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## The indirect impact of sports team reputation on the relationship between CEO's image and spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league

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**Abstract:** Strategic brand management in sports marketing has tended to focus on the impact of team brand association on spectator loyalty; however, sports team managers may lack effective communication regarding their activities to increase loyalty. Very little research has been done on the direct and indirect impact of CEO's image and sports team reputation on spectator loyalty. This study aims to investigate the role of sports team reputation in increasing the effect of CEO's image on spectator loyalty. This research conducted a sample of 900 spectators who attended home games in the professional Thai football league, using a 36-item questionnaire from previously developed scales. The results demonstrated that sports team reputation played a key role in mediating the causal relationship between CEO's image and spectator loyalty. This research not only encourages the marketing communication strategies in the sports business but also provides data for managers to increase their spectator loyalty.

**Keywords:** chief executive officer; CEO; sports management; marketing communication; brand image; sports team reputation; spectator loyalty; structural equation model; SEM; professional football league; Thailand.

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## 1 Introduction

With increasing competition and the growing impact of public opinion on the attitude of consumers towards corporations, the building of Chief Executive Officer's (CEO's) image becomes a rather relevant area of research (Park and Berger, 2004). It is particularly important for a specialist of marketing who creates the corporate image to understand the role of CEO's image and relationship with stakeholders (Park and Berger, 2004). Several studies have tended to focus on CEO's image, the corporate image, and the interaction of concepts of consumer behaviour. The previous studies have found that the CEO's image has an impact on the corporate image (Ko et al., 2008), consumer confidence (Park and Berger, 2004), and consumer trust (Stravinskiene et al., 2020). The reviewed research suggests that CEOs and their behaviour affect the corporate image, but the research on the relationship of CEO's image and consumer loyalty with the organisation has remained unidentified.

The existing study of sports branding focuses on product/service brands (e.g., Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour). Even though brands are often studied from the perspective of a brand's personality (Keller, 1998), little attention has been given to actual personal brands. As technologies such as TV and the internet develop, the power of the personal brand of athlete, head coach, team manager, and CEO also increases (Yang, 2007). However, many essential questions remain unanswered. For example, what factors affect a personal brand, and what are the relationships between a personal brand image and sports team reputation? The present study explores these branding issues for CEO's image in professional team sports, focusing on Thai professional football teams. Therefore, the first objective was to examine the direct impact of CEO's image on spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league.

Strategic brand management in sports marketing has tended to focus on team brand association. Team brand association has an advantage in the long-term to prevent failure from losing in the competition, and to perform spectator loyalty (Gladden and Funk, 2001, 2002; Parent and Foreman, 2007). In spite of being studied extensively in the context of sports marketing, sports team managers may lack effective communication regarding their activities to increase loyalty. Strategic brand management techniques particularly reputation in relation to extending their fan base needs to be investigated. Sports team reputation is determined by overall spectators' perceptions of how they feel about the sports team (Jang et al., 2015), whereas team brand association is the set of associations linked to the brand that spectators hold in their memory (Keller, 1993).

The reputation of a sports team is the overall perception of a sports team based on spectators' reaction to all previous interactive experiences with the sports team's activities. Importantly, a sports team's reputation has been shown to have a strong influence on spectators' experience, attitude, and behaviour (Jang et al., 2015). Sports teams often develop and focus on the parts of their identity that they hope will foster a better image than their rivals. The positively formed team brand association leads to an excellent sports team reputation (Suchao-in et al., 2021), in which spectators develop an

emotional reaction and perception to actions associated with a sports team. Therefore, the present study evaluated sports team reputation in order to provide a more complete picture of sports marketing communication tools. The second objective was to examine the indirect impact of sports team reputation on the relationship between CEO's image and spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 CEO's image and loyalty*

The image of CEOs is defined as one of the most significant in building the consumer opinion about the organisation. Previous studies demonstrated the importance of studies on CEO's image, the corporate image, and the interaction of consumer behaviour (Stravinskiene et al., 2020). Several studies have found that the corporate image has an effect on consumer intentions (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001; Keh and Xie, 2009), consumer satisfaction (Helm et al., 2010), consumer loyalty (de Leaniz and del Bosque Rodriguez, 2016), and consumer perceived value (Zameer et al., 2015). Zameer et al. (2015) found that the behaviour group of the corporate image determines the management in the organisation and its employees, the role of the employer, and the reputation of CEOs. Also, they suggest that CEOs and their behaviour influence the corporate image. However, the literature on the issues of CEO's image and consumer loyalty with the organisation is limited.

