Sports consumer-team relationship quality: development and psychometric evaluation of a scale

Keywords

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to develop the Sports Consumer-Team Relationship Quality Scale (SCTRQS). In Study I, content validity was established through a comprehensive review of literature and tests of content validity, including expert review. Based on the assessment of psychometric properties, theoretical relevance of the items and parsimoniousness of the scale, items were refined for two following studies. Results indicated that the SCTRQS would be a valid tool for marketers and managers to assess relationship quality with their consumers for marketing strategies, effectiveness of advertising campaigns, sponsorship value and value for stakeholders.

Executive summary

There has been increased attention in the field of sports marketing on relationship-building and relationship quality. These constructs are essential concepts that further our understanding of the relationship between the sports consumer and the team. The development of a scale that measures sports consumer-team relationship quality would make it possible to conduct systematic assessments of the relationship between sports consumers and teams. A developed scale would also allow further investigations into the critical link between relationship quality and various sports consumption behaviours.

The purpose of this research was to: develop a scale for measuring relationship quality that is appropriate for the spectator sports context; examine the psychometric properties of the new scale, including

reliability, content validity, discriminant validity, criterion validity and population heterogeneity in the factor structure; and test whether the psychometric properties of the scale derived in the original study could be generalised to a different sample of sports consumers.

The Sports Consumer-Team Relationship Quality Scale (SCTRQS) was developed through three separate studies. Our development process incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative phase consisted of a literature review, content validity check and expert review. The quantitative phase included a confirmatory factor analysis, multiple group analysis and mixture analysis. In Study I, college students (n=154) at a major southeastern university participated. In Study II, individuals (n=682) affiliated with a southeastern university participated. In Study III, spectators (n=321) at two college baseball games at a different southeastern university participated.

In Study I, content validity was established through a comprehensive review of literature and tests of content validity, including expert review. In Study II, empirical evidence was obtained which indicated that the new scale possesses good psychometric properties such as internal consistency, construct reliability, discriminant validity, criterion validity and robustness of the factor structure in different populations. In Study III, consistent results of a cross-validation with two different samples were achieved. The factor structure of the SCTRQS was found to be equivalent across two different samples and sound psychometric properties of the scale were achieved in replication. Overall, the findings across the three studies indicated that the new scale shows preliminary validity and reliability in assessing the quality of relationship between sports organisations and their consumers.

The SCTRQS, which is relatively brief and possesses good psychometric properties, is useful for sports marketing researchers because it provides them with a way to understand better the unique nature of the relational bond that is formed between sports organisations and consumers. Furthermore, the SCTRQS may be utilised in conjunction with other key concepts to study sports consumption behaviours. The SCTRQS can also be adopted for a number of essential purposes in sports management practices. First, using this instrument, sports managers can identify the level of relationship quality with consumers and thereafter develop corresponding relationship management strategies. Second, the SCTRQS could be a useful tool to appraise the effectiveness of relationship marketing campaigns. Finally, the SCTRQS, composed of multiple sub-components of relationship quality, provides a diagnostic tool to discover which aspects of the relationship are damaged so that appropriate remedial actions can be taken.

Introduction

Relationship marketing has attracted a considerable amount of attention among marketing practitioners (Kumar & Shah, 2009; Liu & Yang, 2009; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). For example, a study of over 650 companies around the world reported that approximately 90% were involved in relationship marketing activities and the executives believed that building an authentic and relevant relationship with the customer was critical to the company's long-term success (Peppers & Rogers Group, 2009). Companies' substantial spending on relationship marketing also reflects this enthusiasm. According to a recent study, $1.5 billion will be spent on email marketing in 2011, and relationship marketing accounts for 80% of that email marketing (VanBoskirk, 2009). The study also reported that spending on social media marketing, which has emerged as an essential part of relationship marketing, is estimated at $1.7 billion in 2011 and that amount is expected to rise to $3.1 billion in 2014.

This increased interest in relationship marketing is driven by the importance of long-term customers. Strong long-term relationships with customers are known to yield favourable outcomes such as increased profitability, cost reduction, increased sales, positive

word of mouth and employee retention (Bühler & Nuffer, 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff & Kardes, 2009; Sirdeshmukh, Singh & Sabol, 2002). Furthermore, strong, close, positive relationships with customers can be an idiosyncratic and inimitable resource creating a sustained competitive advantage (Morgan & Hunt, 1999; Rowe & Barnes, 1998; Voss & Voss, 2008). Once a strong relationship with the customer has been built, it (a) creates value by increasing revenues and reducing costs, (b) is rare because only a small number of firms are capable of developing the desirable relationship with the customer, and (c) is difficult and costly for other competitors to imitate and develop the capability (Aurier & N'Goala, 2010; Breivik & Thorbjørnsen, 2008; Grewal, Krishnan & Lindsey-Mullikin, 2008; Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000).

Sports organisations are also recognising the importance and potential benefits of relationship marketing. For example, the vision statement of the Sports Marketing Department at the University of Central Florida (UCF) states: "The Sports Marketing office aspires to solidify a positive rapport with the fans of UCF Athletics by offering them valuable, well rounded entertainment for their ticket purchase. The Sports Marketing office also wishes to reach out to more of the community and to educate them on the great product that UCF Athletics offers for the fans' entertainment value." This statement reflects the organisation's strong emphasis on building a good relationship with its fans.

