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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article title:

Enemies with Benefits: The Dual Role of Rivalry in Shaping Sports Fans' Identity

Corresponding author:

Johannes Berendt
German Sport University Cologne
Institute of Sport Economics and Sport Management
Department of Sport Business Administration
Am Sportpark Muengersdorf 6
D-50933 Köln
Germany
Tel: +49 221 4982 6340
e-mail: j.berendt@dshs-koeln.de

Co-author:

Sebastian Uhrich
German Sport University Cologne
Institute of Sport Economics and Sport Management
Department of Sport Business Administration
Am Sportpark Muengersdorf 6
D-50933 Köln
Germany
Tel: +49 221 4982 6120
e-mail: s.uhrich@dshs-koeln.de

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Abstract

Research question

Rivalries in team sports are commonly conceptualized as a threat to the fans' identity. Therefore, past research has mainly focused on the negative consequences. However, theoretical arguments and empirical evidence suggest that rivalry has both negative and positive effects on fans' self-concept. This research develops and empirically tests a model which captures and integrates these dual effects of rivalry.

Research methods

Data were collected via an on-site survey at home games of eight German Bundesliga football teams (N = 571). Structural equation modelling provides strong support for the proposed model.

Results and findings

In line with previous research, the results show that rivalry threatens fans' identity as reflected in lower public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of the rival team. However, the results also show that there are crucial positive consequences, such as higher perceptions of public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents, perceived ingroup distinctiveness and ingroup cohesion. These positive effects are mediated through increases in disidentification with the rival and perceived reciprocity of rivalry.

Implications

We contribute to the literature by providing a more balanced view of one of team sports' key phenomena. Our results indicate that the prevalent conceptualization of rivalry as an identity threat should be amended by the positive consequences. Our research also offers guidance for

the promotion of rivalries, where the managerial focus should be on creating a perception that a rivalry is reciprocal.

Keywords: sports rivalry, identity threat, disidentification, reciprocity

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Introduction

Sports rivalries are a widely prevalent phenomenon across the globe (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Whether it is sell-out crowds, dubious pranks or riots ahead of derbies—they certainly provoke some curious behavior among team sports consumers. Generally, the concept of rivalry seems to be negatively connoted. It has been described as a destructive competition that shares many characteristics with hostility (Vogler, 2011). The intergroup relations and team sports literature focuses on the negative consequences of rivalry, such as bias (Wann & Grieve, 2005), negative explicit and implicit attitudes (Wenger & Brown, 2014), schadenfreude (Havard, 2014; Leach & Spears, 2009), verbal aggression (Burgers, Beukeboom, Kelder, & Peeter, 2014), consumer rage (Grove, Pickett, Jones, & Dorsch, 2012), prejudice and hostility (Lee, 1985) as well as violence (Guilianotti, 2013). However, initial empirical evidence indicates that there is a positive side of rivalry from the perspective of fans as well. For example, studies show that the mutual derogation and aversion is an enjoyable aspect of team sports consumption and therefore desired by fans (Uhrich, 2014). Luellen and Wann (2010) showed that the salience of a rival can increase team identification, at least temporarily, and Havard and Eddy (2013) even speculated about a “fundamental need for rivalry” (p. 222). Theoretical arguments suggest that the beneficial aspects of rivalry primarily relate to its potential to help team sports consumers build a positive self-concept. Social identity theory stresses that people need a strong and salient outgroup to reinforce their own identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In addition, disidentification theory proposes that the opportunity to disidentify from a rival team is an important way to build a positive self-concept (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). Despite these theoretical accounts, the extant literature emphasizes the identity-damaging aspects of rivalry. This is expressed, for instance, in Tyler and Cobbs’ (2015) definition of a rival as “a highly salient outgroup that poses an acute threat to the identity of the ingroup” (p. 7).

In this research, we develop and empirically assess a model that simultaneously captures both the negative and the positive effects of rivalry on sports fans' self-concept. Our rationale for focusing on rivalry's effects on fans' self-concept centers on the importance of self-concept as a key variable for predicting and explaining the behavior of team sports consumers. It has been noted that "from an individual standpoint, the sport marketer must be able to understand numerous concepts. The first is the consumer's self-concept." (Schwarz, Hunter &, Lafleur, 2013, p. 100). The enhancement of one's self-concept is an important benefit that consumers derive from team sports consumption (Funk, Alexandris, & McDonald 2008; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Peace, 2001), which will eventually result in benefits for the teams in terms of revenue or positive word-of-mouth (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). Previous research provides evidence for this notion because the opportunity to construct a desirable social identity has been shown to positively influence variables such as commitment to the team, behavioral loyalty and referrals (Decrob & Derbaix, 2010; Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). Thus, an understanding of how rivalry influences a fan's self-concept extends sport marketers' knowledge of the factors that determine consumer benefits in team sport.

Along these lines, this research makes the following specific contributions to the literature on team sport consumer behavior. First, by considering both identity-enhancing and identity-damaging aspects of rivalry, our model integrates the ideas of several previous research studies, which have primarily focused on either the positive or the negative consequences of rivalry. Consistent with previous studies that focused on the negative consequences of rivalry, we show that rivalry negatively affects a specific facet of sports fans' self-concept, i.e., their public collective self-esteem in relation to the supporters of the rival. Extending these previous findings, we distinguish between different facets of a fan's self-concept and show that rivalry has also positive effects, as reflected by increased public

collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents as well as perceived ingroup distinctiveness and perceived group cohesion. Our model simultaneously captures these diverse effects of rivalry and therefore provides a more balanced view of the construct.