Consumer loyalty is a measure of a customer's likeliness to repurchase products or services with a company or brand. It is the result of customer satisfaction, positive customer experiences, and the overall value of the products or services that a consumer receives from a business. From the behavioural context, consumer loyalty refers to a number of indicators related to repeated purchases made by consumers such as the quantity of purchase, purchase frequency, date of last purchase, and consumer share (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). Additionally, behavioural loyalty has several forms, as a future intention to repurchase products and services or to continue a working relationship in long-term (Dick and Basu, 1994). For a professional sports team, behavioural loyalty is when a group of consumers purchase season tickets or partial season tickets and watch all of a team's games on television (Baade and Tiehan, 1990), purchase team merchandise (Wann and Branscombe, 1993), and has been a fan for a number of years (Mahony and Moorman, 2000). From the attitudinal context, customer loyalty refers to a favourable attitude towards a brand or organisation that can predict customer behaviour in the future (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). For a professional sports team, attitudinal loyalty is when a group of consumers holds favourable attitudes toward a sports team, leading to increased consumption of team merchandise, increased game attendance, and media rights (Funk et al., 2000; Mahony and Moorman, 2000).

The empirical studies have demonstrated the influence of CEO's image on consumer confidence (Park and Berger, 2004), and consumer trust (Stravinskiene et al., 2020). Alghawi et al. (2014) found that CEO's image strategy affects follower loyalty in the microblogging context in China. They have suggested that CEOs present themselves as experts rather than as friends. The prevalence of loyalty builds better results and encourages positive consumer behaviour. This led to the fact that the character traits of a CEO as a leader consist of leadership, psychology, or sociology, leading to the impact of

management styles on the achievements of the organisation (Park and Berger, 2004; Stravinskiene et al., 2020). It is likely that CEO's image has an impact on consumer loyalty (Alghawi et al., 2014).

The roles of CEOs in professional sports teams are the same as those for any other CEOs in a broader business context. According to a guide to directors' duties and obligations of the football association, CEOs in football clubs usually perform operational and strategic business functions, manage people and assets, and enter into contracts on behalf of the football club. For example, Nualphan Lamsam is the CEO of Muang Thai Insurance. She is a famous CEO of Port Football Club and the most valuable person in sport industry in Thailand. She is the human face of the football club brand and facilitates the team's performance on the pitch. However, published research on the personal brand has focused largely on the impact of football managers on team performance (Wilson et al., 2019) and the impact of athlete brand image on sport consumers' loyalty toward the athletes (Mahmoudian et al., 2021). Previous studies have not been investigated CEO's image on consumers' loyalty. Thus, this study seeks to explore the effect of CEO's image on consumers' loyalty in professional sports team. Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1 CEO's image has a direct impact on loyalty.

## *2.2 CEO's image and sports team reputation*

Several studies in broader marketing have tended to examine the relationship between corporate image and corporate reputation (Flavian et al., 2005; de Leaniz and del Bosque Rodriguez, 2016). However, an individual's image may affect the reputation of an organisation of which he or she is a part. From personal brand in sport, many studies have examined the positive effects of athlete brand image on game attendance (Yamamura, 2011; Ormiston, 2014; Jane, 2016), gate revenue (Berri et al., 2004), and intention to purchase (Carlson and Donavan, 2008). The findings are likely that personal brand may contribute to spectators' behaviour in sports business. A reviewed research demonstrated the effects of athlete brand image on sports team's quality (Yang, 2007). Yang (2007) revealed that athletes are the components of the overall team brand. Good athlete brand image can increase their team's overall quality. A superstar athlete's brand can not only raise his team's branding by increasing team performance but is also an indicator of the quality of games. That is, a superstar brand can generate more revenue beyond his contribution to his team's performance. However, a personal brand is not only athlete, but also including head coach, team manager, and CEO who play an important role with the teams.

