

# BRAND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ASSOCIATED COMMUNITIES: GROUNDING COMMUNITY MEASUREMENT WITHIN SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

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The purpose of this study was to measure consumer identification with several (brand) communities using a multidimensional psychometric community identity instrument grounded in social identity theory. Use of such instrumentation allowed the authors to examine how consumer identification with associated communities affected identification with the brand community. Data were collected on four different community identities (college football team, university, city, state) among students at the three major Florida universities. Results indicated that identification with the respective teams was affected by identification with other communities surrounding the team. This interplay among community identities had a strong subsequent effect on consumer behavior.

Brand community research has gained prominence over the past decade due to the increasing complexities of modern business and the goal of remaining profitable. As a result, “more and more companies are attempting to build deep, meaningful, long-term relationships with their customers” (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003, p. 76). In an effort to foster such relationships, researchers have proposed a communal approach to consumption (Cova and Pace 2006). A classic example of this community-based consumption is the subculture formed by Harley-Davidson devotees (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Schouten and McAlexander (1995) were drawn to the thought that a single product (i.e., the Harley-Davidson motorcycle) defined a distinctive, homogeneous, and enduring subculture. The behavior of consumers driven by similar passions to form a group has come to the forefront as an object of study with relevance for marketing researchers (Cova and Pace 2006). The study of brand communities has revealed (in the aggregate) that these specialized subcultures enable an organization to better communicate, establish, and foster rich consumer relationships. Moreover, such relationships have been found

to significantly and positively affect consumer behavior (e.g., Carlson, Suter, and Brown 2008; Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009).

From a sociological perspective, considerable progress has been made in examining both the existence and characteristics of brand communities (Luedicke 2006; Moore and Mazvancheryl 1996; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and the psychological connections consumers develop with these communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; Carlson, Suter, and Brown 2008; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). Currently, however, the relationship between the brand community and the consumer has been examined as if existing in a vacuum, unaffected by the identity process a consumer has with other communities. Little attention has been paid to the way in which consumers identify with other communities or how this process influences the way they identify with the focal brand community. This comes as somewhat of a surprise since identification with other communities (e.g., religion or nation) should be assumed to influence brand perceptions and subsequently the decisional processes required to become part of a brand community.

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Given this commentary, the purpose of this research was to examine the way in which existing community identities affect identification with a brand community. By removing the relationship between the individual and the brand community from its vacuum (and implementing a multi-community approach), we provide a richer understanding of the identification process with a brand community. A more detailed understanding of this process could provide marketers with increasingly accurate perspectives on the complexities that shape identification with a brand community. Team identity has been seen to have a strong effect on consumer behavior. Therefore, we expect these associated communities to indirectly affect consumer behavior through their affect on team identity (Tapp and Clowes 2002). Once associated community strength is assessed, marketers could then tailor marketing strategies to allow for a stronger position of the associated community or develop new strategies that strengthen weak associations.

In order to test multiple community identities, we captured a psychometric indication of the strength of a brand community by measuring the consumer's identification with several groups. Therefore, we chose not to rely on specific brand community identity measures, and instead we used instruments rooted primarily in social identity theory. Our rationale was that brand communities are essentially social groups that share common features with more generalized groups (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004; Tajfel 1978). Research on brand communities generally supports this similarity argument. For example, many common features in social groups are defined through processes comparable to those within the community literature, such as rituals, history, traditions, moral responsibility, and shared consciousness (Chavis and Pretty 1999; Durkheim 1965).

## BACKGROUND

### Brand Community Identity

At the core of community identification is an individual's desire to belong to a particular community and behave according to established norms and values. Within this desire, the search for a "social identity," to create and foster one's personal identity, is a valuable aspect of such affiliations (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004; Durkheim 1965; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Tajfel 1978).

The idea that companies or brands could serve as a point of community identity has received considerable attention over the past two decades (McAlexander, Schouten, and

Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Results from these studies have uncovered several brand community markers (e.g., shared consciousness of kind, traditions, rituals, history, shared group experiences, moral responsibility, opposite brand loyalty). Yet marketing scholars have not examined what separates brand communities from other communities or how brand communities relate to (non-brand) communities. While uniqueness exists between rituals, traditions, shared group experiences, and the way these markers are perceived, they are nonetheless the same processes that manifest in other communities regardless of geography (e.g., nation, city, neighborhood), demography (e.g., age, gender, race) or social affiliation (e.g., religion, vocation).

The acknowledgment that brand communities (in essence) are shaped by the same markers as other communities and that they form a similar point of identification for their potential members provides an opportunity to consult community identity findings in other areas of social science. For example, what Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) called "a consciousness of kind" has been examined within social psychology as social identity (Tajfel 1978). Social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981, p. 255). The theory stipulates that individuals not only possess a personal identity but also a social identity encompassing salient group classifications. These group classifications can range from demographic categories (e.g., age, gender, race, nationality), to membership organizations (e.g., educational affiliations, political affiliations, sport teams, corporations), to more confined social roles such as brother, parent, friend, teacher, or athlete (Deaux et al. 1995).

The collective identity framework posited by Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), whose main goal was to identify the distinct individual elements comprising social identity, is of particular value for the current study because it allows for a more detailed psychological perspective on social identity. Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe noted that an individual's social identity is formed by the perception of belongingness to a group or community (i.e., community identity). Thus, community identity is not only used to enhance the individual's self-esteem (Hogg and Turner 1985; Tajfel 1978) but, more importantly, one's sense of self-identity is dependent on the specific community identities. Consumers who believe that an organization "shares" with them a subset of distinctive characteristics

will find that organization to be an attractive target for identity creation and social fulfillment (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005). Community identity can be strengthened by emphasizing the positive aspects of identifying with the community (i.e., in-group) and by minimizing the negative aspects. This implies that individuals do not automatically become members of a community. Instead, community membership is dependent on individual attitudes toward the community. The process by which community identity is activated is referred to as *salience*, which implies a readiness to act out an identity as a consequence of the cognitive structure or schema (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Individuals tend to ascribe identity salience when the community provides them with an outlet for their sense of belonging, self-esteem, pride, and vicarious achievement (Cialdini et al. 1976; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992; Stryker and Serpe 1994). Thus, we argue that membership alone is not a sufficient condition for community identity; it is the readiness to act upon that membership that is particularly important:

*Hypothesis 1: The identification process of an individual with a particular community within a certain setting is unique and dependent on the salience of the community.*

Measuring identification with a brand community is important because the stronger the identification with a brand community, the more the individual will act upon that identification. This action, in turn, will benefit the firm through loyalty, willingness to pay higher prices, and activating a sense of community among other consumers (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009).

