awareness. The mean score of 3.74 sug-

gests that, on average, respondents exhibit a considerable degree of awareness regarding the Talent Warsaw brand. However, the standard deviation (SD) of 1.33 indicates a notable diversity in respondents' responses. The median value of 4.0 implies that a majority of respondents possess a relatively strong familiarity with the Talent Warsaw brand. For the brand association aspect,  $\alpha = 0.74$  underscores the robust consistency in respondents' responses. The mean score of 3.78 and standard deviation of 0.93 signify relatively homogeneous responses among respondents. The median value of 4 further substantiates that a significant proportion of respondents harbor positive associations with the Talent Warsaw brand. Similarly, for perceived brand quality,  $\alpha = 0.74$  reaffirms the commendable consistency in respondents' responses. The mean score of 3.76 indicates a general perception of high quality attributed to the Talent Warsaw brand. However, the standard deviation of 1.04 highlights the diversity in respondents' assessments. Nonetheless, the median value of 4.0 reiterates that a majority of respondents perceive the Talent Warsaw brand to be of high quality. Furthermore, brand loyalty exhibited  $\alpha = 0.78$ , affirming the consistency in respondents' responses regarding brand loyalty. Notably, the highest mean score of 3.94 was observed for brand loyalty, indicating a relatively strong sense of loyalty among respondents towards the Talent Warsaw brand. Moreover, with a standard deviation of 1.12, respondents' responses exhibit a noteworthy degree of variability. Consistently, the median value of 4.0 underscores the prevailing loyalty among respondents towards the Talent Warsaw brand across all factors.

**Table 2.** Psychometric data of the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model

Items of CBBE model	Cronbach $\alpha$	Mean	SD	Median
<b>Brand awareness</b>	0.86	3.74	1.33	4.0
I have heard of Talent Warszawa football club		3.64	1.35	4.0
I am quite familiar with Talent Warszawa football club		3.23	1.45	3.5
I can recognize Talent Warszawa football club among other clubs		4.34	0.87	5.0
<b>Brand association</b>	0.74	3.78	0.93	4.0
Talent Warszawa football club brand has strong association		3.89	0.89	4.0
Talent Warszawa football club has favourable association		3.92	0.85	4.0
It is clear what Talent Warszawa football club stands for		3.54	1.01	4.0
<b>Perceived quality</b>	0.74	3.76	1.04	4.0
Talent Warszawa football club is good quality		3.74	1.02	4.0
Talent Warszawa football club has excellent features		3.73	1.05	4.0
Compared to other brands in its category, Talent Warszawa football club is of very high quality		3.82	1.05	4.0
<b>Brand loyalty</b>	0.78	3.94	1.12	4.0
I feel loyal to Talent Warszawa football club		4.05	1.05	4.0
Talent Warszawa football club is my first choice		3.82	1.21	4.0
I am committed to Talent Warszawa football club		3.94	1.11	4.0

**Table 3.** The results of the Spearman rank between dimensions of the amateur sports club brand

Variable	Brand awareness	Brand association	Perceived quality	Brand loyalty	CBBE
Brand awareness	1.00				0.70
Brand association	0.49	1.00			0.86
Perceived quality	0.43	0.74	1.00		0.88
Brand loyalty	0.33	0.63	0.69	1.00	0.81

The elevated Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the distinct components of the CBBE model underscore the consistency and reliability of the measurements, affirming the stability of these constructs within the study. However, it is crucial to contextualize the interpretation of these findings, considering the particulars of the survey methodology and the respondent demographics.

The findings of the Spearman rank correlation analysis, detailed in Table 3, elucidate the interrelationships among various dimensions of the sports club brand, including brand awareness, association, quality, loyalty, and overall brand equity (CBBE). The results consistently demonstrate positive associations across all variables examined. Notably, brand awareness exhibits the lowest correlation ( $\rho=0.70$ ) with overall brand equity compared to other factors, albeit still indicating a robust relationship with CBBE. Brand awareness manifests a moderate additive correlation with brand association ( $\rho=0.49$ ) and perceived quality ( $\rho=0.43$ ), and a weaker additive correlation with brand loyalty ( $\rho=0.33$ ).