In the context of broader marketing, previous studies have examined the relationship between the brand image of an organisation's leader and the reputation of that organisation (Flatt et al., 2013; Bravo et al., 2015). Flatt et al. (2013) have investigated the influence of the CEOs on corporate reputation. They suggested that CEOs transcended from the individual to the company. There was the influence of CEOs transition on corporate reputation, especially a new CEO who has been beneficial to companies with less favourable reputations. Therefore, the CEO's image could be transferred from that individual to the company's reputation. Similarly, it may be likely that CEO's image may be transferred to his/her sports team reputation.

However, there has been no research in this area so it is important that the present study fills in this gap in knowledge of sports marketing. The present study attempts to determine the relationships between CEO's image and reputation of Thai professional football teams. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H2 CEO's image has a direct impact on sports team reputation.

### *2.3 Sports team reputation and loyalty*

Sports team reputation is described as the collective perception of individuals who remembers experiences with a sports team as substantially 'good' or 'bad' (Jang et al., 2015). Sports teams tend to develop and focus on the parts of their identity that they hope will foster a better image than their rivals, in the minds of key stakeholders, e.g., spectators, fans, media, sponsors, etc. However, little research focused on sports team reputation. Therefore, the current study aims to evaluate sports team reputation in order to provide a more complete picture of marketing communication tools.

A positive reputation is associated with consumers who are loyal to a brand in the broader marketing context (Anderson et al., 1994). In the context of sports marketing, two studies have focused on the influence of team brand association on spectator loyalty in a professional sports team (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Bauer et al., 2008). Additionally, one study has focused on the influence of sports team reputation on spectator loyalty in a professional sports team (Suchao-in et al., 2021). However, the influence of sports team reputation on loyalty has remained unidentified. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H3 Sports team reputation has a direct impact on loyalty.

### *2.4 Mediating role of sports team reputation on the effect of CEO's image on loyalty*

Suchao-in et al. (2021) has examined the indirect effect of sports team reputation on the relationship between team brand association on spectator loyalty. Sports team reputation is an essential mediator between team brand association and spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league. Since sports team activities can build their spectators to recall brand images from experiences with a team, which leads to the development of an emotional reaction in response to actions associated with the sports team.

In particular, previous studies did not examine how spectators' emotional feelings were impacted, through experiences with CEOs, over time (Suchao-in et al., 2021). Therefore, the present study hypothesised that sports team reputation plays a mediating role in the relationships between CEO's image and spectator loyalty. The hypotheses are described as follows:

H4 Sports team reputation mediates the impact of CEO's image on loyalty.

## **3 Research methodology**

This quantitative research was conducted from October 2020 to March 2021. Questionnaires were distributed to spectators by a researcher and research assistants. The

modified scales were used from previous studies. Table 1 presented the 36 items of the questionnaire used in each of the scales included CEO's image (Andreini et al., 2020), sports team reputation (Jang et al., 2015), and loyalty (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Kwon et al., 2005).

**Table 1** The 36 items of the questionnaire used in each of the scales included CEO's image, sports team reputation, and loyalty

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Item</i>
CEO's image (Andreini et al., 2020)	Performance	• The CEO is successfulness
		• The CEO is business-minded
		• The CEO is ambitious
	Personality	• The CEO is clean records
		• The CEO is integrity
		• The CEO is balanced
	Leadership	• The CEO is meritocratic
		• The CEO is initiating
		• The CEO is challenging
Sports team reputation (Jang et al., 2015)	Team performance	• Performance of favourite team's players is excellent
		• The favourite team has high quality players
		• The performance of the favourite team is first class
	Team tradition	• The favourite team is a long-established sport team
		• The favourite team has a rich history
		• Its long and storied past makes the favourite team of today something special
	Team social responsibility	• Players from the favourite team contribute toward bettering the local community
		• The favourite team contributes to charitable foundations
		• The favourite team regularly makes donations to local communities or charities
	Spectator-orientation	• The favourite team has programs to recognise players for their volunteer work in the community
		• The favourite team is concerned about its fans
		• The favourite team takes fan rights seriously
	Management quality	• The favourite team treats fans courteously
		• Management has a clear vision of the team's future
		• Management of the favourite team is outstanding
		• Management does a great job of running the team

**Table 1** The 36 items of the questionnaire used in each of the scales included CEO's image, sports team reputation, and loyalty (continued)

