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Empirical Findings from Professional  
Soccer**

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# The Influence of Superstars on Organizational Identification of External Stakeholders: Empirical Findings from Professional Soccer

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the effect of superstars on external stakeholders' organizational identification through the lens of sport. Drawing on social identity theory and the concept of organizational identification, as well as on role model theories and superstar economics, we develop several hypotheses regarding the influence of soccer stars on their fans' degree of team identification. Using a proprietary dataset including archival data on professional German soccer players and clubs as well as survey data of more than 1,400 soccer fans, we find evidence for a positive effect of superstar characteristics and role model perception. We further find that players who measure up to the definition of a superstar are more important to fans of established teams than to fans of unsuccessful teams. The player's club tenure, however, seems to have no influence on fans' team identification. We argue that the effect of soccer stars on their fans is comparable to that of CEOs on their organizations' external stakeholders and consequently apply our results to the business domain. Our results contribute to organizational identification research by extending the list of determinants related to individual persons.

**Keywords:** Organizational identification; superstars; role model; fans; soccer

**JEL Classification:** L83, J0, M0, Z13

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## Introduction

Superstars have been a subject of academic research for over 30 years now and are defined as persons who dominate their domain with exceptional talent (Rosen, 1981) or extraordinary popularity (Adler, 1985). However, the term “superstar” is not confined to the sports or entertainment industry, but also used for outstanding employees or representatives of business organizations (Groysberg, Nanda & Noria, 2004; Wade, Pollock, Porac & Graffin, 2008). CEOs, in particular, can even reach the status of celebrities (Hayward, Rindova & Pollock, 2004) and their images serve as “mirrors of reality reflecting firms’ actions” (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 240). As “the most visible members of an organization [...] they give a face to an otherwise abstract social category, resulting in outsiders’ viewing [them] as the organization” (Scott & Lane, 2000, p. 47). Current examples include Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg, but even former CEOs are still mentioned in the same vein as their companies (Microsoft and Bill Gates, who has been replaced as CEO by Steve Ballmer in 2000, for example, or Apple and Steve Jobs, who passed away in 2011). The crucial question in this context is whether these “superstar-CEOs” are only inevitably associated with their companies or whether they effectively contribute to stakeholders’ organizational identification.

Stakeholders who identify with an organization show supportive behavior towards it (Mael & Ashfort, 1992) because doing so provides them with so-called “identity utility” (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). This is expressed by external stakeholders through, for instance, increased product utilization, customer recruitment, company or product promotion (Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen, 2005), a greater willingness to invest in the company’s shares (Aspara & Tikkanen, 2011), stronger loyalty, or greater resilience to negative information (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Internal members of the organization, on the other hand, will generally show more cooperative behavior, participate more actively in various

organizational functions, and even accept less salary (Mael & Ashfort, 1992; Dukerich, Golden & Shortell, 2002). Therefore, companies certainly benefit from an understanding of which factors drive organizational identification and even engage in costly initiatives to nurture them (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian & Samuel, 1998; Empson, 2004).

Accordingly, the concept of organizational identification has been studied quite extensively and a great number of recent academic studies attest to its sustained popularity (e.g., Ashfort, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Jones & Volpe, 2011; Netemeyer, Heilman & Maxham, 2012; Umphress, Bingham & Mitchell, 2010). The academic literature on external stakeholders, however, has primarily investigated non-personnel related drivers such as organizational prestige, organizational distinctiveness, similarities between the stakeholder and the organization, or duration of affiliation and frequency of interaction (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao & Glynn, 1995; Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Mael & Ashfort, 1992; Smidts, Pruyn & van Riel, 2001). The influence of personnel related factors on organizational identification is still rather unexplored. Ahearne et al. (2005) show that favorable perceptions of salesperson characteristics have a positive effect on organizational identification, Fanelli and Misangyi (2006) theorize that CEO *charisma* positively influences external stakeholders' organizational identification, and Flynn and Staw (2004) provide empirical evidence for a positive effect of charismatic leadership on the organization's attractiveness to outside investors. However, to our knowledge, no study has empirically looked at CEOs (or other top managers) as a determinant of organizational identification. We want to contribute to closing this research gap by empirically investigating the effect of superstars representing an organization on stakeholders' organizational identification. Moreover, in addition to a company representative's superstar characteristics, we analyze perception as a role model and firm tenure as drivers of organizational identification. Finally, since company representatives – as the name suggests – represent their company towards external parties, we are primarily

interested in their effect on *external* stakeholders like customers, consumers, investor or suppliers.

For our empirical analysis, we depart from the effect of company representatives on external stakeholders and, instead, contemplate that of soccer stars on their fans while considering both effects as analogs. We do so for four reasons. First, soccer stars also represent their team and soccer fans are a perfect example of external stakeholders as they support their favorite team in a similar way. Besides giving moral support, they are consumers who buy merchandise or tickets to attend games (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). In addition, they indirectly provide funding by making their favorite club interesting to sponsors (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) and, in cases where a club issues shares, may even act as financial investors. Like “fans” of a business organization, they derive identity utility from their identification (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010) by sharing in their favorite team’s successes, proclaiming their affiliation, and thus, claiming a part of the glory for themselves (Cialdini, 1976).

Second, sport in general and soccer in particular (e.g., Frick & Simmons, 2008) provide an interesting and relevant context for the investigation of business phenomena and “can enhance a scientific understanding of how individuals and groups behave” (Day, Gordon & Fink, 2012, p. 3). Consequently, observing soccer fans when studying the concept of organizational identification is a promising approach. Third, the investigation of organizational identification through the “lens of sport” (Day et al., 2012) provides a major advantage, in that sports fans’ relationships to or admiration for specific players or superstars is easier to measure than the relationship between a business organization or its CEO and its external stakeholders. Finally, given the great degree of emotional attachment in sport compared to other forms of entertainment (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Shank & Beasley, 1998; Sutton, McDonald, Milne & Cimperman, 1997), we believe that soccer fans are more

approachable and less hesitant to provide information on themselves than are individual investors.

We base our argumentation on social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1974, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1975) and, particularly, on Ashford and Mael's (1989) seminal paper on the concept of organizational identification, which states (among other things) that identification with a group and identification with an individual can be complementary and reinforcing (p. 22). Furthermore, we resort to the literature on team identification (e.g., Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) and incorporate superstar economics (Adler, 1985; Rosen, 1981) as well as role model theory (Gibson, 2004) in our theoretical framework. In order to test our hypotheses, we use a unique and proprietary dataset, which includes more than 1,400 fans of German soccer clubs, who were assessed in regard to their identification with their favorite team as well as to their perception of their favorite player.

Our generalized findings aim to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of individuals on organizational identification. They provide empirical evidence on whether or which organizational representatives foster external stakeholders' organizational identification, and thus allow us to derive implications for business practice.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

#### **Organizational Identification as a Specific Form of Social Identification**

The concept of organizational identification is based on Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1974, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1975). According to this theory, a person's self-concept consists of a personal identity containing idiosyncratic characteristics and a social identity derived from group affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In order to locate themselves (and others) within the social environment, people "tend to classify themselves and others into various social groups, such as organizational membership, gender, and age cohort" (Mael & Ashfort, 1992, p. 104). While

some of these classifications are categorical (e.g., female vs. male), the extent to which an individual identifies with a specific group is clearly a matter of degree (Ashfort & Mael, 1989). The more an individual identifies with a group, the more he or she experiences the successes and failures of the group as his own (Foote, 1951; Tolman, 1943). Thus, Ashfort and Mael (1989) define social identification as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate” (p. 21). Organizational identification represents a specific form of social identification in which the individual defines himself in terms of his membership to or affiliation with a particular organization (Mael & Ashfort, 1992).