Both professional and collegiate sports organisations are actively engaged in social media marketing to reach their fans and build or maintain those relationships. According to our website content analysis of the professional and collegiate sports organisations in the U.S., all professional teams in Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and National Hockey League (NHL) are using social media such as Twitter and Facebook as tools for relationship marketing. In addition, all but 15 of 129 intercollegiate athletics programs in the Division I

Football Bowl Subdivision of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) are taking advantage of social media to develop relationships with their fans.

Sports organisations' keen interest in relationship marketing is not surprising because a strong fan base is essential for their survival and success (Bühler & Nuffer, 2010; Beech & Chadwick, 2007; Desbordes, 2007). Devoted fans attend games regularly, buy more of the team's licensed merchandise than other fans, seek team-related information through media (often) and engage actively in positive word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, sports organisations with ardent fan bases are much more attractive to sponsors and the media, representing major revenue sources for the sports organisations. Thus, relationship marketing is a valuable marketing approach and it should be adopted in sport to better market sport to fans, sponsors and media.

Relationship marketing is broadly defined as "all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22). This concept of relationship marketing was first developed as a domain of research and understanding in the service sector. It was later expanded to other areas including, but not limited to, the automobile industry (de Hildebrand e Grisi & Ribeiro, 2004), retail business (Srinivasan & Moorman, 2005), banking (Liang & Wang, 2007), information technology (Eastlick, Lotz & Warrington, 2006), healthcare (Wright & Taylor, 2004), advertising (Davies & Palihawadana, 2006), hospitality (Essawy, 2007), non-profit organisations (MacMillan, Money, Money & Downing, 2005) and leisure (Álvarez, Martin & Casielles, 2007).

Previous research on relationship marketing has enabled sports marketers to suggest that integrating processes, people, operations and marketing capabilities have all helped organisations achieve stronger relationships with their partners. Consequently, this has improved marketing outcomes, such as purchase intention, word of mouth, sales, market share and growth (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner &

Gremler, 2002; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal & Evans, 2006; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999). Taken together with the increased attention on relationship-building in sports marketing and the growing theoretical support for the critical role of the relationship between sports organisations and customers in predicting consumption behaviour, a relationship framework has potential value to consumer behaviour research.

Although some researchers have provided valuable insights into the application of relationship marketing principles in the sports industry (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Cousens, Babiak & Bradish, 2006; McDonald & Milne, 1997; Tower, Jago & Deery, 2006), overall, the empirical investigations have been essentially preliminary. Studies on the systematic examination of relationship quality from the perspectives of sports consumers are particularly lacking.

Relationship quality can be defined as the "overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualised as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship" (Palmatier et al, 2006, p.138). A considerable amount of research has been devoted to various theoretical and practical issues associated with relationship quality since Crosby, Evans and Cowles (1990) introduced the concept. Based on this previous research, Kim and Trail (2009) suggested the following five reasons would help researchers and practitioners understand the value of relationship quality to sports consumer behaviour. First, relationship quality could be used as a tool to diagnose problems in the relationship between the organisation and its customers, and thus be useful in resolving those problems (Roberts, Varki & Brodie, 2003). Second, it could be used to assess the effectiveness of a relationship marketing campaign (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder & Iacobucci, 2001). Third, relationship quality could be used as a conceptual platform for co-ordinating various relational constructs (Fournier, 1998). Fourth, with a valid and reliable measurement instrument, it could be used to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful relationships (Smit, Bronner & Tolboom, 2007).

Finally, Kim and Trail (2009) proposed that based on the assumption of a psychometrically sound measurement instrument, relationship quality could be used to assess the customer equity of an organisation. This is critical, as customer equity is progressively more important for stakeholders as they make investment decisions and for managers of the organisation (Wiesel, Skiera & Villanueva, 2008).

Despite the significance of relationship quality in both marketing practice and research, there has been very little study specifically addressing relationship quality in a spectator sports context. More research is needed to understand the unique features of the relationship quality concept and how it is related to sports consumers and the spectator sports product. This is critical because the nature of the relationship with customers varies widely by customer characteristics and product categories (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983, Fournier, 1998). In particular, it would be beneficial to develop a scale that measures sports consumer-team relationship quality.

Kim and Trail (2009) suggested that development of such a measure would make it possible to conduct systematic assessment of the relationship between sports consumers and teams. In addition, they proposed that a developed scale would allow further investigations into the critical link between relationship quality and various sports consumption behaviours, such as licensed merchandise consumption, media-product consumption and game attendance. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to: develop a scale measuring relationship quality that is appropriate for the spectator sports context; examine the psychometric properties of the new scale including reliability, content validity, discriminant validity, criterion validity and population heterogeneity in the factor structure; and test whether the psychometric properties of the scale derived in the original study could be generalised to a different sample of sports consumers.

To achieve these purposes, the Sports Consumer-Team Relationship Quality Scale (SCTRQS) was developed through three separate studies.