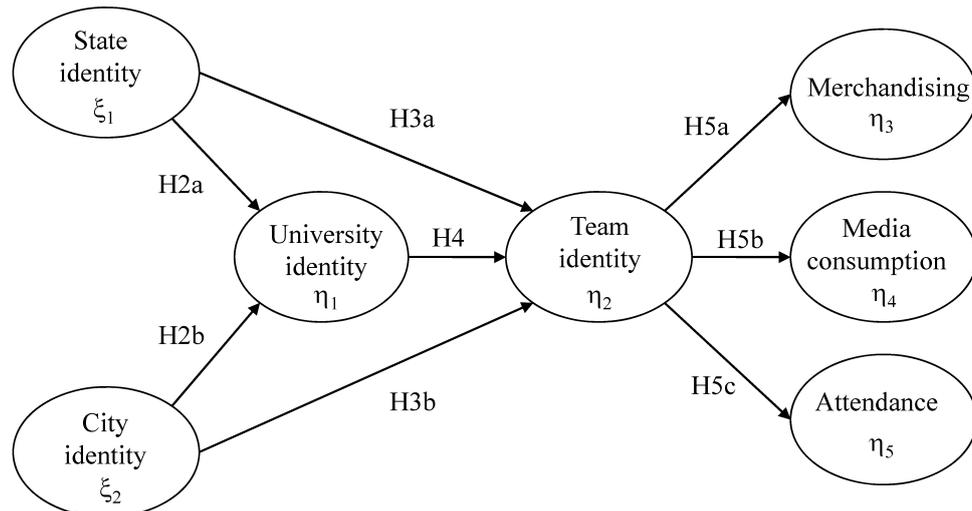
### The Affect of Associated Communities

To date, brand community research has focused on examining the brand as a tool for consumers to identify with one another (e.g., Holt 1995; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). A review of previous research, however, revealed no effort to examine whether identification with one brand community may be influenced by an individual's identification with associated communities. Within the marketing literature, the idea that other identities influence relationships with a brand community was forwarded by Simonin and Ruth (1998). These authors grounded their work in brand alliances to demonstrate that brand evaluations could be influenced by partnerships with other brands or communities. However,

the most notable example of such a partnership between communities is the influence of national identity on consumer behavior, referred to as the "country of origin" effect (see Beverland and Lindgreen 2002; Erickson, Johansson, and Chao 1984). For example, while BMW might have value as a brand, it might also become a mechanism through which consumers identify with larger associated communities such as Germany or the region of Bayern. Therefore, identification with Germany or Bayern will affect the consumer's identification with the BMW brand community. This would be particularly true if the consumer perceives BMW to be representative of the focal country or region. As a result, these community identities may serve to reinforce one other. Similarly, an American consumer might share the same affinity with BMW and perceive him- or herself to be a part of the BMW brand community. However, since BMW is not representative of the United States, one who identifies with any other community does not reinforce his or her community identity with BMW.

Within sport management, some have proposed that the brand communities surrounding sport teams are strongly influenced by their ability to represent associated communities such as nations, cities, and universities (Anderson and Stone, 1981; Heere and James 2007). Individuals derive a sense of identity from their affiliation with local teams thereby reinforcing the bond with their respective communities (Anderson and Stone 1981; Underwood, Bond, and Baer 2001). Therefore, it is crucial for sport teams to understand the interrelationship between a team and the communities surrounding the team because of the possible effects on consumer behavior. An empirical examination of the strength of these links could assist sport programs in better positioning themselves to their consumers. This could be especially valuable for college teams, with their capacity to form a symbol for the university, and potentially for the region, city, or state that could have a positive affect on the loyalty of the fans toward the team. Even when a team underperforms for a certain period of time, its fans might remain loyal, presumably because they feel that by abandoning the team they might also abandon their university and state. Such associated links make it difficult for individuals to cut themselves off from reflected failure (Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford 1986), particularly if a winning tradition has preceded a downward trend. This symbolic representation of sport (and the value that teams have to their surrounding communities) underpins the construction of our model. The assumption is that if positive relationships exist between different community identities, organizations operating in a similar dynamic could use

**Figure 1**  
**Multicommunity Identity Model for College Football Teams**



these findings to develop their own brand community. In this study, we adopted a brand community association model and expanded on this idea to a more inclusive multicommunity perspective (see Figure 1).

The strong symbolic power of sport is nowhere more evident than in the collegiate setting. Accordingly, this context provided an excellent opportunity to explore the multicommunity proposition as each of the brand community characteristics proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) are strongly applicable. For example, teams consistently foster high levels of community identity and serve to reinforce an individual's community identity both with the team and the communities surrounding the team. Correspondingly, there are several team fan characteristics that bolster this assertion. First, members of sport communities demonstrate strong feelings of "we" toward the brand (often occurring after a victory of their favorite team), a response referred to as "basking in reflected glory" (Cialdini et al. 1976). Second, many fans have developed their own rituals and traditions or follow the rituals and traditions of the team to which they are connected. Whether participating in the "tomahawk chop" to support the Seminoles of Florida State University, singing along with the crowd at FC Liverpool soccer matches, or perhaps imitating the "haka" at games of the New Zealand national rugby team, team fans are more than willing to make their allegiances known. Third, fans frequently reminisce about their favored team; celebrating championships, mourning upsets, or reveling in the accomplishments of former star players. Fans use these memories to connect with others and demonstrate their

willingness to share their emotions openly. Finally, many fans feel a responsibility to remain loyal and connected to the team even when the team is unsuccessful (e.g., the Chicago Cubs), an idea proposed by Funk and James (2001), thereby evoking high levels of shared consciousness and community support especially in times of strife. Much of the psychological connection consumers develop with their favorite sport team is dependent on the identity of the consumers with the communities surrounding the sport team, whether geographical, ethnic, gender based, social class based, or political (Heere and James 2007).