The concept of organizational identification can be applied to internal members of an organization (e.g., employees) as well as to external stakeholders (e.g., customers or investors). The latter is usually referred to as “company identification” (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), but the terms are often used interchangeably in the academic literature.<sup>1</sup>

Since we investigate organizational identification in the context of soccer, we employ the concept of team identification for our empirical analysis. Team identification is another specification of social identification and is defined as “one’s level of attachment to, or concern about, a particular sports team” (Madrigal, 2001, p. 148; Ngan, Prendergast & Tsang, 2011, p. 552; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Just as in organizational identification, the individual thus defines himself in terms of his membership to or affiliation with a particular sports team (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Fans who identify with their favorite team strongly even perceive this role as central to their identity (Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000; Wann et al., 2006).

### **Organizational Identification as Source of Identity Utility**

Akerlof and Kranton (e.g., 2005, 2010) have recently introduced the psychological concept of identification to organizational economics. According to their theory, an

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<sup>1</sup> Cornwell & Coote (2005), for example, refer to “organizational identification” when describing the relationship between organizations and their external stakeholders.

employee's utility depends not only positively on income and negatively on effort, but also positively on identity and negatively on the deviation from the ideal effort level. The ideal effort level, in turn, depends on his or her identification with the organization (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the identification itself and supportive behavior resulting from this identification can be sources of identity utility.

**Identity utility from identification.** According to social identity theory, one reason that individuals identify with social groups is to enhance self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Hogg & Turner, 1985; Tajfel, 1978). Identification with an organization allows employees or external stakeholders to participate indirectly in achievements beyond their powers (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mael & Ashfort, 1992). This argumentation is even more apparent in the context of sport. While employees can *directly* influence the organization's success through their work performance, the contribution of sports fans to their favorite team's success is rather limited and mainly confined to providing financial support through the purchase of tickets and merchandise – which makes their role similar to that of external stakeholders of an organization. Nonetheless, sports fans also enhance self-esteem by proclaiming their connection to a favorite team and thereby “bask in reflected glory” (BIRGing) (Cialdini et al., 1976). The more a fan identifies with a team, the stronger is the tendency to BIRG (Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Madrigal, 1995). Since BIRGing, or the enhancement of self-esteem, stems from the identification with a sports team or an organization, it clearly represents identity utility.

In addition to self-enhancement, identification also allows individuals to satisfy some basic human needs. In fact, Pratt (1998) points out that many of the motives cited as reasons for identification relate to the needs for safety, affiliation, and uncertainty reduction (Ashfort et al., 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> According to Akerlof & Kranton (2005), there are only two values for identification, N (insider) or O (outsider) (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005). However, there is also no evidence against a continuous scale.

**Identity utility from showing supportive behavior.** Akerlof and Kranton (2010) state that people derive “identity utility” if they are “doing what they think they should be doing” (p. 13). The more employees or external stakeholders identify with an organization, the more effort they will exert to support it (Akerlof & Kranton, 2005; Ashford & Mael, 1989; Boivie, Lange, McDonald & Westphal, 2001; Dukerich et al., 2002; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). The academic literature on behavioral finance suggests that investors derive self-expressive benefits (Statman, 2004) and emotional or experiential utility (Beal, Goyen & Phillips, 2005; Cullis, Lewis & Winnett, 1992; Fama & French, 2007) from buying or owning shares. We follow Akerlof and Kranton (2010) and further argue that the mere act of investing in or supporting an organization with similar values and norms as oneself also creates identity utility. Aspara and Tikkanen (2011) show that highly identified investors even invest in “their” company if alternatives with higher expected returns (at a given risk level) are available. Hence, identity utility can even compensate for opportunity costs or potential monetary losses. The same reasoning also applies to sports fans, who further derive identity utility from experiencing a feeling of connectedness or a sense of belonging to the larger community of other fans when supporting their favorite team (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Their team identification can even have a positive influence on social well-being (Wann & Pierce, 2005).

### **Organizational Identification as Trigger for Supportive Behavior**

Identity economics explains why individuals who identify with an organization base their decision to support it to a great extent on non-pecuniary motives like organizational identification. The positive outcomes of organizational identification for organizations are thereby manifold. There is empirical evidence that external stakeholders’ identification positively influences their product utilization, customer recruitment, or company and product promotion (Ahearne et al., 2005), their willingness to invest in the company’s shares (Aspara

& Tikkanen, 2011), as well as their loyalty and resilience to negative information (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The list of the positive outcomes of *employees'* organizational identification (as well as the number of academic studies investigating them) is even longer and includes, to name just a few, increased cooperation, effort, task performance, customer orientation or creativity, and lower turnover (Ashfort et al., 2008).

Sports fans show a similar behavior to that of external investors. The more they identify with their favorite club, the more merchandise they purchase, the more games they attend and the more supportive behavior they show during the games (e.g., wearing team apparel, cheering for the team) (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gau, James & Kim, 2009; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Sutton et al., 1997). Moreover, Wann, Hunter, Ryan and Wright (2001) find that higher team identification even leads to a greater willingness to consider illegally assisting the favorite team. Fans who strongly identify with their team are also biased in their prediction of players' performances – in favor of *their* team's players (Wann et al., 2006). The support of sports fans for their favorite team even devolves to the team's sponsors. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) show that team identification positively influences sponsor recognition, attitude towards sponsors, sponsor patronage and satisfaction with sponsors, and Madrigal (2001) eventually identifies a positive effect of team identification on purchases of sponsors' products.

For all these reasons, business organizations (as well as sports teams) should be interested in creating and cultivating identification of their customers (or fans). This requires a detailed understanding of the drivers of organizational (and team) identification.

### **Drivers of Organizational Identification and Team Identification**

As for the outcomes of organizational identification, when looking at the drivers of organizational identification, we need to distinguish between external stakeholders and employees. Since we are primarily interested in the former, we will only mention those of

employees that may logically also apply to external stakeholders. Two obvious drivers of external stakeholders' organizational identification are the attractiveness of company characteristics (Ahearne et al., 2005) or, similarly, the attractiveness of perceived organizational identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Dukerich et al., 2002). More specifically, these factors involve perceived organizational prestige (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Fuller et al., 2006; Mael & Ashfort, 1992; Smidts et al., 2001), organizational (identity) distinctiveness (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Mael & Ashfort, 1992), the construed external image of the organization (Ahearne et al., 2005; Dukerich et al., 2002), and similarities with the organization such as shared goals or motivation (Ashfort & Mael, 1989; Cornwell & Coote, 2005) or identity (Ashfort & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). While both the frequency of interaction with the organization and the duration of the affiliation positively influence organizational identification, the affiliation or frequency of interaction with competitors has a negative effect (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Mael & Ashfort, 1992). Finally, the perceived characteristics of sales representatives can also drive organizational identification (Ahearne et al., 2005), but the effect of CEOs has, to our knowledge, not been investigated empirically.

Because we will use the construct of team identification in our empirical analysis, a brief summary of the influencing factors is also necessary in this context. On the one hand, the academic literature on team identification mentions perceived team performance, perceived team prestige, and perceived team member attractiveness (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Interestingly, none of these factors are under the fan's control, so that we will refer to them as "external drivers". They furthermore coincide fairly well with those of external stakeholders' organizational identification. Again, the effect of soccer stars on team identification has, to our knowledge, not been investigated empirically.

On the other hand, there are “internal drivers”, which are directly related to the individual fan and can only be extended, not changed. These include regional affiliations, socialization agents and domain involvement. Regional affiliations play an important role for the choice of and identification with the favorite sports team (Kolbe & James, 2000; Shobe, 2008; Szymanski, 2003). Socialization agents like family members or friends may pass on their team identification and have a great influence during the individual’s initial phases of team identification (James, 2001; Kolbe & James, 2000). Domain involvement describes the “personal relevance of the domain within which the group operates” (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998), which would, in our case, be soccer or, on a broader level, sport. While these factors tend to be stable, they can still be extended or complemented. For example, the individual may relocate to another place and, eventually, feel connected with it. Despite shifting his regional affiliations, his place of origin will not change. The same logic applies for socialization agents or domain involvement. While parents and siblings will not change, other socialization agents may emerge and exert more or less influence. An individual that has played soccer for the past 20 years and now decides to quit will not forfeit his interest in this sport altogether. However, his involvement may decline and fade eventually – as may the influence of socialization agents. Internal drivers, as defined in this paper, thus *memorize* the experiences made over the life of an individual.