Conversely, perceived quality displays the highest positive correlation ( $\rho=0.88$ ), signifying a very strong positive linkage with CBBE. Perceived quality demonstrates the most pronounced positive association with brand association ( $\rho=0.74$ ) and a moderate positive association with brand loyalty ( $\rho=0.69$ ). Brand association similarly exhibits a very strong positive correlation ( $\rho=0.86$ ) with overall brand equity. The correlation between brand loyalty and overall brand equity is 0.80, indicating a highly robust positive relationship between these variables.

The research outcomes underscore significant connections between distinct facets of a sports club's brand. The robust correlations observed between association, quality, and loyalty, and overall brand equity suggest their pivotal roles in fortifying a sports club's brand and fostering fan engagement and allegiance. Moreover, the elevated correlation between brand awareness and overall brand equity underscores the foundational importance of cultivating brand awareness in sculpting a positive brand image and enhancing brand worth for a sports club.

## Discussion

The research conducted revealed that the brand awareness of the Talent Warszawa club positively impacts its overall brand capital. This implies that higher brand awareness among the audience correlates with increased overall brand capital for the Talent Warszawa club. Thus, Hypothesis 1, stating that brand awareness has a positive effect on the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club, was supported. Spearman's rank correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among various dimensions of the sports club brand, including brand awareness, association, quality, loyalty, and overall brand equity (CBBE). Despite a positive relationship observed between these variables ( $\rho=0.70$ ), brand awareness exhibited the lowest degree of correlation compared to the other factors. The study suggests that while brand awareness is important, it is not the sole determinant of a sports club's overall brand equity.

In studies conducted by Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993), it has been demonstrated that brand awareness holds significant importance in the establishment of customer-based brand equity. Brand awareness serves as the fundamental pillar upon which consumer perceptions and preferences towards a brand are constructed (Keller, 1993). Greater brand awareness correlates with a heightened likelihood for customers to harbor positive associations with the brand and exhibit a propensity to engage in purchase decisions related to it. Enhanced brand awareness has the potential to augment customer-based brand equity by fostering positive associations and brand loyalty. According to Aaker's (1996) findings, heightened brand awareness can engender favorable brand association, subsequently leading to heightened brand loyalty. Customers are inclined to place greater trust and commitment in brands with which they possess familiarity and identification. Research indicates that sports clubs endowed with robust brand awareness typically demonstrate superior financial and athletic performance (Kunkel et al., 2016). Elevated brand awareness translates into heightened fan engagement, thereby resulting in increased

revenues derived from ticket sales, merchandise sales, and sponsorships (Merkle et al., 2020). A study by Funk and James (2006) examined the influence of brand awareness on the purchasing behaviors of sports club enthusiasts. Their findings suggest that heightened levels of brand awareness are positively associated with a greater propensity to purchase match tickets, club merchandise, and subscriptions to club services. Additionally, research by Reghunathan and Joseph (2021) underscores the pivotal role of brand awareness in shaping the overall perception of a sports club. The authors elucidate how brand elements are strategically employed by brand managers to establish distinct associations in consumers' minds, culminating in brand recall and recognition. Notably, brand elements exert a positive influence on fan loyalty towards a sports club. By discerning the key factors shaping fans' perceptions of a club, such as its historical legacy, sporting achievements, match ambiance, and emblematic symbols like jerseys or logos, sports clubs can cultivate a favorable brand image and foster fan loyalty (Shuv-Ami, 2016).

The findings indicate that positive brand associations also contribute to the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club. Hence, favorable brand association facilitates the enhancement of the overall brand capital for the Talent Warszawa club, confirming Hypothesis 2.

In a study by Guschwana (2018), it was demonstrated that positive brand association, such as emotional connections to the club, club reputation, and brand experiences, play a pivotal role in fostering greater fan loyalty. Brand association exerts a substantial influence on fan loyalty, club valuation, revenue generation, talent attraction, and community engagement, underscoring the significance of adept brand management in cultivating sustainable success for sports clubs (Anagnostou & Tzetzis, 2021; Suchao-in et al., 2021; Mazloomi Soveini, 2022). Prior research also indicates that positive brand associations are indispensable in crafting a robust brand image for a sports club (Mansouri et al., 2024). Favorable associations, such as sporting accomplishments, community involvement, or exemplary professionalism, bolster a club's reputation and contribute to the establishment of a formidable brand esteemed by fans and the broader community (Amu et al., 2024). Studies conducted by Azadi et al. (2015) and Mazloomi Soveini (2018) corroborate that positive brand association fosters fans' loyalty to a sports club.