Secondly, this research also identifies the theoretical mechanisms underlying the effects of rivalry. We identify and empirically assess the mediating role of two variables that explain how rivalry affects the different facets of sports fans' self-concept. While the mediator disidentification with the rival team is derived from the intergroup relations literature, we introduce a mediating variable that is specific to sports rivalries, i.e., the perceived reciprocity of the rivalry. Thus, the model contributes to building theory in relation to one of team sports' most fundamental phenomena. Beside the theoretical importance, uncovering the mechanisms that explain how rivalry influences a consumer's self-concept is also of managerial relevance. Previous research has identified the antecedents of rivalry and thus provides sport marketers with the knowledge to create and develop rivalry (Kilduff, 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Assuming that rivalry can be managed to some extent, our findings complement this previous work because a detailed understanding of how rivalry exerts its positive and negative effects can assist sport marketers in leveraging rivalry in a way that facilitates (inhibits) mechanisms that result in positive (negative) effects on fans' self-concept.

The Dual Consequences of Rivalry

For sports fans, all supporters of other teams are opponents and outgroups; however, the supporters of the rival team are particularly relevant. Marketing research substantiates the fact that some outgroups are more important for consumers than others. White and Dahl (2007) distinguished between neutral and dissociative reference groups, with the latter generally being avoided at all costs. Supporters of a rival can be classified as a highly relevant and salient dissociative reference group because fans wish to avoid being associated

with that group. In line with this view, the team sports literature commonly conceptualizes a rival as an identity threat that diminishes fans' ability to make positive comparisons between their group and the supporters of the rival (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Previous studies in team sports and other settings have focused on the negative consequences of rivalry and identity threats. For example, fans have been found to "blast" the rival team (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), denigrate its achievements (Branscombe & Wann, 1994) and express *schadenfreude* (Dalakas & Melancon, 2012; Havard, 2014; Leach & Spears, 2009) in order to protect their own identity. Fewer studies have examined beneficial aspects of rivalry. Evidence from qualitative studies (Uhrich, 2014) and conceptual arguments (Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012; Harvard & Eddy, 2013) indicate that rivalry is an enjoyable element of team sport consumption. In addition, it has been shown that rival team salience can increase identification with the own team (Luellen & Wann, 2010).

However, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical study has considered the positive effects of rivalry on fans' self-concept. This is an important shortcoming because a mere focus on the identity-damaging aspects does not fully reflect the concept of rivalry. Research shows that an identity threat has not only damaging characteristics but can also enhance certain facets of a person's identity (Petriglieri, 2011; Stein, 1976). According to social identity theory, people need a strong and salient outgroup to reinforce their identities and build a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This general notion is also well-established in the team sports literature. For example, Wann and Dolan (1994) note that fans "may increase their social identity by convincing themselves that the ingroup (other fans of their favorite team) is superior to the outgroup" (p. 356). Such identity-enhancing effects have not been considered in studies of rivalry, nor have they been integrated with the identity-damaging aspects of rivalry.

Against this backdrop, our study is the first to examine the dual effects of rivalry on fans' self-concept by integrating them into one model. We capture these dual effects by considering four dependent variables, which are distinct facets of an individual's self-concept. In line with previous research, we propose a negative relationship between perceived rivalry intensity and fans' public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of the rival team. We further propose a positive relationship between perceived rivalry intensity and perceived distinctiveness, group cohesion and public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents. In addition, we introduce two mediating variables that transfer the positive effects: disidentification with the rival team and perceived reciprocity of the rivalry. Figure 1 provides an overview of the proposed model. The next section develops hypotheses for all direct and indirect relationships in the model.

(insert Figure 1 about here)

Hypotheses Development

Negative Effects of Rivalry on Sports Fans' Self-Concept

Social identity is a function of both how one personally evaluates the ingroup and how others evaluate the ingroup (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). People have the need to feel as though one's group is a good group (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). Hence, they assess how key reference groups evaluate the ingroup, which is referred to as public collective self-esteem. It is related to the concept of organizational prestige, which captures one's perception of whether the own organization is respected, admired and prestigious (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Being dishonored or disrespected by outgroup members is considered a threat (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison, 2009). More specifically, the undermining of the ingroup's value is regarded as one class of an identity threat (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999), and devaluations which are "ongoing and extend into the future, as prejudices and intergroup conflicts usually do, will be appraised as identity threatening" (Petriglieri, 2011, p.

646). Given the mutual derogation, longstanding disdain and overt hate between rivals, fans are unlikely to think that they are respected by the supporters of the rival. The existence of a dissociative reference group that devalues the ingroup is a negative consequence of rivalry.

Hypothesis 1 addresses this aspect:

H1: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are negatively related to team sports consumers' public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of the rival (PCSE-R).

Direct positive Effects of Rivalry on Sports Fans' Self-Concept

Although sports fans are held in low regard by rival fans, there comes an identity-enhancing effect along with the existence of a rivalry. It is important to distinguish between two types of reference groups that contribute to sports fans' public collective self-esteem: supporters of the rival and supporters of non-rival opponents. While not a direct parallel, this distinction draws on White and Dahl's (2007) notion that neutral and dissociative outgroups influence the group in specific ways. While the anticipated evaluations of supporters of the rival team should be negative, we propose that rivalry contributes to being respected by supporters of non-rival opponents. A strong rivalry between two teams creates the belief that the two participating groups of fans matter. An established rivalry could also signal that the clubs have a long tradition and a strong fan culture, two features that are commonly appreciated among team sports consumers (Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012). Thus, hypothesis 2 is stated as follows:

H2: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are positively related to team sports consumers' public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents (PCSE-NR).

Beside the increase in public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents, we consider two additional positive consequences of rivalry that reflect a positive self-concept, i.e., enhanced perceptions of distinctiveness and group cohesion (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004).