### **Characteristics of the Favorite Player as Drivers of Team Identification**

In order to investigate the effect of company representatives on external stakeholders’ organizational identification, we look at soccer fans and their favorite star players. We base this approach on the assumption that the effect of soccer stars on fans is analogous (or at least comparable) to the effect of CEOs on individual investors or customers. However, it is necessary to focus on the fan’s *favorite* player for two reasons. First, *every* player represents the team to some degree, and thus, may have an influence on fans’ team identification.

Secondly, not every fan necessarily identifies with the official representative of the team (the “captain”) or the most popular player.

Ashfort and Mael (1989) argue that identification with a group and identification with an individual are oftentimes complementary. Pursuing their reasoning, we believe that identification with a specific individual and a specific group are mutually reinforcing if this individual is a member of this group. If a soccer fan’s favorite player is also a member of the fan’s favorite team, he represents, to some degree, the team’s properties, thus allowing the fan to identify even more strongly with *him*. Likewise, the fan will also identify more with his favorite *team*, if his favorite player is playing for it. The attractiveness of his favorite player thus strengthens the fan’s connection with his favorite team (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998). There is some empirical evidence in favor of this argumentation. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) identify *overall* team member attractiveness as a determinant of team identification and Kolbe and James (2000) observe that fans often cite specific players as a reason for *becoming* a fan of that sports team. In the following, we will therefore hypothesize on the effects of three properties of a fan’s favorite player on team identification: role model perception, superstar characteristics, and club tenure.

**Role model perception.** According to Gibson (2004), there are two aspects of role models. First, they act as “models” so that individuals can *learn* from them through imitation (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Dollard, 1941). Second, observers can *identify* with role models if they perceive some similarity to them in terms of, for instance, their attitudes and behaviors (Foote, 1951; Kagan, 1958). Like social groups, role models thus serve as “social referents”, which help individuals to define themselves (Ashfort & Mael, 1989). In the context of this paper, the first aspect is primarily relevant for young soccer players, so that we will only consider the second, which addresses soccer fans.

Sports fans often choose their favorite athletes as role models (Biskup & Pfister, 1999; Martin & Bush, 2000; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish, 2003), which highlights that identification with a role model does not require interaction (Gibson, 2004, p. 139). A number of studies have further shown that so-called “vicarious role models” like soccer players or other celebrities act as socialization agents (Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004, p. 110) and have a considerable influence on their fans’ attitudes and behaviors (Bush et al., 2004; Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001; Dix, Phau & Pougnet, 2010; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Martin & Bush, 2000). Lines (2001) states that sports stars have an even greater moral responsibility than do celebrities from other domains. We therefore conclude that they must also have an effect on a fan’s degree of team identification.

*Hypothesis 1: The more a fan sees his favorite soccer player as a role model, the more he identifies with his favorite team.*

Furthermore, the influence of a *personal* role model should be greater than that of a person who is rather perceived as a good role model for others.

*Hypothesis 2: The effect of a fan’s favorite soccer player on team identification is greater if this fan sees him as a personal role model than if he sees him as a role model for others.*

**Superstar characteristics.** There is no doubt that superstars (in soccer or other domains) represent an important category of role models (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997) and thus, should have an effect on their fan’s team identification. Moreover, recent studies on the demand for sports clearly show that superstars have an effect on game attendance (e.g., Berri, Schmidt, & Brook, 2004; Berri & Schmidt, 2006; Brandes, Franck & Nüesch 2008; Hausman & Leonard, 1997). We believe that this attraction also affects fans who do not see the superstar as a role model. Thus, in addition to the influence on team identification that

superstars have as *role models*, there is another effect, which originates from the specific characteristics defining a superstar. Fisher and Wakefield (1998) argue in this context that the attractiveness of such players strengthens fans' connections with their favorite club.

In this paper, we define a superstar as someone who dominates his domain because of his exceptional talent (Rosen, 1981) or as someone who has reached an extraordinary degree of popularity (Adler, 1985). In the context of soccer, superstars are therefore usually those players who have achieved the greatest triumphs. A soccer fan may thus choose a superstar, whom he does not perceive as a role model, as his favorite player, only to "bask in his reflected glory" (Cialdini et al., 1976; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). In this case, the drivers of a fan's team identification would not be similarities in attitudes and values with those of his favorite player, but rather the admiration of this player's skills, fame, and contribution to team success.

Ngan et al. (2011) show that the presence of a star player positively affects fans' intentions to buy the team sponsors' products.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, those players we define as superstars are the logical choice in terms of product endorsement (Brooks & Harris, 1998; Bush et al., 2004). In line with the academic literature on product endorsement, which indicates that superstars have a greater influence on customers than do "average" players (e.g., Atkin & Block, 1983; Bush et al., 2004; McCracken, 1989), we thus hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 3: The more a fan's favorite soccer player meets the characteristics defining a superstar, the more the fan identifies with his favorite team.*

Fisher and Wakefield (1998) argue that the effect of group member attractiveness on team identification is greater for fans of unsuccessful teams than for fans of successful teams as "the positive aspects of the group members provide a way of counteracting the negative

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<sup>3</sup> Ngan et al. (2011) treat team identification as a moderator and argue that the effect of a star player is more pronounced for fans with low levels of team identification.

self-image effects that result from affiliation with an unsuccessful group".<sup>4</sup> Fans of unsuccessful teams thus "compensate for the [team's] poor record by emphasizing the connection they have with key players" (p. 29). We follow this reasoning about the moderating effect of the team's overall attractiveness and apply it to the effect of a fan's favorite player.

*Hypothesis 4: The effect of a soccer star on a fan's team identification is greater if he is playing for an unsuccessful team than if he is playing for a successful team.*

**Club tenure.** Fans identify with their favorite player if they perceive commonalities with him (Foote, 1951; Kagan, 1958). We argue that these similarities are strengthened in two ways through longer club tenure of the favorite player. First, longer club tenure gives the fan more time to recognize potential similarities with his favorite player. Second, and more importantly, the longer the player has played for the team (or for other teams of the club like junior teams), the more time he has had to identify with it himself (Riketta, 2005). Through adapting his behavior and values to those of the team and thereby becoming a figurehead or "identification figure", he establishes another similarity with the fan. Previously, we argued that identification with a player will also affect team identification. Hence, as both effects will increase the fan's identification with his favorite player, they will also positively influence his degree of team identification.

*Hypothesis 5: The longer a fan's favorite player has played for the fan's favorite team, the more the fan identifies with the team.*

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, they find that group member attractiveness is not significant for fans of successful teams (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998).

## Data and Methods

### **Sample and Data Collection**

Our sample comprises archival data on professional German soccer players and clubs as well as survey data from soccer fans in Germany. With regard to soccer players and clubs, we retrieved the respective age, club tenure and market value of all soccer players in the Bundesliga as well as the annual performance (i.e., the position at the end of a season) of the current Bundesliga clubs since the foundation of the Bundesliga in 1964 from the websites [www.transfermarkt.de](http://www.transfermarkt.de) and [www.kicker.de](http://www.kicker.de).

The survey, on the other hand, was conducted over the internet and freely accessible on the main websites of the German Football League (DFL) and the German Football Association (DFB) ([bundesliga.de](http://bundesliga.de), [dfb.de](http://dfb.de) and [fussball.de](http://fussball.de)) at the beginning of the season 2011/2012 during September 2011.<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire asked about the fan's favorite German team, favorite Bundesliga player, and the specific reasons for choosing both. In addition, questions were posed to determine the fan's degree of team identification (Mael & Ashfort, 1992; Ngan et al., 2011) and evaluate the favorite player in terms of his qualities as a role model (Dix et al., 2010; Rich, 1997). Finally, the questionnaire posed several questions regarding demographic information, the fan's overall happiness in life, sports activity and soccer involvement.