Deaux et al. (1995) provided a classification metric for the identification process with various groups. Within their classification, the authors provided a rationale to assist in differentiating between how individuals identify with demographic categories (i.e., those we are born in) and how they identify with membership organizations (i.e., those we choose to become a part of). This distinction might become blurred through the concept of salience, as individuals always have a choice to ignore or express a community identity, regardless of whether they were born into the community or chose to join it later in life. Nevertheless, Deaux et al.'s work underpinned our rationale to use demographic categories (i.e., city and state) as precursors for identification with two membership organizations (i.e., university and college football team). The university is an organization that, in many regards, is a symbol of the state. As such, we expected that individuals possessing a higher degree of identification with either the state or city would also possess a higher degree of identification

with the university and consequently, the college football team:

*Hypothesis 2: Identification with the (a) state and (b) city will positively and significantly influence the community identity with the university.*

*Hypothesis 3: Identification with the (a) state and (b) city will positively and significantly influence the community identity with the college football team, both directly and indirectly through the university identity.*

Anderson and Stone (1981) were among the first to introduce the idea that sport teams are symbolic representations of their surroundings. Forwarding this idea, Brooker and Klastorin (1981) noted that athletic success (in the context of the university–football team relationship) can have a positive trickle-down effect on alumni donations to the university—not just the athletic department. More recently, Trail et al. (2003) maintained that both the community and the university are possible points of attachment in the formation of team identity. Research has emphasized the strong partnership between the university and college athletics (Covell and Barr 2001). Covell and Barr (2001) have noted that while the football team is a formal subsystem of the university’s athletic department, it is also part of the larger university structure. The level of influence might vary based on the ability of the college football team to be representative of the university and might also be contingent on the success of the team. For example, a successful team is more likely to be used as a symbol for expressing an individual’s identity with the university, as opposed to an unsuccessful team (Cialdini et al. 1976). Hence, we expected that university identity would positively affect team identity:

*Hypothesis 4: The respondent’s identification with the university will positively and significantly influence team identity.*

Consumer identification has been reported as an important predictor of numerous consumer reactions (e.g., cognitive, affective, and behavioral) (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009). Research specific to the consumer behavior paradigm (e.g., Fisher and Wakefield 1998; Gwinner and Swanson 2003; Madrigal 2000; Tapp and Clowes 2002; Wann and Branscombe 1993) has demonstrated community identity to be a significant precursor of various behavioral consumption patterns—specifically, consumer patronage and repatronage intentions (e.g., Kwon and Armstrong 2002; Kwon and Trail 2003). One idea, in particular, that underscores

the salience of community identity is that varying levels of psychological connection are influenced by different factors (Funk and James 2001) and that these factors may lead to different behavioral outcomes. The findings pertaining to those levels of identification may be consistent with the conclusions of James, Kolbe, and Trail (2002), who found that the stronger one’s psychological connection to a property, the greater the number of variables influencing the connection. Given the loyalty and enthusiasm displayed by many fans of college athletics (Mahony, Madrigal, and Howard 2000), it is reasonable to surmise that an individual’s identification with the team could profoundly influence their consumption intentions:

*Hypothesis 5: Identification with the college football team will positively and significantly influence (a) self-reported merchandise sales, (b) self-reported media consumption, and (c) self-reported attendance.*

## METHOD

### Research Setting

Due to the exploratory nature of testing a multicommunity model, we chose a setting that would be characterized by strong links. The three collegiate settings used in the current study were chosen because of similar characteristics and expected differences regarding the associated communities. The Florida State University (FSU) Seminoles, the University of Florida (UF) Gators, and the University of Miami (UM) Hurricanes have all experienced comparable success over the past two decades, and each has won multiple national championships since 1991. However, notable differences are expected when examining associated communities linkages. In particular, some of UM’s characteristics make it unique from the other two universities. For example, both UF and FSU are large public universities, whereas UM is a much smaller private university carrying the name of their city rather than the state. All three universities offer a similar product and also compete within the same market for recruiting players and attracting fans. As such, three communities that could affect the way individuals identified with the college football team were identified: (1) the university associated with the team, (2) the city the team was located in, and (3) the state the team was located in.

### Community Identity Instrument

The underpinnings of social identity theory suggest that identification is a multidimensional concept (Roccas et

al. 2008). To support this idea, Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) argued the importance of illustrating the many facets that are part of the identification process. These facets describe self-categorization, private and public evaluation, interconnection of self with the group, sense of interdependence with the group, behavioral involvement, and content and meaning as the most notable examples. By implementing these identity facets, researchers are able to gain a more elaborate view on the process of community identification.

In line with the multidimensional view of community identity, items for the current study were adopted from several existing social identity scales (see Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004). For self-categorization, the open-ended item proposed by Henderson-King and Stewart (1994) was used. In contrast to the other items, self-categorization was not examined as a construct within the identification process but rather as a precursor to identity and to test for the presence of salience (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe 2004). In order for the other processes to occur, individuals need to acknowledge their membership categorization. Items for both private and public evaluation were adopted from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). The interconnection of self with the group items were adopted from Mael and Tetrick (1992), while items measuring one's sense of interdependence with the group were adopted from Gurin and Townsend (1986). The behavioral involvement items were adapted from Phinney (1992). Because Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) limited their review of content and meaning to qualitative studies, there was no scale we could implement to measure this concept. Therefore, we proposed several cognitive awareness items to measure this concept (see Table 1). Some of the items were slightly altered to allow for use within different group settings. These changes were minor and confined to the group label only (e.g., "I participate in activities supporting my own race" was altered to "I participate in activities supporting my football team/university/city/state"); therefore, no additional testing was deemed necessary.

For each scale dimension, we relied on previously operationalized items that were adapted from existing research. Making use of these items allowed us to gain initial content validity, as most have been previously tested for internal consistency and validity. By using these items and by measuring community identity in a multidimensional manner, this instrument will not only allow for a more accurate assessment of identification with a brand community, it will also allow for a more thorough assessment of how the different community identity processes affect each other.