According to optimal distinctiveness theory (Pickett & Brewer, 2001), social identity is fueled by two fundamental human needs: the need for group belonging and the need for distinctiveness from others. Distinctiveness is important because self-enhancement can only occur when one sees the group as distinct from other groups (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). Therefore, people seek membership in positively distinct groups. The uniqueness and distinctiveness of a group can be threatened by very similar outgroups (Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006). This may be the case in team sports because the fans of different teams engage in very similar activities and rituals. The existence of a rival team should mitigate that problem. Although there are certain elements of similarity—rival teams might be from the same region or share a common history—rivalry provides a ground for distinction. In competition “group lines are drawn more sharply, values and norms are underscored and we/they differences are accentuated” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 25). Petriglieri (2011) also noted that an identity threat can cause members to stress the positive distinctiveness of their group, and Simmel (1908) claimed that conflict generally strengthens the feeling of distinction. We propose that rivalry enhances the uniqueness of the ingroup. The fans will perceive themselves to be different and positively distinct from other fans. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are positively related to the perceived distinctiveness of team sports consumers.

Kilduff (2010) suggested that rivalry may enhance ingroup cohesion. In a review of psychological literature, Stein (1976) concluded that cohesion increases in groups under threat, a notion that finds empirical support in several studies (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (2002) note that “highly committed group members, when facing an identity threat, on an affective level may display even stronger group affiliation, express their loyalty to the devalued group

and emphasize group cohesiveness” (p. 176). The view that external threats increase perceptions of group cohesion finds additional support in the organizational psychology literature (Pratt, 1998) as well as in sociological research (Coser, 2009). Based on these arguments, we propose that the existence of a common enemy (i.e., the rival team and its supporters) also brings fans closer together.

H4: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are positively related to team sport consumers’ perceived group cohesion.

In the following section, we introduce two mediating variables that represent the explanatory mechanisms underlying the positive effects of rivalry intensity on sports fans’ self-concept: disidentification with the rival team and perceived reciprocity of rivalry.

Indirect positive Effects of Rivalry on Sports Fans’ Self-Concept

An immediate consequence of rivalry is an increased level of disidentification with the rival team. Organizational disidentification is a self-perception based on “a cognitive separation between one’s own identity and the organization’s identity” (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 397). The concept of disidentification embraces the idea that people not only build a positive self-concept by identifying with a certain organization, but especially by disidentifying with organizations from which they perceive their identities to be separated (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). This involves a negative categorization of organizations into groups such as rivals or enemies, whose failures are celebrated as personal successes. Hence, people not only define and affirm their social identity by showing who they are, but also by showing who they are not (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Rivalry seems to be a strong driver of disidentification with the rival team. Part of being a fan—and part of many clubs’ culture—is to hate the rival. Havard (2014) found that fans “were taught which team to root against, or disidentify, from” (p. 247) by their socializing agents. We therefore hypothesize:

H5: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are positively related to disidentification with the rival team.

Previous research shows that disidentification, just like identification, is an important way to build a positive self-concept (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002). Therefore, we propose that disidentification with the rival team mediates the relationship between perceived rivalry intensity and the dependent variables public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents, perceived distinctiveness and perceived group cohesion.

H6: Disidentification with the rival mediates the positive relationship between perceptions of rivalry intensity and public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents (H6a), perceived distinctiveness (H6b) and perceived group cohesion (H6c).

Further, we propose that rivalry intensity directly influences the perceived reciprocity of rivalry, the second mediating variable in our model. We define reciprocity of rivalry as the extent to which fans' perceive their team's rivalry with another team to be mutual, i.e., whether the own team serves as the "rival for the rival." Although by definition a dyadic relationship, the feeling of rivalry is not always clearly mutual (Kilduff, 2010). Tyler and Cobbs (2014) empirically assess the phenomenon of unidirectional rivalry in a social network analysis, where fans of team A view team B as rivals but not vice versa. Yet, the more intense a rivalry is perceived, the more likely it will be perceived as mutual. Anecdotal evidence for this notion stems from the supporters of the English national football team, who believe they have a very intense rivalry with Germany. For them, the Germans are the biggest rivals, and hence they expect them to feel exactly the same (Hesse, 2013). Generally, due to the nature of conflict, antagonism is usually perceived as reciprocal. Simons and Peterson (2000) stated that relationship conflict encourages antagonistic attributions for other group members' behavior, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of mutual hostility. Hence, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H7: Perceptions of rivalry intensity are positively related to perceived reciprocity of rivalry.

The perception that the feeling of rivalry is reciprocated by the opposing fans should also contribute to a positive self-concept. Some teams refuse to acknowledge their neighbors as rivals. They ignore the rivalry, stressing that the meetings are not special but just normal games (Hesse, 2013). We expect this to hurt the fans' self-concept. It is well established that "the unpleasantness of being ignored might take its toll on people's feelings" (Geller, Goodstein, Silver, & Sternberg, 1974, p. 542). The act of ignoring is believed to be powerful and functional for the source but devastating to the target (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). The "silent treatment" is a widespread form of social rejection, which can have severe psychological consequences (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001; Williams & Nida, 2011). Based on these arguments, we propose that the perception of a bi-directional rivalry is positively associated with fans' self-concept. Thus, perceived reciprocity should act as a mediator in the relationship between rivalry intensity and self-concept.

H8: Perceived reciprocity of rivalry mediates the positive relationship between perceptions of rivalry intensity and public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents (H8a), perceived distinctiveness (H8b) and perceived group cohesion (H8c).