TABLE 1 Definitions of relationship quality constructs

CONSTRUCT	DEFINITION	AUTHOR(S)
TRUST	ONE PARTY'S BELIEF THAT ITS NEEDS WILL BE FULFILLED BY ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY THE OTHER PARTY.	ANDERSON AND WEITZ (1989)
COMMITMENT	AN EXCHANGE PARTNER BELIEVING THAT AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER IS SO IMPORTANT AS TO WARRANT MAXIMUM EFFORTS AT MAINTAINING IT; THAT IS, THE COMMITTED PARTY BELIEVES THAT RELATIONSHIP IS WORTH WORKING ON TO ENSURE THAT IT ENDURES INDEFINITELY.	MORGAN AND HUNT (1984)
INTIMACY	FAMILIARITY, CLOSENESS AND OPENNESS TO RELATIONSHIP PARTNERS.	FOURNIER (1998)
SELF-CONNECTION	RELATIONSHIP QUALITY FACET [THAT] REFLECTS THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE BRAND DELIVERS ON IMPORTANT IDENTITY CONCERNS, TASKS, OR THEMES, THEREBY EXPRESSING A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF SELF.	FOURNIER (1998)
RECIPROCITY	INTERNALISED BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE BALANCE OF OBLIGATIONS IN AN EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIP.	PALMATIER (2008)

Study I: Scale construction and refinement

The main purpose of Study I was four-fold.
- Generate a pool of items reflecting the content and domains of the SCTRQS
- Establish the content validity of the initial SCTRQS scale
- Preliminarily investigate the psychometric properties of the scale
- Refine the scale

Item generation
Previous researchers have offered various lists of relationship quality constructs. While combining the previous literature pertaining to components of relationship quality and the expert assessment, we identified five constructs that have been commonly claimed to capture the essential facets of relationship quality. These were also believed to represent the relationships between sports consumers and the team. We included the following constructs in this study: trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection and reciprocity. Following Worthington and Whittaker's (2006) recommendation on scale development research, definitions of individual constructs should be identified first (Table 1). Based on these theoretical definitions, as well as a review of extant literature on

relationship quality, we generated a large pool of potential items. Altogether, 41 items were initially selected or created to measure the five constructs: trust (De Wulf, et al, 2001; Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 2000; MacMillan, et al, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment (Fletcher et al, 2000; Fournier, 1996), intimacy (Spake, Beatty, Brockman & Crutchfield, 2003; Fletcher et al; Fournier), self-connection (Fournier; Robinson & Trail, 2005) and reciprocity (Odekerken-Schroder, De Wulf & Schumacher, 2003; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003).

Qualitative evaluation
The qualitative evaluation of the scale items consisted of three phases. In phase one, the items were reviewed and discussed by the researchers of this study over the course of several meetings. This was done to ensure adequate representation of the proposed domains, reduce item redundancy and refine wordings. In phase two, the items were presented to 40 undergraduate and graduate students majoring in sports management. They were provided with definitions of the subscales and were asked to assign each item to the construct that the item best represented, assess and improve the readability and clarity of the items, and provide suggestions for additional items. The items in the scale were revised based on the input made by these students. Finally, in

phase three the revised items were evaluated by a five-judge panel of scholars who had expertise in the content and measurement of relationship marketing.

The scale items were finalised for a pilot study after adding new items that were necessary but previously omitted. Also, based on the expert panel's suggestions, the scale items were further refined to eliminate problematic items. A total of 24 items were retained to measure the five SCTRQS subscales: trust (5 items), commitment (5 items), intimacy (4 items), self-connection (4 items) and reciprocity (6 items).

Initial quantitative evaluation
Participants and procedure
A total of 154 college students enrolled in sports activity classes at a major southeastern university participated in the study. The sample was 51% male and 49% female. The average age of the participants was 21 years old (M=20.52, SD=2.93) and slightly more than 50% of participants were white/non-Hispanic. A face-to-face self-administered mode was utilised to collect the data. Standard survey procedure was followed in accordance with institutional review board (IRB) protocol. All items were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1=strong disagreement, 4=neutral and 7=strong agreement). It took approximately 10 minutes for a participant to complete the questionnaire.

Results and discussion
A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the factor structure of the SCTRQS scale using the Mplus 5.2 program (Muthén & Muthén, 2008). The model yielded a reasonable fit (x^2/df=463.74/242=1.92, RMSEA=.08, CFI=.91, SRMR=.07) according to guidelines of Hu and Bentler (1999). The items for the SCTRQS factors showed adequate psychometric properties in terms of Cronbach's alpha coefficients that ranged from .87 for trust to .93 for commitment and AVE values that ranged from .51 for reciprocity to .74 for commitment (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2005; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Based on the

assessment of psychometric properties, theoretical relevance of the items and parsimoniousness of the scale, nine items were dropped. At the conclusion of the pilot study, 15 items were retained: trust (3 items), commitment (3 items), intimacy (3 items), self-connection (3 items) and reciprocity (3 items).

Study II: Confirmation of the SCTRQS scale

The purpose of Study II was three-fold:
• Confirm the hypothesised factor structure of the SCTRQS elicited in Study I
• Provide further empirical evidence of validity and reliability for the scale
• Detect the possible presence of population heterogeneity in the factor structure

Methodology
Participants and procedure
Participants were 682 individuals who were affiliated with a southeastern university. Potential respondents were selected using the judgmental sampling method. Participants in face-to-face surveys were recruited via visiting undergraduate and graduate classes, dining facilities and recreation and sports facilities on campus. A total of 424 participants completed the face-to-face self-administered questionnaire. Of these, 20 surveys were incomplete, leaving a total of 404 usable responses. Online survey participants were recruited by sending an email that contained an invitation to participate in the online survey and a link to an internet website on which the survey questionnaire was posted. An email was sent to 2,100 email addresses. Of these 2,100 email addresses, 23 emails were returned as undeliverable, leaving 2,077 effective email addresses. A total of 258 responded, for an effective response rate of 12%. Of these, 31 surveys were incomplete, leaving 227 usable responses. Of the 631 useable participants, 39% were male and 61% were female. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 74 years