A total of 3,047 people responded to the survey; of these, 2,101 answered every question. Since we only focus on the highest soccer league in Germany (the "Bundesliga"), we excluded fans whose favorite club was playing in lower leagues during the season 2011/2012 (259 cases) from the sample. Additionally, as the purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of favorite players on team identification, we also excluded all fans whose

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<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire was pre-tested by ten soccer fans, who were asked to comment on the comprehensibility and clarity of the questions. Their feedback was used to modify unclear questions.

favorite player was not playing for their favorite team at the time the survey was conducted (436 cases), so that our final data set comprises 1,406 fans.

Although we use a multi-source sample, we assessed common method bias within the survey variables as a precaution by conducting Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Exploratory principal component analysis resulted in four factors with an eigenvalue greater than one. The major factor explained less than 23 percent of the variance. With common factor analysis, only five out of ten items (three after varimax rotation) load higher on the first factor than on the other factors. Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation showed that seven out of ten items have factor loadings below the prevalent threshold value of 0.4 (Homburg & Giering, 1996). In addition to Harman's one-factor test, we performed the marker variable test (Lindell & Whitney, 2003). There is hardly a difference between the pairwise correlations and the partial pairwise correlations excluding the influence of the marker. Further, the lowest positive correlation between the model variables and the marker is .020. Altogether, common method variance is unlikely to impact our results.

## **Measures**

Table 1 shows our survey variables and Table 2 the descriptive statistics for all measures. While *Team Identification* represents the dependent variable for our regression analyses, we sub-divide our independent variables in those that reflect the hypothesized effects and control variables, which include additional determinants of team identification. We describe each measure in detail in the following sections.

--- *Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here* ---

**Team identification.** The dependent variable *Team Identification* is an established reflective construct, which is comprised of an average of six items measuring the extent to which an individual identifies with an organization or sports team (Mael & Ashforth, 1992;

Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Ngan et al., 2011). All items reflect questions or statements like “When someone praises my favorite team, it feels like a personal compliment” and had to be assessed on a five-point Likert scale. According to our data, the construct is sufficiently reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.81 (Churchill, 1979).

**Role model perception.** In order to measure the degree to which a fan perceives his favorite player as a role model, we used two statements that are similar to those of Rich (1997) and Dix et al. (2010). The variable *Rolemodelself* represents responses to the statement “I see my favorite player as a role model” and the variable *Rolemodelothers* to “My favorite player is a good role model for others”. Both statements had to be assessed on a five-point Likert scale.

**Superstar characteristics.** Following Franck and Nüesch (2008; 2012), we incorporate both exceptional performance (Rosen, 1981; MacDonald, 1988) and remarkable popularity (Adler, 1985) in our definition of a superstar. In either way, a superstar needs to clearly stand out from the group of other soccer players. Hence, the best measures to define superstars are market values or salaries as they include both sporting performance and the player’s economic value based on his popularity (Garcia-del-Barrio & Puyol, 2007). Since information about salaries is hardly publicly available, we chose the market value, which is provided by the website transfermarkt.de for every professional soccer player. However, two modifications of the players’ market values were necessary in order for it to correctly reflect superstar characteristics: adjustment for age and adjustment for regional context.

There is consistent evidence for a quadratic relationship between a player’s age and his market value (e.g., Carmichael, Forrest & Simmons, 1999; Dobson & Gerrard, 1999; Dobson, Gerrard & Howe, 2000; Eschweiler & Vieth, 2004). However, since age is irrelevant for the definition of a superstar, the first modification adjusts the players’ market value for their age. We analyzed the average market values of all Bundesliga players per age cohort

and found that the market value is significantly lower for players aged below 21 years as well as for players who are older than 28 years (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). The low values for younger players can be explained in two ways: First, some players are not yet full members of the professional squad, but rather in a probation phase for qualifying as Bundesliga player. Second, many of those who will eventually qualify have not yet had the opportunity to present their skills in official games or build their market value respectively. However, in both cases, the reflection of superstar characteristics does not distort the market values, so that no adjustment is necessary for this age cohort. The market values of older players, on the other hand, need to be adjusted upwards since they are biased in two ways with respect to reflecting superstar characteristics. Both the diminishing remainder of the player's career duration (i.e., the expectations regarding his future performance) and his decreasing physical skills steadily reduce the player's market value. However, the player's superstar characteristics are not affected by future expectations, but rather by current status and past success, which is illustrated by the great popularity of soccer players who quit their career a long time ago. Hence, we adjusted the players' individual market values for the age cohorts "29/30 years", "31/32 years" and "older than 32 years" through multiplying them by factors reflecting the deviation of the respective age cohort's average market value from that of players aged 21-28 (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). For example, the average market value of the age cohort "21-28 years" is around 1.7 times higher than that of "29/30 years". Thus, we multiplied the individual market values of players belonging to the latter by 1.7.

The second modification of the market values refers to the regional context for the definition of superstars. Brandes et al. (2008) point out that "outstanding players of small teams [...] [so-called 'local heroes'] may attract fans without having a nationwide appeal." (p. 269). Likewise, a star player playing in a team full of stars will not stand out as much as if he played for a small team. Hence, after adjusting for age, we calculated relative market values

by dividing the player's market value by the team's average market value. We call the resulting measure, which reflects superstar characteristics as accurately as possible, *MVfactoradj*.

**Long-term team success.** We use three alternative measures of long-term team success, *Alltimepoints*, *Alltimeposition* and *Bundesliga years*. In order to test the interaction effect postulated in Hypothesis 4, we multiplied all measures with *MVfactoradj*. To obtain *Alltimepoints* we used the number of points that the team has gathered in the Bundesliga since its establishment in 1963. Moreover, we converted all points to the current regulations, which were introduced in 1995/96 and determine that every team receives three points for a win (instead of two) and one point for a draw. *Alltimeposition* describes the relative position in the all-time Bundesliga ranking. The all-time best team of all current members of the Bundesliga (FC Bayern Munich) received 32 points as it ranks 32 positions in front of the worst team (TSG 1899 Hoffenheim), which received one point. Accordingly, the other teams received somewhere between one and 32 points, depending on their all-time position. Finally, the team FC Augsburg received zero points since the team had never played in the Bundesliga prior to the season 2011/2012. The third measure of long-term team success – *Bundesliga years* – describes the number of seasons that a team has played in the Bundesliga.

**Club tenure.** We define the measure *Clubtenure* as the number of years that a player has played for the club (including for the junior teams).

**Control variables.** Fisher and Wakefield (1998) show that a team's performance positively influences the extent to which fans identify with it. We therefore include the variable *RecentTP*, which is a score evaluating the performance in the season 2010/11 relative to the average performance during the seasons 2005/06 until 2009/10. We calculated this score by assigning points for the positions in the final ranking of the respective seasons. For each season, we awarded 36 points for the first place and 19 for the last place in the

Bundesliga, 18 for the first place in the second professional league and one for the last place. For seasons in which a team played in lower leagues, we awarded zero points. Further, we awarded 20 additional points to teams who won the Championship, 10 to teams who qualified for the UEFA Champions League and five to those who qualified for the UEFA Europa League, since we believe that these successes have a disproportionately high effect on team identification. We then divided the total score for the season 2010/11 by the average total score for the seasons 2005/06 until 2009/10 to obtain *RecentTP*.