Control

It is widely accepted that people identify with sports teams to enhance their own identity and build a positive self-concept (Wann, 2006). The links between team identification and public collective self-esteem, distinctiveness and cohesion have been well-established (Asforth & Mael, 1989; Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Identification also seems to precede disidentification because identifying with a particular team is usually associated with a disapproval of that team's rival. Thus, we control for the influence of fans' identification with their favorite team in our model.

Method

The study was conducted in the context of the Bundesliga, Germany's first division football league in December 2014. As the world's second-most attended sports league with an average of 42.609 spectators per game (Sport Business Daily, 2014), it provides a worthwhile setting to investigate professional team sports consumers. In December 2014, 25 trained interviewers were deployed to home games of eight of the 18 Bundesliga clubs, covering almost half of the entire league. We selected four teams that boast a famous rivalry (Borussia Dortmund, FC Schalke, FC Cologne, Borussia Moenchengladbach) and four teams that are not known for a particularly antagonistic relationship to any opponent (SC Paderborn, TSG Hoffenheim, SC Freiburg and VfL Wolfsburg). The selection was based on discussions with football beat writers and industry professionals. Our rationale for selecting four teams with a famous rivalry and four teams that are not known for a special rivalry was to avoid ceiling effects and increase variance in the independent variable perceptions of rivalry intensity. We expected perceptions of rivalry intensity to be lower among fans of the latter four teams. While a potential drawback of this approach is that some fans might state that their team does not have a rival, we did not expect this to be the case for the majority of fans because rivalry is "a subjective competitive relationship that is independent of the objective characteristics of the situation" (Kilduff, Elfenbein & Shaw, 2010, p. 945).

The interviewers intercepted attendees on their way to and in front of different gates of the stadium, asking whether they would be willing to answer a few questions regarding their favorite team. Interviews were conducted from three hours until 15 minutes prior to kick-off, resulting in a sample size of $N = 748$ (M_{Age} : 36.1 years ($SD = 15.26$), 78.6% male).

Initially the participants were asked for their team's archrival. A total of 164 participants stated their team did not have an archrival. Ninety percent ($N = 147$) were of the four teams that are not known for a famous rivalry. We could not use the data from these participants because they did not answer questions about perceptions of rivalry intensity, their

disidentification, perceived reciprocity and PCSE-R. This left 584 questionnaires with information about both the favorite team and the rivalry. From these, 13 cases were removed due to missing values, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 571$.

Measures

Details of all measures are included in the appendix. The independent variable, perceptions of rivalry intensity, was measured with the single-item “How intense do you think is the rivalry between [favorite team] and [archrival]” on a 10-point scale (1 = not very intense to 10 = very intense; $M = 8.50$, $SD = 1.82$), which has been successfully used in previous studies (Blank, Koenigstorfer, & Baumgartner, 2015). The use of single-item measures is appropriate when the construct is sufficiently narrow, one-dimensional and clear to the participants (Wanous & Hudy, 2001). Although rivalry is a complex phenomenon, our study focused on fans’ overall perceptions of its intensity, a dimension that is concrete and relatively easy to grasp by the participants. This was established in a group discussion ($N = 20$) and confirmed in a pretest with participants from the target population ($N = 29$). The perception of an intense rivalry was found to be “concrete.” It was “easily and uniformly imagined” by the participants. If these two conditions are met, the use of single-items is adequate (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007, p. 176). Thus, we deemed the straightforward measurement of this variable with a single item as an appropriate strategy. All other constructs were measured with multi-item scales using seven-point rating scales (1 = do not agree to 7 = strongly agree). Identification with the favorite team was measured with five items, which were adapted from Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) scale. An example was “My favorite team’s successes are my successes” ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.35$, $\alpha = 0.73$). One item was removed because of poor indicator reliability. Disidentification with the rival was measured with three items adapted from Bhattacharya and Elsbach’s (2002) scale, e.g., “The archrival’s failures are my successes” ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.91$, $\alpha = 0.85$). Reciprocity was measured using

four self-developed items, e.g., “The rivalry between the archrival and my favorite team is mutual” ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = 0.81$). Perceived distinctiveness, adapted from Postmes, Haslam and Jans’ (2013) scale, was measured with four items, e.g., “There is something that makes my favorite team’s fan community unique in comparison with other Bundesliga fans” ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.28$, $\alpha = 0.85$). For both reciprocity and perceived distinctiveness, we removed one item due to poor indicator reliability. Perceived group cohesion was measured with three items adapted from Postmes et al.’s (2013) scale, e.g., “There is great togetherness in my favorite team’s fan community” ($M = 5.97$, $SD = .98$, $\alpha = 0.88$). As for public collective self-esteem, we based the items on the public dimension of Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) public collective self-esteem scale, which have been used in a sporting context (Heere & James, 2007). Unlike the original scale, we distinguished between different reference groups. PCSE-NR measured the public collective self-esteem stemming from the supporters of non-rival opponents, i.e., fans of other Bundesliga teams except for the rival. PCSE-R measured the public collective self-esteem stemming from the rival’s supporters. Both were measured using three items, e.g., “[Archrival] fans respect the [favorite team’s] fans” for PCSE-R ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.28$, $\alpha = 0.82$) and “Except for [archrival] fans: A majority of the Bundesliga fans respects the [favorite team] fans” for PCSE-NR ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.37$, $\alpha = 0.93$). Two further group discussions with undergraduate students ($N = 18$) as well as additional pretesting ensured content validity of the adapted items in the context of football.