TABLE 2 Correlations among variables in Study II

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
TRUST 1	1.00																	
TRUST 2	.72	1.00																
TRUST 3	.70	.72	1.00															
COMMITMENT 1	.64	.60	.65	1.00														
COMMITMENT 2	.65	.62	.67	.87	1.00													
COMMITMENT 3	.63	.60	.68	.85	.85	1.00												
INTIMACY 1	.48	.47	.50	.67	.67	.64	1.00											
INTIMACY 2	.43	.43	.50	.68	.64	.62	.82	1.00										
INTIMACY 3	.55	.55	.58	.68	.67	.69	.66	.68	1.00									
SELF 1	.57	.54	.61	.57	.58	.58	.47	.44	.56	1.00								
SELF 2	.60	.54	.61	.58	.58	.61	.45	.45	.61	.70	1.00							
SELF 3	.63	.58	.66	.65	.64	.65	.55	.53	.68	.71	.76	1.00						
RECIPROCITY 1	.45	.41	.47	.41	.41	.40	.31	.28	.38	.51	.45	.46	1.00					
RECIPROCITY 2	.46	.44	.50	.41	.40	.39	.31	.30	.38	.53	.50	.53	.57	1.00				
RECIPROCITY 3	.53	.50	.56	.45	.44	.44	.32	.31	.43	.59	.61	.62	.61	.69	1.00			
SATISFACTION 1	.53	.48	.51	.54	.52	.52	.48	.46	.49	.44	.45	.50	.34	.46	.45	1.00		
SATISFACTION 2	.59	.58	.67	.74	.74	.76	.57	.58	.60	.53	.53	.61	.40	.42	.44	.56	1.00	
SATISFACTION 3	.53	.53	.58	.50	.51	.50	.44	.45	.50	.38	.42	.47	.35	.42	.39	.67	.63	1.00
MEAN	4.53	4.73	4.31	4.81	4.89	4.88	5.08	5.03	4.25	3.42	3.46	3.56	3.36	3.73	3.28	4.90	4.95	4.86
SD	1.59	1.36	1.60	1.88	1.88	1.87	1.66	1.63	1.70	1.77	1.64	1.73	1.57	1.69	1.55	1.41	1.62	1.44

(M=25.49, SD=10.24). Of the respondents, 7% were Asian, 8% African-American, 20% Hispanic, 62% White and 3% were unknown.

Results and discussion
Data screening and test of assumptions
The available sample of 631 participants was larger than the recommended minimum sample size of 200 (Weston & Gore, 2006). No outliers were detected and there was no evidence of a non-ignorable missing data pattern from the evaluation of the pattern of missing data. All randomly selected pairs of variables appeared to be linearly related. The sign of determinant was positive and the matrix used in this study was positively definite, indicating there was no extreme multicollinearity or singularity. However, there was evidence that both univariate and multivariate

normality assumption for observed variables were violated. Distributions for 14 out of the 18 observed variables were significantly (p<.01) skewed and the distributions for 10 out of 18 variables showed significant (p<.01) kurtosis. Moreover, Mardia's (1985) Normalised Coefficient of both skewness (z=32.44) and kurtosis (z=23.11) were significant (p<.01). For dealing with the non-normality, the Satorra-Bentler (1994) scaling method was used for the SEM analyses in the current study. Consequently, model fit indices that depended on x^2 statistic were adjusted based on S-B x^2

Confirmatory factor analysis
The model fit the data well
(S-B x^2/df=232.43/80=2.91, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.98, SRMR=.04). Cronbach's alpha coefficients

for SCTRQS factors ranged from .83 for reciprocity to .95 for commitment, indicating good internal consistency (Table 3). The AVE values ranged from .62 for reciprocity to .86 for commitment, indicating good construct reliability (Table 3). Pairwise x^2 difference tests showed that all correlations between factors were significantly different from 1.0 (Table 4), providing evidence for discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

DeVellis (2003) suggested that when possible, both concurrent and predictive validity can be equivalently used for criterion validity. Therefore, we examined concurrent validity by examining correlations between SCTRQS sub-constructs and a modified version of the Relationship Satisfaction scale developed by Spake et al (2003). The AVE value (.61) and Cronbach's alpha value (.83) for the Relationship Satisfaction scale were adequate. The statistical model that tested concurrent validity of the SCTRQS with the Relationship Satisfaction scale fit the data well (S-B x^2/df=413.02/120=3.44, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.96, SRMR=.04). All of the SCTRQS factors were significantly correlated with the criterion variable (i.e. Relationship Satisfaction) in the conceptually expected direction and the correlation coefficients ranged from .64 for reciprocity to .86 for commitment. This result was consistent with the previous research findings that a more positive appraisal of quality was associated with higher ratings of satisfaction (Collier & Bienstock, 2006; Cronyn & Taylor, 1992; Reimann et al, 2008), which provided support for the criterion validity of the SCTRQS scale.