Additionally, the research demonstrates that the perceived brand quality of the Talent Warszawa club significantly influences its overall brand capital positively. Consequently, the high standard of services or products offered contributes to the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club, confirming Hypothesis 3. Lastly, the research results validate that brand loyalty has a substantial positive impact on the CBBE of the Talent Warszawa club. Perceived quality demonstrated the highest positive

correlation ( $\rho=0.88$ ) with CBBE, indicating its pivotal role in influencing the sports club's overall brand equity. Furthermore, brand association displayed a robust positive correlation ( $\rho=0.86$ ) with CBBE, underscoring their significance in shaping the sports club's overall brand equity. Brand association exhibited a strong positive association with perceived quality ( $\rho=0.74$ ) and a moderate association with loyalty ( $\rho=0.69$ ), suggesting their substantial impact on perceived brand quality and fan loyalty. Additionally, the correlation between loyalty and overall brand equity was 0.81, indicating a strong positive relationship between these variables. Thus, the findings highlight the substantial influence of fan loyalty on the overall brand equity of a sports club. Increased fan loyalty correlates with higher CBBE, supporting Hypothesis 4, which posits that brand loyalty positively influences the overall brand capital of the Talent Warszawa club.

Akoglu and Özbek (2022) revealed a positive association between perceived quality and brand loyalty. Fans gravitate towards a club that embodies a high standard of quality, both on and off the field. Strong emotional bonds with the club engender heightened fan loyalty and dedication. The study conducted by Maderer et al. (2016) revealed a notable influence of brand associations on fan loyalty within the football industry. It was observed that fans exhibiting positive associations with a club's brand demonstrated a higher propensity towards displaying loyalty to said club. This loyalty was evidenced through their attendance at sporting events, purchase of club-related merchandise, and active engagement with the brand across various platforms. Similarly, Kaynak et al. (2008) identified a significant correlation between brand associations and fan loyalty within the realm of professional sports. The study underscored the importance of positive brand associations, encompassing elements such as the club's sporting achievements, historical background, organizational objectives, and the overall experiences of fans during sporting events, in fostering and enhancing fan loyalty towards the respective club.

## Conclusion

The findings underscore the significance of various components of a sports club's brand, including quality, brand association, brand loyalty, and brand awareness, in shaping overall brand equity (CBBE). The influence of these factors is multifaceted, encompassing not only direct brand associations but also the indirect ramifications of engagement and identification with the team. Thus, the development of a robust sports club brand necessitates the effective management of these factors to foster fan engagement and brand loyalty. Moreover, the results suggest that establishing brand awareness is an essential initial

step in cultivating a positive brand image and enhancing brand equity for a sports club.

Nonetheless, based on the conducted research, it is evident that perceived brand quality exerts the most substantial impact on the club's overall brand capital. The provision of high-quality services or products contributes significantly to the increase in the Talent Warszawa club's overall brand capital, thereby enhancing its long-term success and sustainability.

Prior studies indicate the efficacy of the CBBE model in developing robust club brands. Elevated levels of brand awareness can elevate overall customer-based equity by fostering positive associations, loyalty, and fan engagement with the sports club. The management of brand awareness can directly impact the augmentation of a sports club's CBBE. Through strategic marketing initiatives, promotional activities, community involvement, and the cultivation of a positive brand image, sports clubs can bolster brand awareness, thereby cultivating enduring connections with fans and subsequently fostering heightened loyalty and engagement. Sports organizations and their sponsors can use these insights to devise and execute marketing strategies aimed at increasing the overall brand equity.

### Study limitations

The limitations of this study stem primarily from the relatively small sample size of 102 individuals, and the focus on a single amateur club located in a large city. Consequently, the composition of the selected club's demographic profile may be predominantly homogeneous, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The outcomes derived from such a sample may lack applicability to the wider populace and may be constrained to the specific context of this particular football club. Given the intense competition prevalent in the sports market, further comprehensive investigations are warranted to delve deeper into the realm of consumer-based brand equity research within amateur sports clubs.

### Ethics approval and informed consent

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

### Competing interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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