Measurement Properties

An exploratory factor analysis of the two mediators, four dependent variables and one control variable with principal axis factoring extraction rotated to a varimax solution revealed seven dimensions (eigenvalue criterion). Each item loaded on the conceptualized factor. No cross-loadings exceeded 0.39, and just three were above 0.30 (cf. appendix). A confirmatory

factor analysis using Mplus (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2015) further showed convergent validity, indicated by the psychometric properties of the measurement items. Nineteen of the 22 factor loadings were above 0.70, and all were significant at $p < .001$. The composite reliabilities ranged from 0.75 to 0.93. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was greater than the 0.50 threshold for all constructs with just one exception (identification = 0.44). Discriminant validity was supported by the fact that the AVE exceeded the squared correlations between any pair of constructs (Fornell & Larker, 1981). The global measurement model revealed a good fit of the model to the data ($\chi^2 = 463.41$, $df = 188$, $p < .01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.46$, $RMSEA = 0.051$, $CFI = 0.96$, $TLI = 0.95$, $GFI = .93$, $IFI = .96$). Although recommendations vary and the specification of exact cut-off values is problematic, the model fit is widely deemed good (acceptable) when the χ^2/df ratio is below 2.5 (close to or below 3), RMSEA values are close to or below .05 ($\leq .07$), and CFI values are equal to or greater than .95 ($\geq .93$) (e.g., Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). Table 1 provides an overview of the measurement properties.

(insert Table 1 about here)

Common Method Bias

The questionnaire was designed to proactively minimize the threat of common method variance. Different scale endpoints were used for the predictor and criterion measures to reduce method biases caused by commonalities in scale endpoints and anchoring effects (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We conducted a series of statistical analyses to assess the potential existence of common method bias (Bagozzi, 2011). Harman's one-factor test revealed that no general single factor explained the majority of variance among the measure as the single-factor test revealed a very poor fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 4860.32$, $df = 230$, $p < .01$, $\chi^2/df = 21.13$, $RMSEA = .188$, $CFI = .296$, $TLI = .293$). Also, a marker variable was included in the questionnaire to determine whether the measurement model was

robust to common method variance. Respondents were asked about their sense of environmentalism on a three-item scale adopted from Oliver and Rosen's (2010) scale, e.g., "I am a person who cares about the environment" ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.58$, $\alpha = 0.89$). The construct is theoretically unrelated to all other constructs used in the study. There were no substantial correlations with the other variables, and five were below 0.10. Next, we incorporated a latent method factor into the baseline model and specified all items loading on that factor as well as their latent constructs. The common factor accounted for only 9.6% of the total variance, which is less than the method variance of 25% discovered in studies of self-reported perceptions (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). A comparison of the fit statistics of the model with ($\chi^2 = 459.33$, $df = 187$, $p < .01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.45$, $RMSEA = 0.051$, $CFI = 0.96$, $TLI = 0.95$, $GFI = .93$, $IFI = .96$) and the model without a method factor (see above) indicated some extent of common method variance. A χ^2 -difference test showed that the improvement in fit from including the common method factor is sufficient to justify the loss of an additional degree of freedom (change in $\chi^2 = 4.08$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). We therefore included the method factor in our model. The inclusion of the method factor only marginally reduced the parameter coefficients. For the majority of the coefficients, we observed only changes in the third decimal place. None of the coefficients and significance levels of the total, direct and indirect effects changed significantly in the model with the method factor compared with the model without the method factor. Therefore, we conclude that common method bias is not a serious problem in this study.

Results

We tested the model via structural equation modeling using Mplus. The independent variable, perceptions of rivalry intensity, was specified as a manifest variable, while the other six variables were included as latent constructs. The model displayed an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 702.24$, $df = 213$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.30$, $RMSEA = 0.063$, $CFI = 0.93$, $TLI = 0.91$).

The model explained a significant proportion of the variation in the scores for public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of the rival ($R^2 = 0.10, p < .001$), public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents ($R^2 = 0.16, p < .001$), perceived distinctiveness ($R^2 = 0.31, p < .001$) and perceived group cohesion ($R^2 = 0.25, p < .001$). Figure 2 provides an overview of the results.

(insert Figure 2 about here)

In line with previous research, perceptions of rivalry intensity exerted a negative and significant total effect on fans' public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of the rival ($b = -.31, p < .001$), providing support for H1. However, consistent with H2, H3 and H4, perceptions of rivalry intensity were positively related to the other three facets of the fans' self-concept, as reflected by a positive and significant total effect on public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents ($b = .09, p = .033$), perceived distinctiveness ($b = .27, p < .001$) and perceived group cohesion ($b = .20, p = .001$). Perceptions of rivalry intensity were also positively related to the two mediators of disidentification ($b = .18, p < .001$) and perceived reciprocity ($b = .49, p < .001$), providing support for H5 and H7.

The results further showed that perceptions of rivalry intensity exerted a significant indirect effect on fans' self-concept. Via the two mediators of disidentification and perceived reciprocity of rivalry, perceptions of rivalry intensity exerted a positive and significant indirect effect on public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents (indirect effect $b = .17, p < .001$), perceived distinctiveness (indirect effect $b = .23, p < .001$) and perceived cohesion (indirect effect $b = .19, p < .001$).

As indicated by non-significant direct paths of perceptions of rivalry intensity to perceived distinctiveness, cohesion and public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters

of non-rival opponents, there is indirect-only mediation via disidentification with the rival and perceived reciprocity.

Next, we analyzed the specific indirect effects of the two mediators. This analysis allows to determine the extent to which each of the mediators transfers the effects of rivalry on the dependent variables, conditional on the presence of the other one. Disidentification with the rival mediates the relationship between perceptions of rivalry intensity and perceived distinctiveness (indirect effect $b = .03$, $p = .019$), providing support for H6b. The coefficients of the indirect effects of rivalry intensity on public collective self-esteem in relation to the supporters of non-rival opponents and perceived group cohesion were not significant. Thus, the results provided no support for H6a and H6c. Perceived reciprocity of rivalry mediated the relationship between perceptions of rivalry intensity and public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents (indirect effect $b = .18$, $p < .001$), perceived distinctiveness (indirect effect $b = .20$, $p < .001$) and perceived group cohesion (indirect effect: $b = .18$, $p < .001$) and, supporting H8a-c. Table 2 provides an overview of the coefficients of all direct and indirect relationships in the model.