The study tested the possible presence of population heterogeneity caused by observed and unobserved sources. First, we performed a multiple-group CFA to assess if gender introduced the heterogeneity in the hypothesised factor structure. We compared a model with cross-group equality constraints on factor loadings to a model without cross-groups equality on the factor loadings (Kline, 2005). The initial model specifying the same factor loadings across gender converged to an admissible solution and achieved a good model fit (S-B x^2/df=351.88/180=1.96,

RMSEA=.06, CFI=.98, SRMR=.05). For the second model, the factor loadings were freely estimated in each group. The model converged to an admissible solution and showed a good model fit (S-B x^2/df=338.12/170=1.98, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.98, SRMR=.05). These two models provided almost identical values of selected model fit indices and the S-B $^-2$ difference between the two models was insignificant (¢ S-B $^-2$ (10)=13.77, p>.05), indicating that the factor loadings were not significantly different across two groups. This result provides support that the SCTRQS items measured the five constructs in the same way for both males and females. Next, a factor mixture analysis was conducted to test possible population heterogeneity caused by unobserved sources. Estimation of the hypothesised model with a single-class provided the following model fit information: loglikelihood H_0 value=-14336.70, BIC=29028.00 and ABIC=28853.385. Estimation of the model setting factor loadings free across two-latent classes yielded the following model fit information: loglikelihood H_0 value=-14320.75, BIC=29067.02 and ABIC=28857.48. The difference in BIC and ABIC between the single class model and the two-latent class model was marginal. Moreover, p-value of the Lo-Mendell-Rubin (2001) adjusted likelihood ratio test was insignificant (ALRT=31.458, p=.25), indicating the model was not significantly improved by adding a class with more parameters. This non-significant result favours the single-class model (Raykov & Marcoulides, 1999; Shugan, 2002). From this result it can be suggested that there was no unobserved source introducing significant population heterogeneity in the factor structure of the SCTRQS scale. Together, these results provide evidence that the SCTRQS scale invariably measured the constructs that the scale was intended to measure across different subpopulations, both observed and unobserved sources of heterogeneity.

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TABLE 3 Summary results for confirmatory factor analysis of SCTRQS and relationship satisfaction in Study II

SCALE	FACTORS AND ITEMS	λ	S.E.	α	AVE
SCTRQS	TRUST			.88	0.71
	I TRUST THIS TEAM	.84	0.02		
	THIS IS RELIABLE	.82	0.02		
	I CAN COUNT ON THIS TEAM	.87	0.01		
	COMMITMENT			.95	0.86
	I AM COMMITTED TO THIS TEAM	.93	0.01		
	I AM DEVOTED TO THIS TEAM	.93	0.01		
	I AM DEDICATED TO THIS TEAM	.91	0.01		
	INTIMACY			.89	0.73
	I AM VERY FAMILIAR WITH THIS TEAM	.89	0.01		
	I KNOW A LOT ABOUT THIS TEAM	.89	0.01		
	I FEEL AS THOUGH I REALLY UNDERSTAND THIS TEAM	.79	0.02		
	SELF-CONNECTION			.89	0.72
	THIS TEAM REMINDS ME OF WHO I AM	.82	0.02		
	THIS TEAM'S IMAGE AND MY SELF-IMAGE ARE SIMILAR IN A LOT OF WAYS	.85	0.01		
	THIS TEAM AND I HAVE A LOT IN COMMON	.89	0.02		
	RECIPROCITY			.83	0.62
	THIS TEAM UNFAILINGLY PAYS ME BACK WHEN I DO SOMETHING EXTRA FOR IT	.70	0.01		
	THIS TEAM GIVES ME BACK EQUIVALENTLY WHAT I HAVE GIVEN THEM	.78	0.02		
	THIS TEAM CONSTANTLY RETURNS THE FAVOR WHEN I DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR IT	.88	0.02		
RS	RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION			.83	0.61
	I AM PLEASED WITH THE RELATIONSHIP THAT I HAVE WITH THIS TEAM	.71	0.03		
	MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS IS FAVOURABLE	.87	0.02		
	I AM SATISFIED WITH MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS TEAM	.75	0.02		

TABLE 4 Correlations among Relationship Quality constructs in Study II

FACTOR	1	2	3	4	5	6
TRUST	1.00					
COMMITMENT	.82	1.00				
INTIMACY	.67	.82	1.00			
SELF-CONNECTION	.83	.77	.70	1.00		
RECIPROCITY	.72	.56	.46	.79	1.00	
SATISFACTION	.85	.86	.75	.74	.64	1.00

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Study III: Cross validation

The samples in Studies I and II consisted of individuals who were affiliated with the same university and were fairly homogenous in terms of age. In Study III, we tested whether the results for the SCTRQS from Study II could be generalised to the setting of a different sport at a different university with a sample representing a broader range of ages.

Methodology

Participants and procedures
A total of 321 spectators at two college baseball games at a large southeastern university responded to the SCTRQS scale. We removed 21 incomplete survey forms, leaving a total of 300 usable responses. The sample was 57% male and 43% female. The average age of the participants was 44 (M=44.19, SD=17.02) and the sample was 5% Asian, 7% African-American, 18% Hispanic, 67% White and 3% other. We employed the same data collection procedures utilised in Study II.