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Item</i>
Sports team reputation (Jang et al., 2015)	Financial soundness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The favourite team is doing well financially</li> <li>• The favourite team has a strong record of profitability</li> <li>• The favourite team financially outperforms competitors</li> </ul>
Loyalty (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Kwon et al., 2005)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would be willing to defend my favourite team publicly, even if it caused controversy.</li> <li>• I could never change my affiliation from my favourite team to another professional team.</li> <li>• I consider myself a committed fan of my favourite team.</li> <li>• I would attend my favourite team regardless of which team they were playing against at the time.</li> <li>• I am more likely to attend future games.</li> <li>• I am more likely to purchase the team's merchandise.</li> <li>• I am more likely to buy (team name) clothing.</li> <li>• Number of home games attended.</li> </ul>

A seven-point Likert scale was applied. The Thai questionnaire was translated from English by professional translators. After generating a list of items in Thai, these items had to be assessed for content validity by three professionals from sports management, one professional from a communications program, and one practitioner from a professional football team in the Thai League (T1).

The respondents were 900 spectators aged 18–65 years, consisting of 150 from six teams in the Thai League (T1). Six teams have taken based on an average attendance record exceeding 5,000 in order to accomplish the club license criteria according to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). At each home game, the researcher and research assistants were stationed at entrances around the stadium to distribute questionnaires before the kickoff. Questionnaires were distributed by convenience sampling to the home team's spectators. The researcher and research assistants informed the potential test subject and then all respondents agreed and signed the informed consent form. Additionally, if they had any questions about the questionnaire, they would be addressed by the researcher or research assistants. The researcher and research assistants would wait for respondents to fill in the questionnaire then collect the completed questionnaire before giving out the souvenir.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted by using AMOS 20.0 for evaluating, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and goodness of fit. Firstly, to confirm the reliability of the dimensions and the overall scale, Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) were used for evaluating reliability. If all the values for these three indices are over the minimum level required 0.7, then those confirm the reliability (Hair et al., 2014). Secondly, and the average of variance extracted (AVE) was used to confirm the convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). If the results of



AVE are higher than 0.5, then those confirm the convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). Thirdly, the discriminant validity can be determined by comparing the AVE to the squared correlation between two constructs. If the squared correlation between two latent variables is less than the AVE of either one, it indicates that the latent variables explain more unique variance than shared variance (Hair et al., 2014). Thus, the discriminant validity can be claimed.

Finally, Hair et al. (2014) recommended using at least three or four fit indices, including at least one incremental index and one absolute index, to minimise each type of error. The values for comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and incremental fit index (IFI) at least 0.9 are considered acceptable in order to determine the fit of a model. If the  $p$ -value of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) is less than 0.05 and normed chi-square (CMIN/df) is between 1 and 3, then the values confirm that the model fits the data well. If root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and root mean square residual (RMR) is less than 0.05, then the values confirm that the model fit the data well. However, with the number of observed variables less than 12 and the number of observations greater than 250, Hair et al. (2014) suggested that the chi-square is probably insignificant even with a good fit. Therefore, the present study used other indices to test the suitability of the fit of the model.

Structural equation model (SEM) was performed using AMOS 20.0 for testing the hypotheses. Bootstrapping with 5,000 retrials was used to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients and estimate the standard error. If levels of significance of the direct effect and the indirect effect are less than 0.05, the hypothesis will be accepted (Hair et al., 2014). To test the magnitude of the mediation, the present study computed the variance accounted for ( $\text{VAF} = \text{indirect effect} / \text{total effect}$ ). It is the ratio of indirect effect to the total effect. The established thresholds for the VAF ratio are greater than 0.8, representing full mediation, between 0.2 and 0.8 representing partially mediation, and less than 0.2 representing no mediation (Hair et al., 2014).