(insert Table 2 about here)

To determine the relative explanatory power of the two mediators, we followed Cheung's (2009) recommendations and compared the relative magnitude of all specific indirect effects of rivalry intensity on the self-concept variables as indicated by their respective standardized coefficients. Comparisons of the indirect effects sizes showed that the magnitude of the indirect effects through perceived reciprocity of rivalry were significantly greater compared to the indirect effects through disidentification for public collective self-esteem in relation to supporters of non-rival opponents and perceived group cohesion (both p 's $< .01$) but not for perceived distinctiveness.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

In light of previous research suggesting diverse effects of the existence of a rival team on sports fans' self-concept, rivalry can be described as a double-edged sword (Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010). Our model is the first attempt to conceptualize the dual effects of rivalry by integrating both positive and negative consequences on team sports consumers' self-concept. The empirical assessment of the model widely supports the notion of dual effects of rivalry. We contribute to the literature by providing a more balanced view of one of team sports' key phenomena.

Our results indicate that rivalry supports fans in building a positive self-concept and enhances their identities. This is important because providing the consumers with opportunities to build a positive self-concept is essential for team sports firms (Funk, Alexandris, & McDonald 2008; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Peace, 2001). These opportunities heavily depend on the fluctuating weekly performance. Although team performance and the development of rivalry can be interrelated, an established rivalry may, to some extent, shape fans' identity independent of the team's current performance. No matter the most recent results on the pitch or the current position in the table, rivalry helps fans to define who they are and who they are not. An intense rivalry typically culminates when the two teams collide on the pitch. Yet, with the never-ending banter and mocking between the opposing fans, it is prevalent all year long. As our model shows, an intense rivalry is positively related to fans' public collective self-esteem, perceived distinctiveness and ingroup cohesion. This may explain why fans harbor a fundamental need for rivalry as speculated in previous studies (Harvard & Eddy, 2013). As an integral part of their identity, rivalry is likely to tie consumers to their team. People generally enjoy being members of distinct, cohesive and respected groups, three attributes that have been linked to enhanced loyalty and attachment (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Pickett & Brewer, 2001).

Such attributes also make groups attractive for new members and could help teams to attract new fans.

Considering the beneficial outcomes of rivalry raises the question of whether the prevalent conceptualization as an identity threat (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015) should be refined or at least amended by the positive consequences. A threat is most commonly understood to be something negative. Although the existence of a strong and salient outgroup is required to build a positive self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), past research has focused on the dark sides of rivalry. Several studies uncovered how fans protect their identity in the face of a threat, e.g., by blasting the rival, denigrating his achievements or displaying *schadenfreude* (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Havard, 2014). Our research confirms that rivalry does indeed have a negative effect on the self-concept. Sports fans are devalued and disrespected by a highly relevant outgroup. The social psychology literature suggests that the undermining of a group's value poses an identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011). Yet this threat comes along with a range of crucial positive consequences, meaning that rivalry does not only evoke identity-damaging but also identity-enhancing aspects. This is not appropriately reflected in the prevalent conceptualization of rivalry as a threat.

Our model also contributes to the literature by identifying the key mediating variables that explain the identity-enhancing effects of rivalry. The positive effects of rivalry on the self-concept are fully mediated via disidentification and perceived reciprocity. The finding that the positive consequences do not occur directly might explain why research has focused on the dark sides of rivalry, which are more obvious. According to our results, perceptions of rivalry reciprocity are more important in mediating the effects of rivalry on fans' self-concept than increases in disidentification with the rival team. This finding indicates that the process of disidentifying is less important for team sport fans' self-concept, although disidentification has been shown to help people in shaping their identity (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). One

potential explanation is that fans are typically strongly identified with their favorite team, which may reduce the potential to further enhance their identity through disidentifying from the rival team.

Managerial Implications

The findings of previous research provide guidance for managing rivalries at the league level. For example, league authorities could try to influence key rivalry antecedents, such as proximity, similarity and frequency of competition (Kilduff, 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015), by means of realignments or during the creation of new leagues. Our model paves the way for the managing of rivalry at the club level in a way that is beneficial for the team. Specifically, marketing and communication strategies relating to an existing rivalry should be used in a way that maximizes rivalries' influence on the mediating variables of disidentification and reciprocity because these variables underlie the positive effects of rivalry. Although some might perceive the behavior as unethical, players often heat up fans by promoting disidentification from the rival and reminding the fanbase who they are not. For example, Arsenal FC midfielder Robert Pires was pictured holding a sign "What do we think of Tottenham? Expletive. And what do we think of expletive? Tottenham" (Law, 2014). While he had to issue public apologies, his behavior is likely to have increased Arsenal's fans' disidentification from the rival while at the same time boosting their identity. It is up for debate whether disidentification could (and should) be promoted in a more responsible way (e.g., by alluding to traditional differences or different values of two clubs). However, when promoting disidentification, managers need to be aware of potential pitfalls regarding the team's marketing activities. For example, it has been shown that fans transfer their dislike for the rival onto the sponsors of the rival team (Bergkvist, 2012). Sponsors may therefore disapprove of aggressive marketing strategies geared towards the rival. Also, as one should

not speak ill of others, such strategies may also have a detrimental effect on the team's reputation.