Results and discussion

The usable sample of 300 participants was larger than the recommended minimum sample size of 200 (Weston & Gore, 2006). In addition, no substantial violations of statistical assumptions such as linearity, outliers, missing values and multicollinearity were uncovered. However, distributions for 16 out of 18 observed variables were significantly (p<.01) skewed and the distributions for 3 out of 18 variables showed significant (p<.01) kurtosis. Moreover, Mardia's (1985) Normalised Coefficient of both skewness (z=40.78) and kurtosis (z=21.06) were significant (p<.01). These results indicated that both univariate and multivariate normality assumption were violated. Therefore, the Satorra-Bentler (1994) scaling method used in Study II was also applied for the SEM analyses in Study III.

In the CFA, the model fit the data well (S-B x^2/df=159.53/80=1.99, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.97, SRMR=.06). The results indicated good

internal consistency and construct reliability of the scale, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .82 for reciprocity to .95 for commitment and the AVE values ranging from .61 for Reciprocity to .86 for commitment. Discriminant validity was evidenced based on pairwise x^2 difference tests in that all correlations between factors were significantly different from 1.0. The AVE value (.73) and Cronbach's alpha value (.87) for the Relationship Satisfaction scale were also satisfactory. Evidence providing support for concurrent validity of the SCTRQS was found as well, as the model achieved good fit (S-B x^2/df=224.18/120=1.87, RMSEA=.05, CFI=.97, SRMR=.05). All SCTRQS factors were significantly correlated with the criterion variable in the theoretically anticipated direction and the correlation coefficients ranged from .65 for Intimacy to .87 for Trust.

The initial model constraining factor loadings to be same across gender showed good fit (S-B x^2/df=305.92/180=1.69, RMSEA=.07, CFI=.95, SRMR=.07). The second model estimating factor loadings separately in each group yielded a good model fit (S-B x^2/df=296.04/170=1.74, RMSEA=.07, CFI=.96, SRMR=.06). The values of the fit indices for the two models were almost identical and the S-B x^2 difference between the two models was not significant ($\triangle$ S-B x^2 (10)=9.14, p>.05), indicating that the factor loadings were not significantly different across two groups. Estimation of the hypothesised model with single class yielded the following model fit information: loglikelihood H_0 value=-6546.93, BIC=13407.01 and ABIC=13232.59. Estimation of the model setting factor loadings free across two-latent classes provided the following model fit information: loglikelihood H_0 value=-6518.90, BIC=13169.80 and ABIC=13204.28. The difference in BIC and ABIC between the two-latent class model was small and p-value of the Lo-Mendell-Rubin (2001) adjusted likelihood ratio test was not significant (ALRT=55.17, p=.67). Thus, the mixture CFA provided evidence that there was no unobserved source causing substantial

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population heterogeneity in factor structure of the SCTRQS scale.

Finally, we compared the factor structure of the SCTRQS across the two samples of Studies II and III by executing a multiple-group CFA. Specifically, we tested if a model without equality constraints on the factor loadings across the two samples achieved a significantly better model fit than did a model with equality constraints on factor loadings (Kline, 2005). The findings of the multiple group analysis using the two samples from Studies II and III substantiated that the factor structure of the SCTRQS was stable across the two samples. The model specifying the same factor loadings across the two samples fit data well (S-B x^2/df=457.82/180=2.54, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.97, SRMR=.05). For the second model, the factor loadings were freely estimated in each group. That model also showed good fit (S-B x^2/df=439.53/170=2.58, RMSEA=.06, CFI=.97, SRMR=.05). The model fit indices hardly changed and the S-B x^2 difference between the two models was not significant ($\triangle$S-B x^2 (10)=18.07, p>.05). This demonstrated that the factor loadings were not significantly different across the two samples. In summary, the validity and reliability of the SCTRQS scale were further substantiated and the factor structure found in Study II was replicated in Study III. Findings derived from the cross-validation study offered strong evidence to support robustness of the new scale.

General discussion

The primary goal of this research project was to answer the following research question: how should relationship quality between a team and its sports consumers be conceptualised and measured? This objective was achieved through three studies developing the SCTRQS scale and initially validating the measure. In Study I, content validity was established through a comprehensive review of literature and tests of content validity, including expert review. In Study II, empirical evidence was obtained

indicating that the new scale possesses good psychometric properties in the following aspects: (a) internal consistency was found with Cronbach's alpha values for all subscales greater than a widely accepted cut-off criterion; (b) construct reliability was demonstrated by high AVE values for all constructs; (c) discriminant validity was supported with significant results of testing the difference from unity for all pairs of constructs; (d) criterion validity was evidenced with all of the SCTRQS constructs positively correlated with a modified version of the Spake et al (2003) Relationship Satisfaction scale; and (e) the robustness of the measure regarding factor structure in different populations was supported with the non-significant results from multiple group analyses and the mixture CFA. In Study III, consistent results of a cross-validation with two different samples were achieved. The factor structure of the SCTRQS was found to be equivalent across two different samples and sound psychometric properties of the scale were achieved in replication. Overall, the findings across these three studies indicate that the new scale shows preliminary validity and reliability in assessing the quality of relationship between sports organisations and their consumers.

Research implications

The major implication of this research is the development of a psychometrically sound measure of sports consumer-team relationship quality. A review of the extant work reveals that there are numerous scales for measuring relationship quality in various contexts. However, no measurement tool for examining the essence of the relationship between sports organisations and their consumers had been created. For this reason, the SCTRQS scale was developed to fill the void. The resultant scale, which is relatively brief and possesses good psychometric properties, provides sports management researchers with a solid framework and a tool for empirical examinations of relationship quality in the sports industry. The scale is

useful for researchers because it provides them with a way to better understand the unique nature of the relational bond formed between sports organisations and consumers. Researchers will also be able to explore the role of relationship quality in explaining various sports consumption behaviours.