## Data Collection

In total, 872 (FSU:  $n = 262$ ; UF:  $n = 348$ ; UM:  $n = 262$ ) usable surveys were collected (male: 59 percent; female: 41 percent) through a convenience sampling method. While males are slightly overrepresented, we have no reason to believe this will bias the results. Respondent ages ranged from 18 to 49 ( $M = 20.40$ ) with 95 percent of the respondents below the age of 23. Data were collected from freshmen (10 percent), sophomores (25 percent), juniors (29 percent), and seniors (34 percent). On average, the respondents resided in their respective city for 4.39 years and in the state of Florida for 13.36 years.

Undergraduate students enrolled in physical activity classes during the first part of a fall semester (i.e., prior to the start of the college football schedule to minimize any biasing from the performance of the team) were asked to voluntarily participate in the research. We delimited our sampling to physical activity classes for two main reasons: (1) to attract students from every college on campus (i.e., all students are required to take one of these classes to fulfill graduation requirements) and (2) to attract students at different stages in their academic career. Undergraduate students were chosen as they were expected to identify with the college football team and were also expected to have some level of identification with the university they currently attended. Questionnaires were distributed by one researcher at each of the three universities, and of the total enrollment in these classes ( $n = 1,604$ ), 872 participated in the research, providing a response rate of approximately 54 percent.

The first set of items assessed demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, year in college, length of time in city, and length of time in state). The second set of items measured the identification of the students with the university, team, city, and state. All the items were scored on a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." The third set of items assessed patronage behaviors. In particular, three consumer outcomes were measured using subscales adapted from general work in sport marketing (Kim, Walsh, and Ross 2008; Milne and McDonald 1999; Walker and Kent 2009). Respondents were asked to self-report how much team-related merchandise they purchased, how frequently they followed their team through media, and how frequently they attended games.

## Data Analysis

To assess the appropriateness of the use of the instrument in this particular context, we examined the reliability

**Table 1**  
**Group Identity Instrument**

Constructs	Descriptions
Self-Categorization (Henderson-King and Stewart 1994)	Identifying self as a member of, or categorizing self in terms of, a particular social grouping. (open-ended question)
Private Evaluation (Items originated from Luhtanen and Crocker 1992)	The positive or negative attitude that an individual has personally toward the group. I feel good about being a (fan/member) of my (state/university/college football team/city). In general, I am glad to be a (fan/member) of my (state/university/college football team/city). I am proud to think of myself as a (fan/member) of my (state/university/college football team/city).
Public Evaluation (Items originated from Luhtanen and Crocker 1992)	The perceived positive or negative attitude of nonmembers toward the groups by the individual. Overall, my (state/university/college football team/city) is viewed positively by others. In general, others respect my (state/university/college football team/city). Overall, people hold a favorable opinion about my (state/university/college football team/city).
Sense of Interdependence with the Group (Items originated from Gurin and Townsend 1986)	The degree to which the individual feels his or her faith is dependent on the faith of the group. What happens to my (state/university/college football team/city) will influence what happens in my life. Changes affecting my (state/university/college football team/city) will have an impact on my own life. What happens to my (state/university/college football team/city) will have an impact on my own life.
Interconnection of Self with the Group (Items originated from Mael and Tetrick 1992)	The degree to which the individual feels the group is a part of him- or herself. When someone criticizes my (state/university/college football team/city), it feels like a personal insult. In general, being associated with my (state/university/college football team/city) is an important part of my self-image. When someone compliments my college football team, it feels like a personal compliment.
Behavioral Involvement (Items originated from Phinney 1992)	The degree to which an individual engages in actions that directly implicate the group identity. I participate in activities supporting my (state/university/college football team/city). I am actively involved in activities that relate to my (state/university/college football team/city). I participate in activities with other (fans/members) of my (state/university/college football team/city).
Cognitive Awareness (Self-developed items)	The general awareness (or knowledge) that an individual has of the group. I am aware of the tradition and history of my (state/university/college football team/city). I know the ins and outs of my (state/university/college football team/city). I have knowledge of the successes and failures of my (state/university/college football team/city).

and validity of the scales following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2005) and Lance, Butts, and Michels (2006). To test Hypothesis 1, we conducted four different one-way MANOVAs (multivariate analyses of variance). To control for type I errors, a post hoc Bonferroni adjustment was performed within each MANOVA. To test Hypotheses 2–5, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed (Hair et al. 2005).

## RESULTS

### Scale Reliability

To test the sample-specific data and evaluate the instrument's appropriateness, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, interitem correlation, and the item-to-total correlation scores (see Table 2). The results of these analyses revealed that all of the community identity

**Table 2**  
**Initial Reliability Tests for Team, University, City, and State Identity (n = 872)**

	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Interitem Correlation (Lowest to Highest Correlation)	Item-to-Total Statistic (Lowest and Highest Statistic)
Team			
Private evaluation	0.914	0.758–0.818	0.810–0.853
Public evaluation	0.869	0.642–0.762	0.693–0.786
Interconnection of self with the group	0.865	0.486–0.808	0.612–0.763
Sense of interdependence with the group	0.943	0.824–0.896	0.849–0.901
Behavioral involvement	0.895	0.601–0.795	0.698–0.822
Cognitive awareness	0.912	0.651–0.759	0.776–0.832
University			
Private evaluation	0.910	0.760–0.793	0.805–0.831
Public evaluation	0.905	0.753–0.779	0.797–0.819
Interconnection of self with the group	0.850	0.593–0.763	0.641–0.767
Sense of interdependence with the group	0.921	0.754–0.823	0.820–0.872
Behavioral involvement	0.873	0.470–0.782	0.611–0.814
Cognitive awareness	0.878	0.604–0.684	0.713–0.759
City			
Private evaluation	0.918	0.755–0.829	0.807–0.865
Public evaluation	0.912	0.744–0.832	0.781–0.849
Interconnection of self with the group	0.909	0.630–0.831	0.709–0.830
Sense of interdependence with the group	0.932	0.801–0.849	0.840–0.877
Behavioral involvement	0.869	0.473–0.770	0.647–0.800
Cognitive awareness	0.879	0.559–0.750	0.636–0.786
State			
Private evaluation	0.906	0.741–0.801	0.783–0.830
Public evaluation	0.915	0.760–0.814	0.803–0.844
Interconnection of self with the group	0.895	0.617–0.787	0.722–0.801
Sense of interdependence with the group	0.922	0.779–0.825	0.820–0.855
Behavioral involvement	0.854	0.450–0.780	0.601–0.784
Cognitive awareness	0.883	0.616–0.677	0.716–0.761