Another factor that has an influence on team identification is domain involvement. The more a fan is involved in the domain of his favorite team (in our case soccer, or on a broader level sports), the greater his team identification (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Lascu, Giese, Toolan, Guehring & Mercer, 1995). We use two alternative variables to measure domain involvement. *Sportsactivity* indicates how many times per week a fan does sport and *Socceractivity* is an ordinally scaled variable reflecting the current and past involvement in playing soccer.

We also include *Age* and the ordinal variable *Education* as control variables. Although they do not classify as determinants of team identification, they may account for other factors, which are incapable of measurement. For the same reason, we include the binary variables *Gender* and *Nationality* (German or non-German). Further control variables are *Happiness*, *City/Region*, *SAParents* and *SAFriends*, which are all assessed on a five-point Likert scale. *City/Region* represents the fan's regional affiliations and is operationalized through the question "I identify with my favorite club because I live or used to live in the same city or region" and *SAParents* ("I identify with my favorite club because my parents are also fans") and *SAFriends* ("I identify with my favorite club because my friends are also fans") measure the influence of socialization agents. While we do not postulate a specific

direction for the effect of Happiness, *City/Region*, *SAParents* and *SAFriends* should positively influence *Team Identification*.

Finally, we include the variable *Always for German Team* (“During international games, I always want the German clubs to win, no matter which one is playing”) and expect it to have a negative effect on *Team Identification*. We base this assumption on Bhattacharya et al. (1995), who provide some evidence that participation in similar organizations negatively influences organizational identification.

## **Methods**

We look at correlations to investigate bivariate relationships between the independent variables and *Team Identification* as well as to identify (i.e., to preclude) multicollinearity between the independent variables. For our multivariate analyses, we conduct OLS regressions (as our data is cross-sectional), using the control variables as standard controls. We further calculate robust errors to minimize potential bias from heteroscedasticity. As the ranges of the independent variables vary significantly (see Table 2) we use standardized regression coefficients (“betas”) to compare the relative strength of their effects. Finally, in order to investigate the interaction effect postulated in Hypothesis 4, we use interaction terms and treat the effect of *MVfactoradj* on *Team Identification* as a linear function of long-term team success.

## **Robustness Analyses**

To make our results more robust, we used alternative variables and repeated the analyses.<sup>6</sup> First, we created an alternative dependent variable (*Team Identification\_alt*), which is an extension of *Team Identification* with three additional questions adapted from Wann and Branscombe (1993) and Kwon and Trail (2001) (see Table 1). Being internally even more consistent than the original construct (Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85 compared to 0.81),

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<sup>6</sup> All these analyses and results are available on request from the authors. They are not reported for the sake of brevity.

the results hardly change if *Team Identification\_alt* is used as dependent variable. Second, we created *MVshareadj*, which is the player's market value divided by the team's total market value, as an alternative proxy for superstar characteristics. Again, we obtain similar results as with *MVfactoradj*. Third, we experimented with different combinations of points awarded for *RecentTP* (e.g., 10 instead of 20 for the Championship, 5 instead of 10 for qualification for the UEFA Champions League, and 3 instead of 5 for qualification for the UEFA Europa League; other combinations used were 25/15/5 and 30/20/10) as well as with no bonus points at all. While the latter alternative variable does not produce statistically significant results, all the others yield comparable results as *RecentTP*. This further confirms our assumption that winning the championship or qualifying for an international cup clearly influences team identification. Finally, we further calculated ordered probit models (using the *sum* of the six Likert-scale items measuring *Team Identification* as dependent variable), which also produce very similar results as the OLS regressions.

## Results

### Bivariate Results

The pairwise correlations between the measures (see Table 3) support Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3, but provide evidence contrary to Hypothesis 5. According to Hypothesis 1 and 3, team identification is positively affected by the favorite player's perception as a role model and his conformance with characteristics defining a superstar. As expected, we find statistically highly significant correlations (at the p<.001 level) between *Team Identification* and *Rolemodelself*, *Rolemodelothers* and *MVfactoradj*.

Hypothesis 2 states that the perception as a personal role model should have a greater effect on team identification than the perception as a role model for others. This is confirmed by the fact that the correlation between *Rolemodelself* and *Team Identification* (0.363) is stronger than between *Rolemodelothers* and *Team Identification* (0.265).

According to Hypothesis 5, the favorite player's club tenure should positively influence a fan's team identification. However, the correlations between *Clubtenure* and *Team Identification* (not significant at the p<.05 level; p-value of 0.099) and *Clubtenure* and *Team Identification\_alt* (significant at the p<.05 level; p-value of 0.021) are both negative.

--- *Insert Table 3 about here---*

### **Multivariate Results**

In Hypothesis 1, we argue that the perception of the favorite player as a role model positively influences a fan's degree of team identification. Both regression models in Table 4 support this hypothesis and show a statistically highly significant effect of *Rolemodelself* or *Rolemodelothers* on *Team Identification*. When further controls are introduced in regression model 2, the relative effect of *Rolemodelself* decreases slightly stronger (beta coefficient changes from 0.305 to 0.233) than that of *Rolemodelothers* (beta changes from 0.089 to 0.074).

Our regression models also support Hypothesis 2 as the impact of *Rolemodelself* on *Team Identification* is consistently more than twice as great as that of *Rolemodelothers* (beta of 0.305 in model 1 compared to 0.089 and 0.233 in model 2 compared to 0.074).

*MVfactoradj* also has a statistically highly significant and positive effect on *Team Identification* in both models, which supports Hypothesis 3. Moreover, with a beta coefficient of 0.110 in model 2, superstar characteristics seem to have a greater effect on team identification than most other drivers such as, e.g., *Clubtenure* (-0.061), *RecentTP* (0.047), *City/Region* (0.075), *SAFriends* (0.087), or *Always for German Team* (-0.070).

The effect of *Clubtenure* on *Team Identification* in the regression models is negative and statistically significant at the p<.01 level. Being in line with the correlation coefficient, these results are contrary to Hypothesis 5, in which we postulate a positive effect. Although some independent variables are correlated to a certain degree, multicollinearity does not seem

to be a problem. In both regression models, all variance inflation factors (VIFs) are below the critical value for assessing multicollinearity, which is defined as 10 (Baum, 2006) or even 2.5 (Allison, 1999) in the academic literature.

--- *Insert Table 4 about here*---

Table 5 shows three regression models which include interaction terms measuring the interaction between superstar characteristics and long-term team success and in which variables that are not statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level in regression model 2 are omitted. While the interaction term *Alltimepoints x MVfactoradj* in model 3 is hardly statistically significant (p-value of 0.102), *Alltimeposition x MVfactoradj* in model 4 is almost significant at the  $p < .05$  level (p-value of 0.055). However, there is strong evidence for an interaction effect in model 5 with *Bundesliga years x MVfactoradj* having a p-value of 0.027.

--- *Insert Table 5 about here* ---

In order to analyze the interaction effect more closely, we insert a number of potential values of *Bundesliga years* into the following formula from regression model 5:

$$\text{Effect of } MVfactoradj \text{ on Team Identification} = -0.220 + (0.008 \times \text{Bundesliga years})$$

Likewise, we do so for *Alltimeposition* and regression model 4:

$$\text{Effect of } MVfactoradj \text{ on Team Identification} = -0.186 + (0.011 \times \text{Alltimeposition})$$

These formulas illustrate that the effect of *MVfactoradj* becomes greater with rising values for *Bundesliga years* or *Alltimeposition*, which is contrary to Hypothesis 4. In fact, according to the first formula, the effect of *MVfactoradj* on *Team Identification* is, for example, more than twice as large for fans of teams with 45 years of Bundesliga membership than for fans of teams with 35 years (0.143 compared to 0.063; see Table A1 in the Appendix).

## Discussion

### **Interpretation of Empirical Results**

In the empirical analysis, we wanted to explore whether certain characteristics of a fan's favorite player have an influence on the fan's degree of team identification. We therefore tested the effect of variables reflecting a) role model perception, b) superstar characteristics and c) club tenure on team identification.