Furthermore, the SCTRQS scale may be utilised in conjunction with other key concepts to study sports consumption behaviours. For instance, exploring the potential mediating or moderating effects of relationship quality on the linkage between motives and sports consumption behaviours. This specific area would allow researchers to gain in-depth understanding of how motives and perceived relationship quality interactively influence sports consumption behaviours.

Managerial implications

The SCTRQS can also be adopted for a number of essential purposes in sports management practice. First, using the instrument, sports managers can assess the level of a sports organisation's relationship quality with the sports consumers and thereafter develop corresponding marketing strategies. Sports organisations can easily administer a survey using a concise 15-item SCTRQS scale to obtain data about the overall strength of the relationship between the given sports organisation and the sports consumers. A simple average score across all five dimensions can provide a measure of the overall strength.

There are various potential applications of the obtained scores representing relationship strength. One potential application is its use in classifying fans of the given sports organisation into multiple perceived relationship quality segments based on the individual SCTRQS scores. The sports organisation can analyse the demographic, psychographic and other characteristics of these segments and why the individuals in each segment reported the different level of relationship quality (e.g. high, medium and low). Then the organisation can develop and implement

differentiated marketing strategies for each segment, according to the information from the analysis.

Second, the SCTRQS can be a useful tool to appraise the effectiveness of relationship marketing campaigns. Measuring the effectiveness of marketing campaigns is essential for sports marketers to understand how well their marketing programmes are performing in terms of achieving objectives and what adjustments need to be made to enhance performance. Although measuring the effectiveness of a marketing campaign can be difficult and complicated, the benefits gained from the efforts are typically much greater than the investments. By administering SCTRQS surveys regularly and tracking the relationship quality scores with the aid of a now readily available database management system, sports managers can determine the effectiveness of relationship marketing campaigns. The changes in relationship quality scores across different points in time will indicate whether the sports organisation's relationship marketing actions are enhancing or worsening the relationships.

Third, the SCTRQS, which is composed of multiple sub-components of relationship quality, provides a diagnostic tool to discover which aspects of the relationship are problematic so that appropriate remedial actions can be taken. Sports organisations can use the SCTRQS scale to evaluate their relationship with the sports consumer along each of the five relationship quality dimension (trust, commitment, self-connection, intimacy and reciprocity) by averaging the scores on items purported to measure the same sub-dimension. The mean score of sub-dimensions lower than the midpoint of the scale would suggest that those areas need to be addressed to improve the relationship with sports consumers. For example, the participants of this study reported a mean score of 3.48 on Reciprocity. This reveals that they did not perceive that there was symmetry in their relational exchanges with the given sports organisation and they did not feel appreciated and valued in return for their financial and psychological investment in the organisation. This perceived inequality might lead to

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termination of the relationship. Hence, the SCTRQS survey helps the sports organisation understand that reciprocity should be the organisation's priority in its relationship with its sports consumers and that there is a need to address the negative perceptions in a sincere and honest manner.

To improve the perceptions on reciprocity, the sports organisation might want to embrace community relationship programmes like the ones initiated by New Orleans Hornets, a professional NBA basketball team. The Hornets have successfully developed various community relationship programmes to make a positive and lasting contribution to the community as a mutually beneficial relationship partner. The programmes have included: Hoops for Homes, which provided housing for 20 local families who suffered major damage from Hurricanes Katrina; Books and Bugs, to motivate elementary school students to understand the value of reading and cultivate a lifetime reading habit; Wish Requests, granting wishes for terminally and chronically ill children from around the local community; Top Hats and High Tops, an annual charity gala event raising over $160,000 per year; and Hornets Visits, which arranges visits of the players, coaches and broadcasters to schools, hospitals, nursing homes and community service clubs in the local area (New Orleans Hornets, 2010).

The SCTRQS can also be used by sponsors and other stakeholders. Potential sponsors can use the SCTRQS scale to evaluate the attractiveness of the sports organisation. In the current economic climate, sponsors are increasingly under pressure to justify their sponsorship expenditures. For sponsors, the selection of an optimal sports entity is critical to successful sponsorship return on investment. One critical factor in evaluating sports organisations as potential sponsees is the strength of the relationship between the organisation and its fan base, because companies and other sponsors engage in sports sponsorship to reach their target market (i.e. the fans) by establishing a link with sports organisations. If the sports organisations are not well accepted by the public and do not have a strong fan following, the

established link with the sports organisation might not have a positive impact on fans' perceptions of the sponsor (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999; Meenaghan, 2001). Sponsors could also use the SCTRQS to evaluate the relationship strength of focal sports organisation relative to other sponsorship options. The sponsor needs to simply include the questionnaire about its focal sports organisation and the other sports organisation in a SCTRQS survey, requesting the participants to provide perception ratings for each organisation. They can then compare each organisation's average relationship quality score.