Our model indicates there is a better—and more ethical—way to enhance the fans' self-concept. The managerial focus should be on creating a perception that a rivalry is reciprocal, because this mediator is the key underlying mechanism that explains why rivalry enhances fans' perceived distinctiveness, ingroup cohesion and public collective self-esteem. There are several ways for managers to boost the perceived reciprocity. The marketing and PR department need to grow the rivalry and keep it salient, e.g., with tailor-made communication strategies (provocative, yet respectful statements from officials and players alluding to the rivalry). For example, team officials sometimes refrain from using the rival's official team name, using traditional nicknames instead. Other tools to promote rivalries could be special rival merchandizing gear, allowing the fans to express their identity, special events around derbies, a rivalry section on the webpage or an occasional tweet about the rival (and their misfortune?). However, managers need to be patient as both perceived reciprocity and disidentification are constructs that are shaped over time.

It is widely known that team sport services are the result of co-creation processes between several teams and other actors (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). This notion of co-creation is also relevant for managing rivalries because teams need to cooperate to make sure that rivalry is not perceived as one- but as bi-directional. Thus, managerial activities to increase perceptions of rivalry reciprocity might require direct collaboration between marketing managers of rival teams in order to gain beneficial outcomes for the self-concept of their respective consumers.

Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer and Exler (2008) proposed focusing on non-performance related attributes when building brand identity because they are more consistent than sporting success. Rivalry could be such an attribute. In the long-term, an intense rivalry could help

brand managers to create a unique positioning, a feat that has become increasingly difficult for sporting brands to accomplish. For most teams, unique positioning is considered a challenge because “all play football and all want to be successful” (Lehnebach, 2014). Rivalry could help to distinguish certain clubs from others by drawing clear lines and shaping a unique identity.

Also, our research should remind league planners about the importance of rivalries. In times where competitions are redesigned and teams are realigned, economists have wondered how the potential loss of precious rivalries would influence the historic identity of clubs (Dobson & Goddard, 2011) and, relatedly, the value of TV rights (Solberg & Gratton, 2004). It seems reasonable to believe that the abandonment of a long-time rivalry would eradicate the positive effects that come along with it.

However, as rivalry is a double-edged sword, both league and club officials might face the task of playing down rivalries that have become too heated or aggressive. For example, the Greek football league was forced to suspend their entire play following derby riots (CNN, 2015). Between rivals, tempers are flying high, and it is a thin line between entertainment and aggression. Because an intense rivalry primarily influences fans’ self-concept by increasing perceptions of rivalry reciprocity, ignoring the rivalry and focusing exclusively on sporting matters (“It’s just a game, and we can’t win more than three points”) could take the heat—and hate—out of certain matches, although that may not be what fans are craving. Our model suggests that decreasing the salience of disidentification might also help to play down rivalries around derby games to minimize the risk of aggressive behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any study, our research is not without limitations. Despite the strong theoretical background, our empirical study is unable to prove that the relationships in the model are causal due to the correlational design. To address this concern, we tested a number

of different models, e.g., with disidentification as dependent variable. All of these alternative models displayed a significantly worse fit to the empirical data as compared to the proposed model.

The model focuses on perceptions of rivalry intensity as the key independent variable, which was measured with a single item. We deemed this conceptualization appropriate because it captures fans' overall assessment to what extent the phenomenon of rivalry occurs between their favorite team and its rival. However, rivalry has only most recently attracted the attention of researchers (Havard, 2014; Kilduff, 2010), and there are other potential ways to conceptualize and measure this complex construct. One challenge is to capture the ambivalent character of rivalry from the perspective of the fans. Therefore, it might be worthwhile to seek a better way to simultaneously measure the love-hate aspect of rivalry, which is indicated by the implicit appreciation but explicit derogation of the rival team. A potential approach to overcome this measurement challenge may be the simultaneous use of explicit and implicit measurement tools. On top of that, weighing the positive against the negative consequences would help to assess whether the construct is more of a threat to or an amplifier of the own identity.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to examine the extent to which the effects of rivalry on fans' self-concept depend on the level of their involvement. We found a significant and positive relationship between rivalry and fans' self-concept, however, it is likely that a minimum level of involvement is required for this relationship to occur and that the relationship gets stronger as involvement increases. Spectators with very low levels of involvement may be unaffected by both the identity-threatening and identity-enhancing aspects of rivalry. Also, it would be interesting to examine how rivalry affects the centrality of one's identity as a sports fan, an important dimension of a person's identity that was omitted in the current study. Centrality refers to the importance of an identity for an

individual compared to other identities (Settles, 2004). One may expect that rivalry has the potential to increase the centrality of a person's identity as a sport fan.

In one of our pre-studies, we found a positive correlation between the intensity of rivalry and negative emotions, such as hate and aggression towards the rival. More research is needed to explore the dual effects and provide guidelines for the responsible marketing of rivalries. For example, researchers could assess different communication strategies prior to derby games, looking for ways to build anticipation without increasing the risk of aggressive behavior.

As a cornerstone of fans' self-concept, future research should explore how clubs can integrate the concept of rivalry into their marketing plans. Could it potentially be used to enhance merchandising sales? The fan stores of many teams rely on pictures of celebrating players to trigger positive emotions. Would an advert making fun of the rival achieve a similar effect? A rivalry evokes strong emotions, and more thought should be given to the commercial exploitation apart from ticket sales and viewing figures.

Outside the world of sports, there is little knowledge about the concept of rivalry, not to mention its benefits. The model could contribute to the analysis of rivalry in other domains. Understanding rivalry in sports can ultimately pave the way to understanding rivalry in other domains. Brands battle out rivalries (e.g., Apple vs. PC, Pepsi vs. Coke), while organizations face fierce inter- as well as intra-firm competition. Some of the model's basic findings, e.g., that rivalry is positively related to distinctiveness, cohesion and esteem, are likely to hold in other domains, such as for consumers of rival brands or employees of competitors. Everywhere, people need strong outgroups to define themselves (Fournier & Lee, 2009). Thus, the exploration of rivalry in the world of sports may be the starting point for research into this phenomenon in other contexts.