We argued that a fan identifies more with his favorite team if he perceives his favorite player as a role model. Our results clearly confirm this hypothesis. In fact, no other variable in our model has a stronger effect on team identification. We also find empirical evidence for our second hypothesis, which stated that the influence of a favorite player on team identification is greater if he is seen as a personal role model than if he is seen as a role model for others. Apparently, when a fan identifies with a role model, he will – consciously or unconsciously – attribute some of this personal identification to the identification with his favorite team.

Moreover, we expected a fan to identify more with his favorite team if his favorite player is a superstar. We further hypothesized that this effect is greater for fans of traditionally unsuccessful teams than for fans of successful teams. While our results strongly support the existence of a “superstar effect” on team identification, they provide evidence that refutes our assumptions regarding the moderating role of long-term team success. Superstars seem to be more important for fans of successful teams than for fans of unsuccessful teams. Hereby, we cannot accept the argument that this finding may be due to the fact that superstars tend to play for successful teams, because we defined superstars relative to their team members. While Fisher and Wakefield (1998) argue that fans of unsuccessful teams cherish superstars to “compensate for the [team’s] poor record” (p. 29), we now contemplate that rather fans of *successful* teams long for superstars, regarding them as an essential part in their

appreciation for the team. Fans of successful teams are used to seeing the best players play for their favorite team and, as a consequence, expect this condition to stay the same. Another explanation for our findings is that fans of successful teams and fans of unsuccessful teams have different motives to be fans. While fans of successful teams may primarily want to participate in the team's achievements (Cialdini et al., 1976) and reflected prestige (which is usually enhanced by superstars), fans of unsuccessful teams may value the feeling of connectedness or the sense of belonging to the larger community of other fans (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Fans of successful teams may have further become used to their favorite team being successful, and the presence of superstars may guarantee future success to them.

Finally, we could not find any evidence for our last hypothesis, in which we claimed that a fan identifies more with his favorite team if his favorite player has played for it for a long period of time. In fact, our results suggest the opposite. Fans whose favorite player has longer club tenure have lower levels of team identification. However, the negative effect of this variable on team identification should not be interpreted in a way that longer club tenure of a fan's favorite player definitely reduces team identification. Instead, it tells us that new players may act as identification figures as well – even more than established players. It stands to reason that new star players boost or refresh a fan's identification with his favorite team because a fan – especially a fan with a high level of team identification – perceives the mere act of contracting a star player as a success.

### **Implications for Business Practice**

We looked at soccer stars and their fans to study the effect of CEOs on external stakeholders' organizational identification. The results of our study thus suggest that appointing the “right” CEO is an important lever for enhancing external stakeholders' organizational identification, and thus for triggering or increasing supportive behavior towards the organization. For instance, customers will promote the company or its products

through positive word-of-mouth and also purchase more products themselves (Ahearne et al., 2005) and individual investors will acquire or continue to hold shares even if better options are available to them (Aspara & Tikkannen, 2011).

More specifically, organizations do benefit from installing someone as CEO who is perceived as a role model or possesses superstar characteristics. The results of our empirical analysis imply that managers do not only act as role models for their employees (Gibson, 2004) but also for individuals from outside of their organization. Consequently, CEOs increase organizational identification of external stakeholders who perceive them as role models by providing a face to the organization, with which stakeholders can identify (Foote, 1951; Kagan, 1958; Scott & Lane, 2000). Thereby, it is not necessary, but favorable, if stakeholders perceive the CEO as their personal role model. Conversely, so-called “negative role models” might draw attention to the organization, but they will not contribute to creating identification (Gibson, 2004). Superstar characteristics – which are not confined to sports or music stars, but can be attributed to top performers in business organizations as well (Groysberg et al., 2004; Wade et al., 2008) – enhance a CEO’s influence on external stakeholders’ organizational identification. The popularity and global admiration make it even easier for stakeholders to identify with the organization that he or she represents. A good example for anecdotal evidence in this context is Steve Jobs and Apple. Having been the “quintessential charismatic organizational leader” (Flynn & Staw, 2004, p. 318), Steve Jobs was perceived by many as a good role model and certainly collected much external support for Apple. Moreover, given the fact that he has more hits on Google (~ 129 million) than the current president of the United States, Barack Obama (~ 54 million), or the most popular sports stars (e.g., Cristiano Ronaldo: ~ 43 million, Lionel Messi: ~ 14 million, or Lebron James: ~ 21 million), one could safely assert that Steve Jobs was a “superstar”.

Interestingly, the CEO's organizational tenure seems to be not a critical factor for external stakeholders' identification. In fact, a long tenure may even be counterproductive since CEOs with longer tenure are often perceived to be "stale in the saddle" (Miller, 1991) and "less likely [...] to remain aligned with their environments" (Datta & Guthrie, 1994, p. 570). Hiring a new star, on the other hand, can even have symbolic intent and thus, boost identification by confirming that the organization is attractive and worth identifying with (Datta & Guthrie, 1994; Friedman & Singh, 1989; Wade et al., 2008). Moreover, the presence of a superstar seems to be more important for established, successful companies than for emerging, but rather unknown ones. While slowly "growing" their own superstars thus serves the latter well, established organizations rather need an established and already popular CEO because their external stakeholders simply expect that. For the same reason, hiring popular CEOs can even have a greater effect on external stakeholders' identification for established companies than promoting lesser-known internal candidates (with long firm tenure). Coming back to our Steve Jobs example: As co-founder of Apple he represents the typical "home-grown" superstar. His popularity had an effect on that of the emerging company Apple and vice versa. At the same time, our results imply that he could have had a significant effect on the organizational identification of external stakeholders of established companies like Microsoft or IBM, had these companies hired him.

While Groysberg et al. (2004) argue that transferring superstars brings with it some obstacles and negative influences on operational performance, we believe that this issue is not as critical for CEOs since their representative functions are considerably more pronounced. Nevertheless, performance implications should not be neglected (Datta & Guthrie, 1994; Wade et al., 2008).

## Limitations

While our study makes important contributions to the organizational identification literature by providing some first evidence on the effect of individual persons, we also acknowledge that it faces, like any study, some limitations. First, we only looked at fans of the German Bundesliga (and soccer players of the Bundesliga respectively). It would be interesting to know whether similar results can be obtained in other countries as this would eventually further support the validity of our generalization to business organizations.

Second, since our data is cross-sectional and not longitudinal, we cannot detect long-term effects on team identification. Panel data with a stable sample of fans could investigate fans' reactions on specific events (e.g., contracting a star player, favorite player causing a scandal) with respect to their level of team identification.

Third, as in any cross-sectional research design, we cannot be perfectly sure about the direction of causality of some of the relationships we analyze (Allison, 1999; Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquot & Lalivé, 2010). For example, one could argue that higher team identification leads to choosing a favorite player with more pronounced superstar characteristics instead of the other way around, as shown in our results. However, if this was the case, we would rather expect highly identified fans to choose a favorite player who is *less* popular. Nevertheless, we cannot completely rule out endogeneity concerns.

Fourth, although we use multi-source data, some of the variables come from a single survey, so that they may suffer from methodological issues such as response bias or common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although we can mitigate these concerns by conducting established statistical tests and by relying on survey variables only when exploring perceptions instead of objective characteristics, we cannot completely rule out that measurement issues affect our results. Besides, there is a selection bias due to the use of the

internet as survey platform, so that younger fans (see Table 2) and potentially rather more motivated and informed people are included in the sample.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we explored the effect of soccer stars on their fans' degree of team identification. Our empirical results suggest a positive effect of superstar characteristics and role model perception on team identification while club tenure seems to have no influence. We then transferred these results to the business domain as sports serves as an interesting and relevant context to investigate business phenomena (Day et al., 2012) and since some CEOs also measure up to the definition of a superstar (Wade et al., 2008). Accordingly, CEOs who possess superstar characteristics or those who are perceived as role models should influence external stakeholders' organizational identification. Moreover, their superstar properties seem to be more important for stakeholders of established organizations.

