

## 2018 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XVI)

### Branding Women's Sports: A Literature Review

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**Wednesday, October 24, 2018**  
**6:30-7:20 PM, Ford Field**

**50-minute poster presentation**

Branding women's sports: A literature review

Enthusiasm for women's sports is emerging. For instance, in the WNBA's 19th season average attendance was over 7,000; more than the NBA in its 19th season (Griffin, 2016). Moreover, the 2018 NCAA Women's Basketball Championship game was the most-watched basketball game broadcast on ESPN since the NBA playoffs ("Women's title game", 2018). Conversely, only 2-3% of network and cable television coverage of sports is dedicated to women's sports (Fink, 2015). Additionally, women's sports accounted for only 0.4% of total sport sponsorships between 2011 and 2013 (Rogers, 2018). Considering the purchasing power of women, this untapped market is prime from a spectator and consumer outlook (Fink, 2015). Although several studies provide a sociological view, few studies have taken a marketing approach when examining women's sports.

Pursuing brand management strategies is one way to set your business apart in a competitive service brand industry (Williams & Pedersen, 2012). Women's sports brands are in competition with the dominant men's sports industry. An improved understanding of branding in women's sports is needed in order to develop awareness, and ultimately brand equity. The present study aims to explore the literature relative to branding in women's sports as a foundation for a proposed conceptual model. Thus, providing another avenue for more empirical research in this context while exploring a solution to the minimal consumption of women's sports.

#### Literature Review

As the chief branding concept, brand equity is the set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand that adds or subtracts from the value of the brand in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1991). According to the research, consumer perception is paramount for developing brand equity with service entities (Berry, 2000; Kwan Green, Hill, & Hunt, 2013). Developing service brand equity suggests that an organization has a recognized brand and brand meaning due to the internal promotion of the brands' message, external brand communications, and customer experiences (Berry, 2000). This study will be the first to explore brand equity in a women's sports context. Although there are multiple conceptualizations of brand equity, consumer-based brand equity will be applied to the current study. Consumer-based brand equity is "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand" (Keller, 1993). Consumer-based brand equity occurs when a consumer is aware of a brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in their mind (Keller).

Brand equity has been conceptualized in the sport and participatory sport segments. Gladden, Milne, & Sutton (1998) developed the first brand equity model in sport. Their model was designed based on Aaker's (1991) framework of brand equity assets (i.e., brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty). Ross (2006) developed a spectator-based brand equity model based on Keller's (1993) conceptualization of consumer-based brand equity and emphasized the service oriented nature of spectator sport. Brand-related studies in participatory sport (i.e., health clubs, campus recreational sports) have utilized previous brand association scales to examine consumer behavior (Alexandris, Douka, Papadopoulos, & Kaltsatou, 2008; Williams & Pedersen, 2012; Williams, Pedersen, & Walsh, 2012), and have conceptualized brand equity in campus recreational sports (Robinson & Gladden, 2003; Mills & Williams, 2016). Although Keller and Aaker's models have been utilized as the theoretical framework for previous brand equity models in sport, Berry (2000) argued that this conceptualization may not be appropriate for service-oriented brands because the core product is intangible and inherently difficult to differentiate. Therefore, future studies should consider applying Berry's brand equity framework to women's sports.

To date, there are no studies that have examined brand equity in women's sports in the United States. Regarding

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branding in women's sports, previous studies have primarily focused on branding in international women's soccer (Cortsen, 2016; Martensson, 2010). Martensson (2010) analyzed women's soccer using two approaches; brand management and hegemonic masculinity. Cortsen (2016) examined the effects of introducing a new sport product (i.e., soccer ball) on the brand equity of a women's soccer team in Denmark. The results of the aforementioned study confer how introducing a new sports product relates to the following factors: winning and success, passion and the business of sports, accountability and role models, brand articulation and marketability in the context of women's football in Denmark.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the gaps in the branding literature as it pertains to women's sports. Additionally, the researcher endeavored to develop an understanding of brand equity in women's sports by applying a consumer-based brand equity perspective. Lastly, the study explored the practical implications as well as avenues of future research (i.e., conceptual model).

### Practical implications and future research

The current study illuminates the need for more conceptual and empirical examinations of brand equity in women's sports. With minimal literature available related to brand equity in this context, the foundational work must be conceptual. Therefore, developing a conceptual model is optimal. Furthermore, as practitioners look for ways to improve consumption and overall revenue regarding women's sports, continued studies may provide a basis for improving the overall marketing of women's sports.

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