## 4 Results and discussion

### 4.1 Demographic data result

594 males and 306 females accounted for 66% and 34%, respectively. This showed that there were more males than females in Thai League (T1). Additionally, in terms of the age range, the 18–25 years, the 26–33 years, the 34–41 years, and the 42–49 years accounted for 35.1%, 19.4%, 18.7%, and 15%, respectively. This showed that the period of the adult was the highest number in Thai League (T1). Furthermore, the 50–57 years and the 58–65 years accounted for 9.3% and 2.4%, respectively. This showed that the period of older was the lowest number in Thai League (T1). In terms of ticket types, the daily match ticket accounted for 59.3%. This showed that daily match ticket was the most number in Thai League (T1). However, the seasonal ticket and the free ticket accounted for 20.8% and 19.9%, respectively. This showed that the seasonal ticket and the free ticket were the lowest number in Thai League (T1). Finally, in terms of levels of spectator, likes only one team and neither likes nor dislikes were the most number and accounted for 35.9% and 30.1%, respectively in Thai League (T1). While the choices of likes only this favourite team and likes more than one team were the lowest number and

accounted for 17.2% and 16.8%, respectively in Thai League (T1). This demographic data was shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Spectators' demographic data (n = 900)

	<i>Description</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender	Men	594	66.0
	Women	306	34.0
Aged range	18–25 years	316	35.1
	26–33 years	175	19.4
	34–41 years	168	18.7
	42–49 years	135	15.0
	50–57 years	84	9.3
	58–65 years	22	2.4
Type of ticket	Seasonal ticket	187	20.8
	Daily match ticket	534	59.3
	Free ticket	179	19.9
Level of spectator	Neither likes nor dislikes	271	30.1
	Likes more than one team	151	16.8
	Likes only one team	323	35.9
	Likes only this favourite team	155	17.2

#### 4.2 Reliability and convergent validity test

The CFA model was tested for the validity and reliability of the data. The CFA measurement model showed that the CFIs confirmed the suitability of the model presented ( $\chi^2 = 28.862$ ,  $df = 25$ ,  $p = 0.270$ ,  $CMIN/df = 1.154$ ,  $CFI = 0.999$ ,  $NFI = 0.996$ ,  $GFI = 0.994$ ,  $AGFI = 0.984$ ,  $IFI = 0.999$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.013$ ,  $RMR = 0.015$ ).

**Table 3** Results of convergent validity and reliability

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>CA</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
CEO's image	0.895	0.869	0.748
Sports team reputation	0.920	0.885	0.616
Loyalty	0.906	0.833	0.775

Notes: CA denotes Cronbach's alpha; CR denotes composite reliability; AVE denotes the average of variance extracted.

Table 3 demonstrated the result of CA, CR, and the AVE for the model variables in order to achieve accuracy within the questionnaire. All the CA scores and the CR scores were greater than 0.7, which implied that all the constructs were considered good and acceptable. Furthermore, convergent validity testing was calculated from the result of AVE. The results showed that all the AVE result variables were greater than 0.5, which implied that all the constructs were considered good and acceptable.

4.3 Discriminant validity test

Discriminant validity testing was calculated from the square roots of the AVEs, which was greater than the off-diagonal correlations among the constructs. Table 4 demonstrated that all the square roots of the AVEs were greater than the off-diagonal correlations among the constructs. The results indicated good discriminant validity of the measurement scales.

**Table 4** Results of discriminant validity

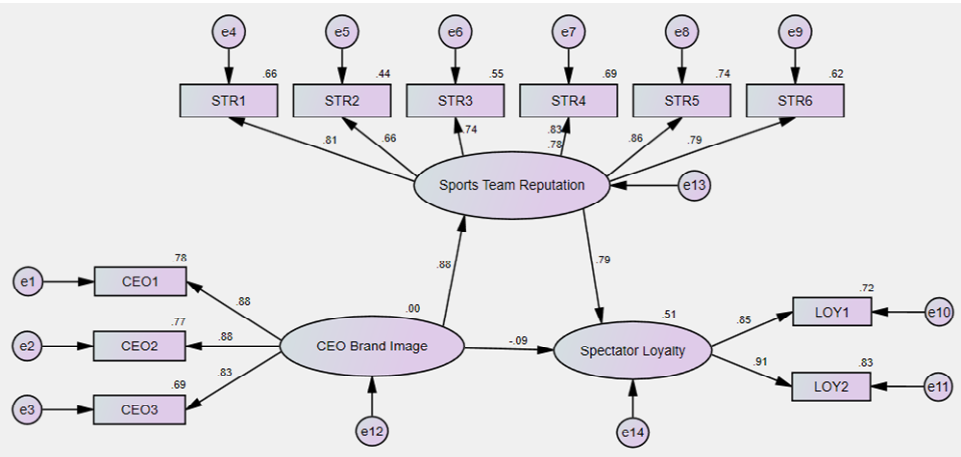
	Mean	SD	(CEO)	(STR)	(LOY)
(CEO)	5.596	1.057	0.865		
(STR)	5.621	0.932	0.782*	0.785	
(LOY)	5.753	1.111	0.538*	0.607*	0.881

Notes: \*Significant at  $p < 0.01$  (Spearman's correlation); SD denotes standard deviation; ( ) denotes square root of average variance extracted (AVE); CEO denotes CEO's image; STR denotes sports team reputation; LOY denotes loyalty.