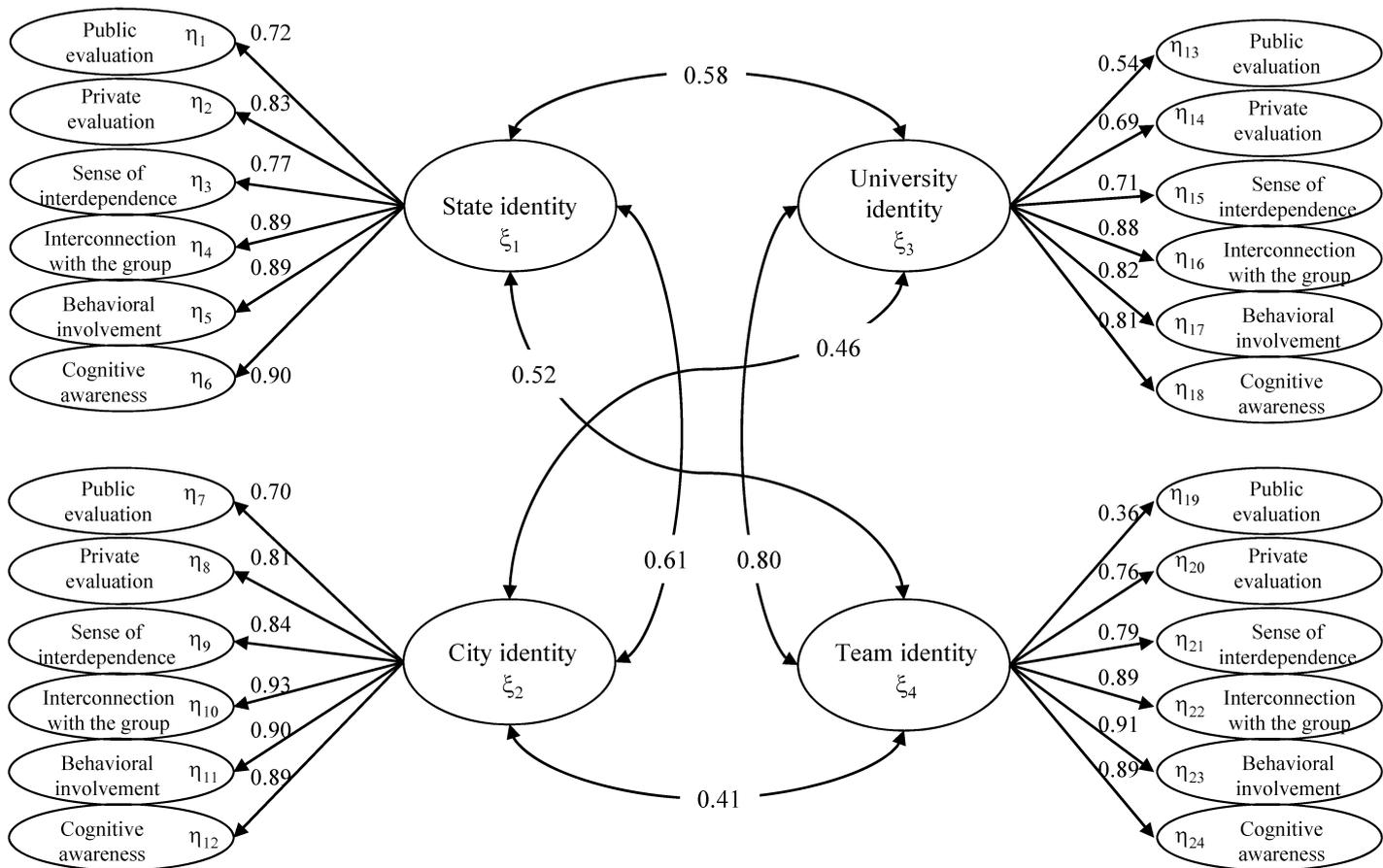
constructs and items demonstrated evidence of internal consistency. The three consumer behaviors all possessed Cronbach's alpha scores above 0.80 (i.e., merchandise = 0.88, media = 0.85, attendance = 0.91) indicating internal consistency (Lance, Butts, and Michels 2006).

### Construct Validity

Additional structure testing was performed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the generic community identity scale as well as by evaluating the factor loadings of the different constructs in the three different settings (see Figure 2). The results supported the community identity scale's internal structure validity and all the factor loadings (at both the first-order and second-order level) were well above the 0.50 cut point (Hair et al. 2005).

To support the construct, convergent, and discriminant validity of the scale, several additional tests were performed. First, convergent validity was assessed by calculating the analysis of variance (AVE) scores for each construct using the 0.50 cutoff suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Convergent validity scores across the different group settings all exceeded the recommended cutoff with AVE scores ranging from 0.65 to 0.86. Second, discriminant validity was determined by comparing the AVE estimate for each construct with the squared correlations between constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Community identity research, in general, has struggled with the high correlation between the different community identity constructs (Dimmock, Grove, and Ecklund 2005; Roccas et al. 2008), and these high correlations were present within our data as well. Nevertheless, because of the strong convergent validity of the individual

**Figure 2**  
Second-Order CFA Model



Notes:  $n = 430$ ;  $\chi^2(df) = 9,240.78(2,454)$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.77$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96; nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = 0.96; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.080; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.082. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

dimensions, these high relationships were accounted for. The squared correlations between community identity constructs (i.e., team, university, and state) were all lower than the respective AVE scores, with one exception. Within the city identity construct, *interconnection of self with the group*, had slightly higher squared correlations (0.69, 0.68) with *behavioral involvement* and *cognitive awareness*. We propose (i.e., from a conceptual perspective) that *interconnection of self with the group* is distinct enough to accept the high correlations with both *behavioral involvement* and *cognitive awareness* for this particular community. Overall, the results of the internal structure testing resulted in an acceptable cross-settings generic model.