For external stakeholders including investors and governing bodies (e.g. NBA and NCAA), SCTRQS provide a means to assess sports organisations' capabilities to create value for the stakeholders. Customer equity can be defined as the lifetime value of customers to an organisation that focuses on costs of acquisition and retention of customers (Blattberg & Deighton, 1996). Customer equity is a crucial customer metric for evaluating the organisation's current performance and future prospects. This information is particularly pertinent to stakeholders who want to evaluate the value of the organisation. Thus, to a greater extent, customer equity has become a key factor for making decisions on investment and the acquisition price (Wiesel et al, 2008).

Relationships with customers are considered a primary element for estimating customer equity and customer lifetime value (Rust, Lemon & Zeithaml, 2004; Vogel, Evanschitzky & Ramaseshan, 2008). Stakeholders can obtain the information about a sports organisation's relationship with sports consumers by requesting the organisation provide the results of the SCTRQS survey and use the results in conjunction with data on other key components of customer equity to assess the organisation's current value and future potential.

Limitations and future research

There are a number of limitations in this study. One potential limitation is related to the samples used. Our study did not assess the psychometric properties of the scale with people of varying cultures. The sports consumer's relationship with a sports team can potentially be culture specific. This might pose a threat to the external validity of the findings. Specifically, our samples consist of individuals only in the United States. Although in principle the findings from the developed SCTRQS scale can be applicable in different countries, it is not possible to determine how specific the results are to the U.S. context. It is therefore not possible to make generalisations from the current study. It seems likely that individuals in various cultures may respond differently to the items regarding relationship with a sports team. Therefore, future research needs to apply the SCTRQS scale in a wider variety of countries to surmount the potential limitations in the generalisability of the scale. However, it should also be noted that the sample characteristics mentioned above may affect statistics of central tendency, but it is less likely to influence the correlations among observed variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), which is the primary source of information for CFA (if not the only one).

In addition, the research context of this study was intercollegiate football and baseball. This context might limit the generalisability of the scale. The psychometric properties of the measure for the different sports (e.g. basketball, soccer and golf) and different levels of competition (e.g., minor league, major league and women's college athletics) cannot be fully known. Until future validation studies are conducted in various sports contexts, applications of the SCTRQS scale in other settings should be interpreted cautiously. It would therefore be beneficial to replicate the results from our study in the context of various sports to strengthen the generalisability of the scale.

Next, although we attempted to develop a comprehensive inventory of sports consumer-team relationship quality constructs, we do not claim that

the constructs included in this study were inclusive of all possible components of relationship quality. Instead, it is recommended that future researchers explore other possible relational constructs not included in our study. Along with this, researchers need to identify which aspects or dimensions should be incorporated. Contributions such as these will allow for a better understanding of the relationship between sports organisations and their respective consumers.

The focus of this paper was on developing a psychometrically sound scale to measure the sports consumer-team relationship quality. With the developed scale in hand, the natural extension of this study would be to empirically examine the role of relationship quality in the sports consumer behaviour framework. For example, it would be worthwhile examining the relationship between relationship quality and various behavioural aspects of sports consumption such as attendance, media consumption, licensed merchandise consumption, BIRGing (basking in reflected glory), CORFing (cutting off reflected failure) and word-of-mouth behaviours. Moreover, investigation into potential predictors of the relationship quality would be informative.

A meta-analysis of literature on relationship quality identifies antecedents of relationship quality including relationship benefits, dependence on seller, relationship investment, seller expertise, communication, similarity, relationship duration, interaction frequency and conflict (Palmatier et al, 2006). However, the meta-analysis did not include research on sports consumers. Therefore, it would be worthwhile empirically examining if these factors are also significant antecedents of sports consumer-team relationship quality. To this end it would be also beneficial to identify the factors that are not considered as antecedents of relationship quality in the general consumer behaviour context but are essential in predicting relationship quality in the sports consumer behaviour context.

Although the research provides insights into the multi-faceted nature of relationship quality, the study is limited in that it only specifies correlational

relationships between the five relationship quality constructs. Further work, particularly designed to determine potential unidirectional or reciprocal causal relationships between these relationship quality constructs, would offer deeper understanding of how they are interrelated. In a related stream of inquiry, it would also be useful to understand what the different role of each relationship quality construct plays in affecting various sports consumption behaviours. Which relationship quality constructs are more or less responsible for driving a particular sports consumption behaviour (e.g. attendance, licensed merchandise and media), for which sports consumer groups (e.g. female, senior citizen and supporter club members) and to what extent?

Another worthwhile avenue to explore is how the quality of relationship between the sports entity and its sports consumer influences sponsor-focused sponsorship outcomes, including sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsor, sponsor patronage and satisfaction with sponsor. For example, consumer attributions of corporate motive for sponsorship (e.g. altruistic, benevolent, selfish and profit-driven) has been found to be a significant factor determining the effect of sponsorship on attitude toward sponsor and sponsor patronage (D'Astous & Blitz, 1995; Rifon et al, 2004; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Meenaghan (2001) suggested that the strength of the relationship between consumers and the sponsored entity could influence how the consumers shape the evaluative judgments on the sponsorship. This point can be extended to the consumer attributions of corporate motive for sponsorship. Thus, additional research is needed to examine how relationship quality influences the consumer attributions, which in turn affect the sponsorship effects.

Further research could also explore whether the relationship quality affects other evaluative judgments such as sponsor fit and credibility that are also known as key determinants of sponsorship effect (Rifon et al, 2004; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Scholars pursuing this line of research will help improve understanding of the relationship between sports consumers and

sports organisation and the role of relation quality in explaining sports consumption behaviour.

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