4.4 Structural equation model

The results of the SEM fit level test have shown in Figure 1. Following Hair et al. (2014), the  $p$ -value of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) is more than 0.05 and normed chi-square (CMIN/df) is between 1 and 3, then the values confirm that the model fit the data well. If RMSEA and RMR is less than 0.05, the values for CFI, NFI, GFI, AGFI and IFI at least 0.9, then the values confirmed that the model fit the data well ( $\chi^2 = 28.862$ ,  $df = 25$ ,  $p = 0.270$ , CMIN/df = 1.154, CFI = 0.999, NFI = 0.996, GFI = 0.994, AGFI = 0.984, IFI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.013, RMR = 0.015).

**Figure 1** Results from SEM indirect impact of sports team reputation between CEO's image and spectator loyalty representing standardised regression coefficients (see online version for colours)



Notes: Chi-square = 28.862, df. = 25, sig. = .270, CMIN/df. = 1.154, n. = 900, CFI = .999, NFI = .996, GFI = .994, AGFI = .984, IFI = .999, RMSEA = .013, RMR = .015.

#### 4.4.1 Direct hypotheses

Results of the proposed direct hypotheses are demonstrated in Table 5. There was a positively significant impact of CEO's image on sports team reputation ( $\beta = 0.882$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and a positively significant impact of sports team reputation on spectator loyalty ( $\beta = 0.788$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). These data supported H2, and H3. However, there was no significant impact of CEO's image on spectator loyalty, which was not supported H1 ( $\beta = -0.088$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 5** Standardised estimates of direct impacts for CEO's image, sports team reputation, and spectator loyalty (n = 900)

Direct hypotheses	$\beta$ -value	t-value	Result
H1 CEO's image $\rightarrow$ loyalty	-0.088	-1.044	Not support
H2 CEO's image $\rightarrow$ reputation	0.882*	25.865	Support
H3 Reputation $\rightarrow$ loyalty	0.788*	8.746	Support

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

In terms of marketing, public relations, and sports leadership context, several pieces of literature acknowledge the importance of CEO's image to overall corporate image and influence consumer's behaviour (Flavian et al., 2005; de Leaniz and del Bosque Rodriguez, 2016). Despite that, the majority of the research has been studied from a fundamentally theoretical perspective, examines corporate image influence on consumer's behaviour, and no studies examine how CEO's image impacts spectator loyalty in the sports organisations. It is likely very important to analyse not only team brand association to spectator loyalty, but also CEO's image who lead to the spectators' development of an emotional reaction in response to actions associated with the sports team. The present study hypothesised that CEO and sports team when combined with spectator loyalty may be closely related to sports team reputation.

The results of the present study disclosed CEO's image structure and elements and confirm that personality, performance, and leadership of CEO have a significant impact on sports team reputation in Thai League (T1). As noticed Jin and Yeo (2011), the assessment of CEO's image depends on the information in media and does it positively or negatively image of the corporation and its CEO. Most of our respondents formed CEO's image from the media. Consistent with Stravinskiene et al. (2020), the consumers receive overall perceptions of CEOs, then keep in their promises, especially social responsibility. The psychological traits have a positive impact on consumer trust in CEO, the consumers believe that organisation provides and sells them good quality products and services. Therefore, the psychological traits of CEO are transferred to the spectator, leading to performing a positive attitude, belief, and trust toward the team, and finally it is transferred to sports team reputation.

Furthermore, the results of the present study confirm that sports team reputation has a positive impact on spectator loyalty in Thai League (T1). As noticed Suchao-in et al. (2021), spectators receive overall perceptions of sports team activities, then spectators feel a good attitude and believe that sports team provide good quality of products and services to them, and finally loyal to a team. Thus, the present study is very important to notify that sports team reputation has a direct impact on spectator loyalty in both

attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. It is likely that sports team reputation performs both emotional and behavioural reactions in response to the sports team actions.