### The Uniqueness of the Identity Process

To test Hypothesis 1, two main strategies were employed to compare the mean scores for each group identity construct

at the three different universities. First, one of the crucial components of measuring community identity is whether respondents perceive themselves to be a member of the community. To account for this, respondents were asked the question: "With which [college football team/university/city/state] do you identify most?" The communities were mentioned and the open-ended nature of the item afforded the opportunity to insert a response. This self-categorization was regarded as an indicator of the strength of the community.

Second, four different one-way MANOVAs were conducted to assess cross-sample similarities and differences among the universities for each of the four communities. To control for type I error, a post hoc Bonferroni adjustment was performed for each MANOVA. The choice to do four separate one-way MANOVAs had to do with the self-categorization. Those individuals that did not identify with one of the communities within a collegiate setting were eliminated

from the analysis. This led to four different sample sizes (Team identity,  $n = 818$ ; University identity,  $n = 849$ ; City identity,  $n = 579$ ; State identity,  $n = 646$ ), and for each we had to compute four separate one-way MANOVAs.

The differences between universities for levels of self-categorization and community identity were significant. In particular, the findings provided insight on how individuals identify with the communities surrounding them. The status of a college football program as a possible source of identity was apparent through both the percentage of students that identified as fans and their level of identification within four of the six identity processes. Nevertheless, the low scores for both *interconnection of self with the group* and *sense of interdependence with the group* illustrated that most respondents perceived the bond with the team as fairly weak. This phenomenon is described by the theories of basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al. 1976) and cutting off reflective failure (Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford 1986). These theories illustrate that if a team is successful, the individual feels like part of the team (e.g., "We won the championship"). Conversely, when the team is unsuccessful, the individual tends to disassociate with the team (e.g., "They played terribly").

The perceived reputation of the universities under investigation was also apparent through the identification process. While students at both UF and UM strongly identified with their universities, students at FSU scored significantly lower on their identification processes with the university. The percentage of students that categorized themselves as part of either the city or state followed our expectation that UM was primarily representative of the city of Miami (76 percent identified with the city and 45 percent with the state), while FSU is regarded as representative of the state (54 percent identified with the city and 88 percent with the state). Surprisingly, UF was representative of both the city and state (68 percent identified with the city and 86 percent with the state). It could be that the higher percentage of students that identified with Gainesville (in comparison to Tallahassee) was caused by the recent successes of the football team.

Four one-way MANOVAs were conducted revealing significant overall effects for the three community identities (Team:  $F(6, 810) = 3,920, p < 0.001$ ; University:  $F(6, 841) = 6,356, p < 0.001$ ; City:  $F(6, 571) = 1,515, p < 0.001$ ; State:  $F(6, 638) = 1,839, p < 0.001$ ). These results confirmed Hypothesis 1, which stated that identification with each community is unique. It is important to note that only those individuals that categorized themselves as a part of the community were included in this analysis. Due in part to

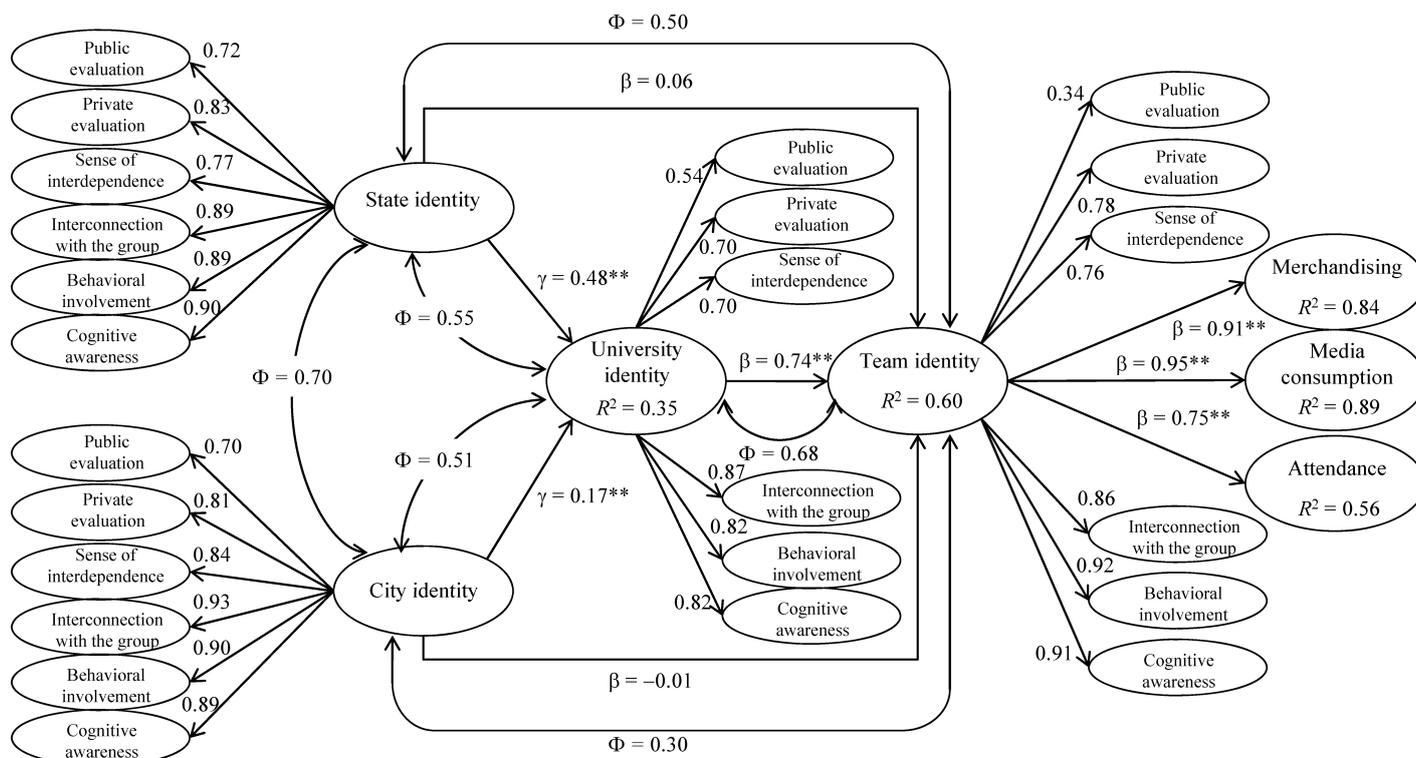
their 2008 national championship season (six months prior to our data collection), we expected the respondents from UF to score significantly higher on the different identity constructs compared with the other two schools. Both UF and UM received higher scores on the university identity constructs, which confirmed this rationale. For city identity, UM respondents scored higher than UF or FSU, indicating the difference between a large metropolitan area versus a smaller, regional city. However, the scores for the state identity only partially confirmed our hypothesis. We expected no differences for state identity between the three collegiate settings. Regardless, within the FSU setting, respondents scored significantly higher on both *behavioral involvement* and *cognitive awareness*. This result could be caused by Tallahassee's position as the capital city of Florida. Therefore, the respondents may be more closely involved with issues involving the state rather than the city. In sum, the results provided support that identification processes within each community was unique. In addition, the results support the assertion that a stronger identity is often associated with a stronger community.