In addition to providing the basis for several implications for business practice, our results contribute to the organizational identification literature by extending the list of determinants related to *individual* persons beyond CEO charisma (Fanelli & Misangyi, 2006; Flynn & Staw, 2004). Further research should now focus on developing a more differentiated view of these effects. For instance, do they vary across industries, between a B2B and a B2C context, or between customers or individual investors? Other potential avenues for further research are the investigation of whether specific CEO characteristics (besides charismatic appearance) foster organizational identification and whether the influence of CEOs reaches beyond existing stakeholders.

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**Table 1: Measurement of Survey Variables**

<b>Variable (from survey)</b>	<b>Item Description and Response Format</b>
Team Identification <i>(adapted from Mael &amp; Ashfort, 1992)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When someone criticizes my favorite team, it feels like a personal insult.</li> <li>▪ I am very interested in what others think about my favorite team.</li> <li>▪ When I talk about my favorite team, I usually say “we” rather than “they”.</li> <li>▪ My favorite team’s successes are my successes.</li> <li>▪ When someone praises my favorite team, it feels like a personal compliment.</li> <li>▪ If a story in the media criticized my favorite team, I would feel embarrassed.</li> </ul> <p><i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></p>
Team Identification_alt <i>(based on Kwon &amp; Trail (2001) and Wann &amp; Branscombe (1993))</i>	<p>In addition to previous items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I am proud to be a fan of my favorite team.</li> <li>▪ I feel a personal sense of achievement when my favorite team wins and a personal sense of failure when it loses.</li> <li>▪ I would support my favorite team regardless of whether they won or lost.</li> </ul> <p><i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></p>
Rolemodelself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I see my favorite player as a role model.</li> </ul> <p><i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></p>
Rolemodelothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My favorite player is a good role model for others.</li> </ul> <p><i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></p>
Sportsactivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How often do you do sports? (0 = less than once a week, 7 = seven times per week)</li> </ul>
Socceractivity	<p>Which statement best describes your soccer activity level? <i>(Assigned score in parentheses)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I play soccer as a member of a club. (3)</li> <li>▪ I used to be a member in a soccer club but now I only play soccer for fun. (2)</li> <li>▪ I used to be a member in a soccer club but now I do not or hardly play soccer. (2)</li> <li>▪ I play or used to play soccer for fun but have never been a member of a soccer club. (1)</li> <li>▪ I do not play soccer. However, I do other sports as a member of a sports club. (0)</li> <li>▪ I do not play soccer. However, I do other sports but not as a member of a sports club. (0)</li> <li>▪ I do not do sports. (0)</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 0 = No degree</li> <li>▪ 1 = “Volks-/Hauptschule” (9 years of schooling)</li> <li>▪ 2 = “Mittlere Reife” (10 years of schooling)</li> <li>▪ 3 = “Abitur” (12 or 13 years of schooling)</li> <li>▪ 4 = University degree</li> <li>▪ 5 = Doctoral degree</li> </ul>
Happiness	<p>Altogether, how happy are you currently with your life? <i>(4-point Likert scale: 1 = very unhappy; 2 = rather unhappy; 3 = rather happy; 4 = very happy)</i></p>
City/Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I identify with my favorite club because I live or used to live in the same city or region. <i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></li> </ul>
SAParents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I identify with my favorite club because my parents are also fans. <i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></li> </ul>
SAFriends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I identify with my favorite club because my friends are also fans. <i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></li> </ul>
Always for German Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During international games, I always want the German clubs to win, no matter which one is playing. <i>(5-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</i></li> </ul>

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Measures**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Dependent Variable</b>					
Team Identification	3.077	.940	3.080	1	5
<i>Team Identification_alt</i>	<i>3.493</i>	.823	<i>3.560</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>Independent Variables</b>					
Rolemodelself	3.154	1.410	3	1	5
Rolemodelothers	3.694	1.082	4	1	5
MVfactoradj	2.678	1.010	2.403	.523	4.663
<i>MVshareadj</i>	<i>.113</i>	<i>.041</i>	<i>.098</i>	<i>.024</i>	<i>0.229</i>
Clubtenure	5.782	4.552	3	0	14
<b>Control Variables</b>					
RecentTP (20-10-5)	1.164	.472	.876	.571	2.143
<i>RecentTP (10-5-3)</i>	<i>1.109</i>	<i>.365</i>	<i>.911</i>	<i>.638</i>	<i>2.143</i>
<i>RecentTP (25-15-5)</i>	<i>1.207</i>	<i>.532</i>	<i>.904</i>	<i>.522</i>	<i>2.143</i>
<i>RecentTP (30-20-10)</i>	<i>1.225</i>	<i>.551</i>	<i>.912</i>	<i>.471</i>	<i>2.143</i>
<i>RecentTP (no bonus points)</i>	<i>1.060</i>	<i>.279</i>	<i>.966</i>	<i>.657</i>	<i>2.143</i>
Sportsactivity	2.933	2.087	3	0	7
Socceractivity	1.741	1.109	2	0	3
Age	28.112	13.289	24	12	73
Education	2.391	1.153	2	0	5
Gender*	.867	.340	1	0	1
Nationality*	.940	.237	1	0	1
Happiness	3.827	.769	4	1	5
City/Region	2.475	1.748	1	1	5
SAParents	2.048	1.470	1	1	5
SAFriends	2.430	1.359	2	1	5
Always for German Team	4.004	1.283	5	1	5
<b>Moderators</b>					
Alltimepoints	2357.5	652.8	2269	0	3022
Alltimeposition	27.631	5.680	28	0	32
Bundesliga years	42.482	8.623	44	0	48

\* = dummy variables: 0 = female / non-German; 1 = male / German  
Alternative variables for robustness analyses in italics

**Table 3: Correlations between Measures**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
<i>Dependent Variable</i>																		
1 Team Identification																		
2 Team Identification_alt		<b>.97</b>																
<i>Independent Variables</i>																		
3 Rolemodelself		<b>.36</b>	<b>.38</b>															
4 Rolemodelothers		<b>.26</b>	<b>.29</b>	<b>.57</b>														
5 MVfactoradj		<b>.13</b>	<b>.13</b>	.02	.03													
6 Clubtenure		-.04	<b>-.06</b>	.01	<b>.07</b>	<b>.10</b>												
<i>Control Variables</i>																		
7 RecentTP		<b>.08</b>	<b>.07</b>	-.03	.03	<b>.26</b>	.03											
8 Sportsactivity		<b>.14</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.09</b>	.03	-.02	.03										
9 Socceractivity		.05	<b>.08</b>	<b>.21</b>	<b>.07</b>	-.01	-.03	.04	<b>.41</b>									
10 Age		<b>-.20</b>	<b>-.22</b>	<b>-.27</b>	<b>-.11</b>	.02	<b>-.06</b>	<b>-.07</b>	<b>-.42</b>	<b>-.28</b>								
11 Education		<b>-.27</b>	<b>-.28</b>	<b>-.22</b>	<b>-.15</b>	-.03	-.01	<b>.06</b>	<b>-.13</b>	<b>-.11</b>	<b>.13</b>							
12 Gender		.03	.04	.02	-.04	-.02	-.05	-.01	<b>.11</b>	<b>.28</b>	.00	-.02						
13 Nationality		<b>-.06</b>	-.05	-.05	-.05	.02	-.01	<b>.05</b>	-.02	.05	.01	-.00	.02					
14 Happiness		<b>.08</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>.08</b>	-.00	<b>-.06</b>	.02	<b>.13</b>	.03	-.05	.03	.05	.01				
15 City/Region		<b>.11</b>	<b>.09</b>	-.04	<b>-.05</b>	.03	<b>-.07</b>	<b>.05</b>	-.04	<b>-.12</b>	.04	.05	-.01	.05	.03			
16 SAParents		<b>.16</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.13</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.09</b>	-.03	-.00	<b>.11</b>	.04	<b>-.16</b>	<b>-.06</b>	-.05	<b>.08</b>	.03	<b>.24</b>		
17 SAFriends		<b>.22</b>	<b>.19</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>.16</b>	.04	-.03	<b>.05</b>	<b>.06</b>	-.01	-.02	<b>-.07</b>	.01	.01	<b>.08</b>	<b>.29</b>	<b>.30</b>	
18 Always for German Team		<b>-.07</b>	-.03	.04	<b>.08</b>	-.05	.05	<b>-.08</b>	.01	<b>.06</b>	.01	-.05	.05	.03	.02	<b>-.08</b>	-.03	.02