In contrast, our study did not succeed to evaluate a positive relationship between CEO's image and spectator loyalty. The subsequent research on this topic noted that CEO's image influences consumers' loyalty and the prevalence of loyalty encourages positive consumer behaviour (Alghawi et al., 2014; de Leaniz and del Bosque Rodriguez, 2016). Since a sports business sector is a unique context, characterised by a highly distinctive set of characteristics, which is different from the broader marketing context (Chadwick, 2011). In the sports marketing context, the success of team performance plays an important role in the emotional and behavioural reactions in spectators' response to the sports team. The perception of the fulfilled games was relevant to influencing spectators' belief and attitude, leading to generating word-of-mouth publicity and establishing brand loyalty. Furthermore, the spectators rather know who the head coach and the team manager are. Therefore, the head coach's image and the team manager's image may influence sport consumers' loyalty toward the teams rather than the CEO's image of sports teams. This is one of the special features of the professional football that are distinct from broader business sectors.

4.4.2 Indirect hypotheses

The results of the proposed indirect hypotheses (H4), including standardised total effect, standardised indirect effect, standardised direct effect, and the variance accounted for ( $VAF = \text{indirect effect} / \text{total effect}$ ) are shown in Table 6. The results supported H4, that there was a positively significant indirect impact of sports team reputation on the relationships between celebrity endorsement and spectator loyalty ( $\beta = 0.694$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, the value of VAF was 1.145. It can be concluded that sports team reputation plays a mediating role in the relationship between CEO's image and spectator loyalty.

**Table 6** Standardised estimates of indirect impact of sports team reputation between CEO's image and spectator loyalty (n = 900)

<i>Indirect hypotheses</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>VAF</i>
H4	CEO's image -> reputation -> loyalty	0.606*	0.694*	-0.088	1.145

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; VAF = indirect effect/total effect.

The present study demonstrated that there was an indirect impact of sports team reputation on the relationships between CEO's image and spectator loyalty. In the other words, sports team reputation plays a mediating role in this causal relationship. According to Jang et al. (2015), the two dimensions of the sports team reputation construct include spectator-orientation and team social responsibility. As noticed Suchao-in et al. (2021), spectator-orientation and team social responsibility could recall CEO's image from experiences with a team, leading to developing an emotional reaction in response to actions associated with the sports team, then finally spectators continually perceive their loyalty towards a team.

## **5 Practical implications, limitations, and future study**

The present study is amongst the first to empirically investigate the direct and indirect impacts of CEO's image and sports team reputation on spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league. Our research has shown that CEO's image and sports team reputation represent one of the factors which determine the success of spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league. Additionally, the present study contributes to the literature on the value of CEO's image and sports team reputation, due to empirical findings provide merit insights for sports marketing public relation practitioners. Managers from sports marketing public relations departments may create strategy of CEO's image and sports team reputation in the publicity, leading to increase their spectator loyalty.

With respect to this study's scope, the focus has been solely on the professional Thai football league sector. However, this may not transmit sufficient information compared to examining this study from the professional sports team. The article also has an extensive number of continual issues that would require further research in order to improve the predictive power of the model suggested. Therefore, we encourage the new studies to focus the professional sports team in Thailand such as volleyball, basketball, golf, tennis, etc.

By verifying the conceptual model of the direct and indirect impact of CEO's image and sports team reputation on spectator loyalty in the professional Thai football league, no interrelations of the respondent demographic and/or behavioural characteristics with the analysed model constructs were investigated. We suggest the future research that the results of this study could help to clarify how the assessment of CEO's image and sports team reputation. CEO's image and sports team reputation may influence on the socio-demographic characteristics of different respondents. Furthermore, the new studies may enhance the possibilities for practical application in order to segment spectators or to position offers prepared for spectators.

## **6 Conclusions**

CEO's image was found to directly impact sports team reputation and reputation was found to directly impact spectator loyalty. Interestingly, this study has shown that sports team reputation plays a mediating role in the causal relationships between CEO's image and spectator loyalty. Sports team reputation helps to cultivate the impact of CEO's image on spectator loyalty.

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