### **Multicommunity Model for College Football Teams**

To analyze the affect of the associated communities on the college football team community and further assess the impact on consumer behavior (following Hypotheses 2-5) we employed SEM. In order to perform SEM, all study participants who did not identify with all four groups in one particular setting were eliminated from the analyses, thereby reducing the sample to 430. The remaining respondents all identified with one of the following sets of communities: (1) Florida, Tallahassee, FSU, Seminoles; (2) Florida, Gainesville, UF, Gators; (3) Florida, Miami, UM, Hurricanes. The structural equation model is depicted in Figure 3.

For the examination of each college football program, all the hypotheses were revisited. Our results fully support Hypothesis 2 as both state identity and city identity affected university identity, explaining 35 percent of the variance. More specifically, state identity yielded a stronger influence on university identity than city identity. Because two of the three universities carried the state name where the institution is located, this result was not unexpected. We were unable to explore this finding further because of sample size limitations. If performed, this might have illustrated the difference between UM and FSU/UF; as such, future research would be well served to examine this relationship.

**Figure 3**  
**A Comprehensive Model of the Relationships Between University Identity, City Identity, State Identity, and Team Identity**



Notes:  $n = 430$ ;  $\chi^2(df) = 10,663.64(3,047)$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; CFI = 0.96; NNFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.076; SRMR = 0.079.  $** p < 0.01$ .

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3. While neither city nor state identity had a direct effect on team identity, they both indirectly affected team identity through university identity. Again, the inclusion of all three universities within one model might have limited the findings, as within each university setting this direct linkage might be present. Intuitively, we expect that the state identity might have a direct effect on team identity at UF and FSU, while city identity could have a direct effect on team identity at UM. Future research should also examine this relationship further.

Full support was found for Hypothesis 4. University identity had a strong and positive direct effect on team identity. Indirectly, city and state identity accounted for 60 percent of the variance explained through team identity. This high impact of university identity on team identity has been well documented in the literature (see Brooker and Klastorin 1981; Covell and Barr 2001). Previous findings, coupled with our results, provide an explanation of the loyalty that many of these college football programs experience among

their fan base. As discussed previously (see Table 3), because of the low mean scores on *interconnection of self with the group* and *sense of interdependence with the group*, it is easy for individuals to cut off their ties especially when the team is unsuccessful. However, if the team is considered to be representative of the university (as our model suggests), it becomes much harder to cut the team ties, as this would mean cutting ties with the university as well.

Previous research has indicated that team identity significantly and positively affected consumer behavior (Fisher and Wakefield 1998; Madrigal 2000; Tapp and Clowes 2002). We concur with these contentions based on the support offered for Hypothesis 5. Specifically, team identity strongly affected self-reported merchandise sales, self-reported media consumption, and self-reported attendance. Thus, the strong effect that community identity had on merchandise sales and media consumption could prove useful for these programs, essentially affording the team the opportunity to attach the associated communities to products and public relations strategies.

**Table 3**  
**MANOVA Analysis of the Different Group Identities Within Each Setting**

	<b>FSU (n = 262)</b>	<b>UF (n = 348)</b>	<b>UM (n = 262)</b>	<b>Differences between colleges at the <math>p = 0.05</math> level</b>
College Football ( $n = 818$ )	Seminoles $n = 243$	Gators $n = 325$	Hurricanes $n = 250$	
Private evaluation	5.634	6.247	5.880	UF > FSU and UM
Public evaluation	4.890	5.987	4.752	UF > FSU and UM
Interconnection of self with the group	3.129	3.659	3.392	UF > FSU
Sense of interdependence with the group	2.650	3.044	2.817	UF > FSU
Behavioral involvement	4.424	4.859	4.531	UF > FSU
Cognitive awareness	4.370	5.005	5.161	UF and UM > FSU
University ( $n = 849$ )	FSU $n = 251$	UF $n = 342$	UM $n = 256$	
Private evaluation	5.882	6.434	6.342	UF and UM > FSU
Public evaluation	5.379	6.214	5.716	UF > UM > FSU
Interconnection of self with the group	4.553	4.910	4.879	UF and UM > FSU
Sense of interdependence with the group	4.462	4.770	4.703	None
Behavioral involvement	5.109	5.412	5.279	UF > FSU
Cognitive awareness	4.948	5.162	5.384	UM > FSU
City ( $n = 579$ )	Tallahassee $n = 142$	Gainesville $n = 238$	Miami $n = 199$	
Private evaluation	4.972	4.653	5.179	UM > UF
Public evaluation	4.681	4.507	5.085	UM > UF and FSU
Interconnection of self with the group	3.617	3.070	3.799	UM and FSU > UF
Sense of interdependence with the group	4.028	3.441	4.251	UM and FSU > UF
Behavioral involvement	4.249	3.815	4.060	FSU > UF
Cognitive awareness	4.270	3.804	4.454	UM and FSU > UF
State ( $n = 646$ )	Florida $n = 230$	Florida $n = 298$	Florida $n = 118$	
Private evaluation	5.480	5.393	5.232	None
Public evaluation	5.307	5.148	5.105	None
Interconnection of self with the group	4.328	4.002	3.980	None
Sense of interdependence with the group	4.730	4.488	4.432	None
Behavioral involvement	4.675	4.433	4.102	FSU > UM
Cognitive awareness	4.861	4.607	4.438	FSU > UM

## DISCUSSION

The idea that identification with a brand community can positively affect the organization is slowly making its way into the marketing literature (Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer 2009). To fully comprehend the effect of community identification, it is important for the marketing field to develop (and subsequently adopt) reliable and valid instrumentation that has strong roots in social identity theory. Such instrumentation would assist in providing a more detailed view of community identity and its associated consequences. In the present paper, empirical evidence is posited attesting to the reliability and valid-

ity of a multidimensional scale to measure community identity. This scale allowed for the examination of the strength of each community relative to various associated communities. The use of three comparable college football programs within the same region supported our propositions. While this study context may appear fairly straightforward, it did provide empirical evidence of the extent of the affect that the identification processes of an individual can have on their identity with the focal brand community.