Bold correlations are significant at the p<.05 level (two-tailed)

**Table 4: Effect of Perception as Role Model, Superstar Characteristics and Club Tenure on Team Identification**

Variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	b	Beta	VIF	b	Beta	VIF
<b>Independent Variables</b>						
Rolemodelself	.203*** (.021)	.305	1.61	.155*** (.021)	.233	1.69
Rolemodelothers	.077** (.027)	.089	1.49	.064* (.026)	.074	1.53
MVfactoradj	.104*** (.024)	.112	1.08	.102*** (.023)	.110	1.11
Clubtenure	-.014** (.005)	-.066	1.02	-.013** (.005)	-.061	1.04
<b>Control Variables</b>						
RecentTP	.109* (.051)	.055	1.08	.093 <sup>†</sup> (.048)	.047	1.12
Sportsactivity	.032** (.012)	.071	1.25	-.001 (.012)	-.002	1.43
Socceractivity	-.044 <sup>†</sup> (.023)	-.052	1.23	-.048* (.024)	-.057	1.37
Age				-.008*** (.002)	-.114	1.33
Education				-.158*** (.021)	-.195	1.08
Gender <sup>a</sup>				.119 <sup>†</sup> (.070)	.043	1.11
Nationality <sup>a</sup>				-.204 <sup>†</sup> (.104)	-.052	1.02
Happiness				.055 <sup>†</sup> (.030)	.045	1.04
City/Region				.040** (.014)	.075	1.18
SAParents				.024 (.017)	.037	1.22
SAFriends				.075*** (.018)	.109	1.20
Always for German Team				-.051** (.019)	-.070	1.03
Constant	1.808			2.487		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.159			.239		

a = dummy variables: 0 = female / non-German; 1 = male / German

b = unstandardized regression coefficient with robust errors in parentheses

Beta = standardized regression coefficient

VIF = variance inflation factor = 1/tolerance

† < 0.1, \* < 0.05, \*\* < 0.01, \*\*\* < 0.001

**Table 5: Interaction between Superstar Characteristics and Long-Term Success in their Effect on Team Identification**

Variables	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	b	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta
<b>Interaction Effects</b>						
MVfactoradj	-.095 (.121)	-.103	-.0186 (.155)	-.202	-.220 (.156)	-.238
Alltimepoints	-3.1e-4** (1.2e-4)	-.215				
Alltimepoints x MVfactoradj	9.0e-5 (5.5e-5)	.230				
Alltimeposition			-.035** (.012)	-.211		
Alltimeposition x MVfactoradj			.011 <sup>†</sup> (.006)	.343		
Bundesliga years					-.023** (.008)	-.209
Bundesliga years x MVfactoradj					.008* (.004)	.412
<b>Other Independent Variables</b>						
Rolemodelself	.159*** (.020)	.239	.159*** (.020)	.239	.158*** (.020)	.238
Rolemodelothers	.072** (.026)	.083	.072** (.026)	.083	.070** (.026)	.081
Clubtenure	-.010 <sup>†</sup> (.005)	-.047	-.011* (.005)	-.055	-.012* (.005)	-.059
<b>Control Variables</b>						
Socceractivity	-.038 <sup>†</sup> (.022)	-.045	-.039 <sup>†</sup> (.022)	-.046	-.039 <sup>†</sup> (.022)	-.046
Age	-.009*** (.021)	-.122	-.009*** (.002)	-.122	-.009*** (.002)	-.123
Education	-.154*** (.021)	-.190	-.154*** (.021)	-.190	-.154*** (.021)	-.190
City/Region	.029* (.014)	.055	.032* (.014)	.060	.034* (.014)	.063
SAFriends	.084*** (.018)	.122	.083*** (.018)	.121	.083*** (.018)	.120
Always for German Team	-.047* (.019)	-.064	-.048* (.019)	-.066	-.049* (.011)	-.067
Constant	3.375		3.601		3.607	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.241		.241		.240	

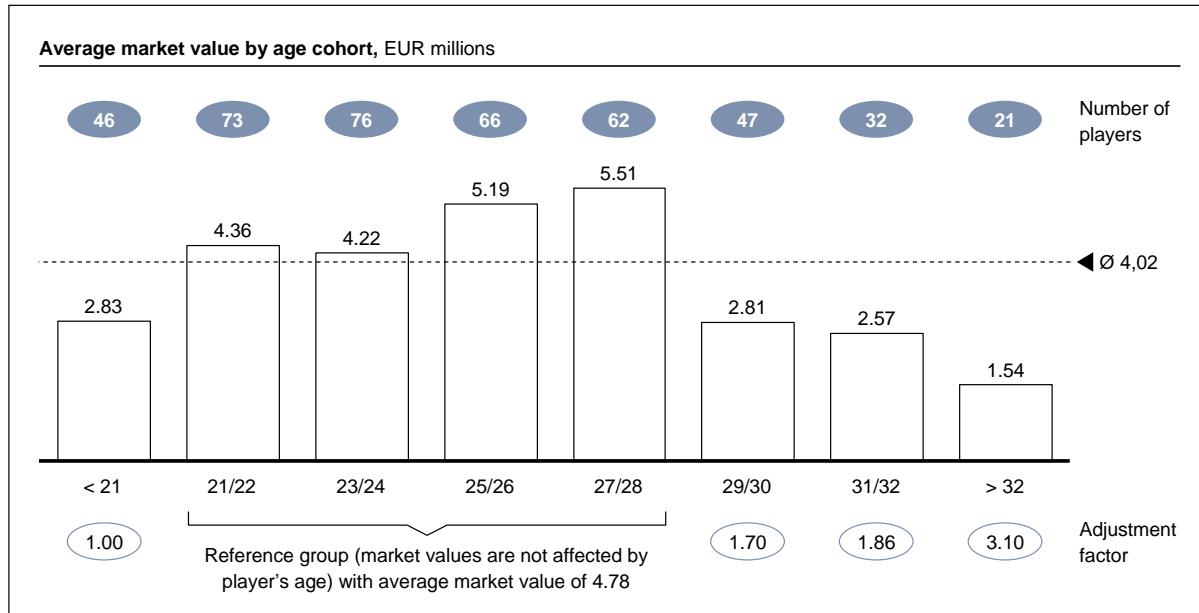
b = unstandardized regression coefficient with robust errors in parentheses

Beta = standardized regression coefficient

† &lt; 0.1, \* &lt; 0.05, \*\* &lt; 0.01, \*\*\* &lt; 0.001

## Appendix

**Figure A1: Average Market Value of Bundesliga Players per Age Cohort**



**Table A1: Effect of Superstar Characteristics on Team Identification as a Function of Long-Term Team Success**

Bundesliga years (max = 48)	Effect of MVfactoradj on Team Identification	Alltimeposition (32 points for first place)	Effect of MVfactoradj on Team Identification
0	-.220	0	-.186
5	-.180	5	-.130
10	-.139	10	-.074
15	-.099	15	-.018
20	-.059	16	-.007
25	-.018	17	.004
27	-.002	20	.038
28	.006	25	.094
30	.022	30	.150
35	.063	32	.172
40	.103		
45	.143		
48	.168		