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Table 1
Summary of Measurements Properties and Zero-Order Correlations

	M	SD	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perceptions of Rivalry Intensity	8.50	1.82	-		-	1							
2. Identification Favorite Team	4.60	1.35	.73	.75	0.44	.15**	1						
3. Disidentification Rival	3.78	1.91	.85	.85	0.66	.23**	.56**	1					
4. Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry	6.01	1.30	.81	.82	0.61	.45**	.10*	.19**	1				
5. Perceived Distinctiveness	5.57	1.28	.85	.85	0.66	.26**	.27**	.34**	.37**	1			
6. Perceived Group Cohesion	5.97	.98	.88	.88	0.71	.22**	.28**	.26**	.33**	.50**	1		
7. Public Collective Self-Esteem - non-rival	4.75	1.37	.93	.93	0.81	.11*	.18**	.14**	.27**	.39**	.33**	1	
8. Public Collective Self-Esteem – rival	2.27	1.28	.82	.82	0.61	-.26**	.02	-.08	-.22**	-.06	-.02	.26**	1

Notes: Seven-point rating scales used for all constructs except for perceptions of rivalry intensity (ten). CR = Composite Reliabilities. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. * $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Total, Direct and Indirect Effects of Rivalry

	Est.	SE	t	Hyp.	Support
Total effects (direct + indirect)					
Rivalry → Public Collective Self-Esteem (R)	-.31***	.042	-7.28	H1	yes
Rivalry → Public Collective Self-Esteem (NR)	.09*	.043	2.14	H2	yes
Rivalry → Perceived Distinctiveness	.27***	.041	6.43	H3	yes
Rivalry → Perceived Group Cohesion	.20***	.042	4.78	H4	yes
Rivalry → Disidentification Rival	.18***	.038	4.79	H5	yes
Rivalry → Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry	.49***	.036	13.60	H7	yes
Direct effects					
Rivalry → Public Collective Self-Esteem (NR)	-.08	.049	-1.67		
Rivalry → Perceived Distinctiveness	.04	.049	.73		
Rivalry → Perceived Group Cohesion	.01	.049	.24		
Indirect Effects					
Rivalry → Public Collective Self-Esteem (NR)					
via Disidentification Rival	.00	.012	-0.58	H6a	no
via Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry	.18***	.029	6.14	H8a	yes
Rivalry → Perceived Distinctiveness					
via Disidentification Rival	.03*	.014	2.34	H6b	yes
via Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry	.20***	.030	6.55	H8b	yes
Rivalry → Perceived Group Cohesion					
via Disidentification Rival	.01	.013	0.80	H6c	no
via Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry	.18***	.030	6.00	H8c	yes
R²					
Public Collective Self-Esteem (R)	.10***	.027	3.65		
Public Collective Self-Esteem (NR)	.16***	.034	4.70		
Perceived Distinctiveness	.31***	.038	8.00		
Perceived Group Cohesion	.25***	.038	6.64		

Notes: Standardized coefficients, standard errors and t-values.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure Captions:

Figure 1. Proposed model capturing the dual effects of rivalry on fans' self-concept, as mediated by disidentification and perceived reciprocity.

Figure 2. Standardized estimates of the path coefficients in the model.

Notes: Only significant paths are displayed.

Questionnaire Items, Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Standardized Loadings from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	CFA
1. Public Collective Self-Esteem - Non-Rival Opponents								
Except for (archrival) fans: A majority of the Bundesliga fans hold a favorable opinion of (favorite team) fans.	.88							.92
Except for (archrival) fans: A majority of the Bundesliga fans respects the (favorite team) fans.	.87							.92
Except for (archrival) fans: (favorite team) fans are held in high esteem by a majority of the Bundesliga fans.	.80							.86
2. Perceived Group Cohesion								
In the (favorite team) fan community one feels great solidarity.		.83						.88
The (favorite team) fan community is a unit.		.77						.82
There is great togetherness in the (favorite team) fan community.		.74						.83
3. Disidentification Rival								
When someone praises the archrival, it feels like a personal insult.			.80					.80
When someone criticizes the archrival, it feels like a personal compliment.			.80					.88
The arch-rivals failures are my successes.			.59			.39		.75
4. Public Collective Self-Esteem - Rival								
(Archrival) fans respect (favorite team) fans.				.84				.83
(Archrival) fans hold a favorable opinion of (favorite team) fans.				.82				.86
(Favorite team) fans are held in high esteem by (archrival) fans.				.61				.64
5. Perceived Distinctiveness								
Among all Bundesliga fans in Germany the fans of (favorite team) stand out.					.79			.88
There is something that makes (favorite team) fans unique in comparison with other Bundesliga fans.					.72			.79
The (favorite team) fan community has a distinctive character compared to other Bundesliga fan communities.		.32			.67			.76
6. Identification Favorite Team								
When someone praises my favorite team, it feels like a personal compliment.						.76		.82
My favorite team's successes are my successes.						.73		.74
When someone criticizes my favorite team, it feels like a personal insult.			.35			.47		.60
When I talk about my favorite team, I usually say "we" rather than "they".						.42		.42
7. Perceived Reciprocity of Rivalry								
For (archrival) fans (favorite team) is the archrival as well.							.88	.90
The rivalry between (archrival) and (favorite team) is mutual.							.68	.72
For (archrival) fans there is nothing worse than losing to (favorite team).							.65	.71