The structural model added support to the overall proposition that identification with a particular brand community does not exist in a vacuum and is affected

by the way individuals identify with various other communities. For the university, this is particularly interesting as the examination of these links could allow them to either make better use of an existing association or by developing a weaker tie. For example, we have shown that the majority of the respondents at UM identified with the university and the city of Miami rather than with the state of Florida. Armed with this information, university officials could begin to target consumers more effectively by implementing an existing association (i.e., the city of Miami) with a new marketing strategy, perhaps one aimed at capturing state identity to appeal to a broader consumer base.

Notwithstanding the positive results described above, this study is not without its limitations. As this was a first attempt to capture community identity within a multicomunity setting, the results are limited to these specific community identities. It is our contention that the associations between related communities are unique and therefore marketers should not necessarily assume those relationships to be present in their own setting. Even if they are present, marketers are well advised to understand that the power of these associations play a crucial role when predicting consumer behavior. This study is better understood as an effort to exemplify the importance of a multicomunity perspective within brand community research, rather than providing a detailed examination of the fan base of the three college football programs. The limitations in regard to the SEM are a good illustration. Because of a relatively small sample, we were unable to produce a model for each university separately. Therefore, our understanding of how these associations exist within each university is limited, and possible invariance analyses (to further probe independent effects) were not possible.

Another limitation can be attributed to the sample of college students as representatives of the overall fan base of the three college football teams. Our results suggest that university identity had the strongest impact on team identity, while city identity represented the weakest. This result is likely only representative of this particular sample and not for the overall population within that particular collegiate setting. In this regard, the results are best understood as an exploratory attempt to find empirical evidence of the linkage that exists between the different communities. As such, more value should be attached to the implications of this study for future research projects, rather than on the consequences this study has for the particular universities. Thus, future

research should focus on the relationship of other brand communities with their associated communities outside of sport. The example regarding the automobile industry would be an excellent venue to conduct a comparative study in which scholars could examine the impact of national identity on the brand communities surrounding U.S. car manufacturers.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Over the past decade, marketers have been searching for ways to improve consumer relationships by creating strategies for long-term, enduring bonds. This focus has resulted in a paradigm shift from looking at the buyer as just a consumer to looking at the buyer as a member of the organization who is highly involved with the organization and other members. When consumers are considered as members, managers are well served by acknowledging the different memberships each individual possesses with other organizations. In those situations where a large portion of the consumers possess a similar membership to another community, managers can take advantage of this associated community and emphasize (or develop) their relationship with the associated community.

The results of this study give rise to a few interesting implications that are likely to extend beyond the sport industry. The first goes directly to the main thrust of this investigation—that is, the refined community identity instrument should allow marketers to gain a more detailed picture on how consumers identify with their brand community. Rather than rely on a one-dimensional identity scale (which might only provide a generic idea of how strongly consumers identify with the organization), this instrument should assist in gathering new information on how consumers evaluate their bond with the organization (i.e., private evaluation), how they feel other people perceive this bond (i.e., public evaluation), how strongly their bond with the organization actually is (i.e., interconnection of self with group, sense of interdependence with the group), their everyday involvement with other consumers of the brand (i.e., behavioral involvement), and how well informed they are about the organization (i.e., cognitive awareness). Each of these processes can directly and/or indirectly affect the behavior of the consumer and therefore play an important role regarding the fundamental marketing strategies of the organization.

Second, the proposition that associated communities (e.g., city, state, university) affect identification levels of consumers as well as the consumer's patronage intentions

could assist many products that, in contrast to sport teams, do not illicit strong emotions among their consumers. For many products, the symbolic meaning they provide to the consumer is limited. Thus, their capacity to serve as a brand community is considered to reside on the periphery of connectedness. By implementing associated communities within their marketing strategies, these brands can tap into the benefits that brand community identity provides the organization.

The idea that companies could make use of associated communities (e.g., feminine, patriotic, blue collar) is hardly a new concept in marketing. However, the empirical (i.e., explicit) assessment of the strength of each of these associations is still in its infancy and can potentially hinder managers in their quest to build partnerships with the "right" organizations. Organizations that successfully manage these relations will increase the likelihood that fans will feel a sense of reciprocation toward the focal entity.

Acknowledging this multicomunity environment can help the organization build their own brand and develop additional points of attachment for members who derive associations from that particular brand. The stronger the relationship between the brand community and the associated community, the more difficult it will become for the consumer to leave the brand community—as he or she might feel that doing so, the individual is also abandoning the associated community. In this light, smaller or new startup companies (e.g., that have yet to find a way to communicate meaning to their consumers) are well advised to incorporate brand community markers of existing and powerful associated communities (e.g., history, tradition, or rituals) into their current marketing mix.

These markers of brand community can be of particular use when trying to emphasize the linkage between the organization and associated communities. The organization could integrate the history of the associated community into their own advertisements, develop certain traditions or rituals that align (or borrow from) with the associated community, and ascertain their presence at occasions when the associated community provides shared group experiences for their community members. Each of the universities examined in this study has made use of similar strategies. Their mascots depict animals that have a regional affiliation (ibis, alligator), or represent a historical association (the Seminole tribe); their team names include the associated communities (university, city/state) in combination with nicknames that have symbolic value for their consumers; and each of the college football teams organize events that associate the team with the city and/or university. The ability of these college football teams to develop these mark-

ers and fully emerge them into their marketing strategies could serve as a blueprint for other organizations outside the realm of sports.

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