Understanding the Drivers of Co-Brand Consideration: A Sport Co-Brands perspective

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Abstract

Co-branding is a brand partnership that joins two or more brands in a short- or long-term arrangement that involves using multiple brand names, logos or features for the same product. The emergence of the co-brands within the sports industry calls for research into understanding the drivers of consumer decisions. Hence, this study aims to examine the driver of factors influencing sports co-brand consideration. A total of 250 responses were obtained from South African sports consumers. Quantitative research was the chosen research method, with a questionnaire as a data collection tool. Data was processed and analysed using SPSS and structural equation modelling. The study demonstrates that perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, and perceived value significantly influence consumers' co-brand consideration for sport products. The study's findings are significant to the sports industry in South Africa and can be used as the basis to establish effective co-brands. Co-branded sports goods marketers targeting South African consumers can utilise these findings. Co-branding partnerships should focus on generating unique and exclusive items that stand out in the market. Unique collaborations can stimulate consumer interest and consideration. Marketers should emphasise what differentiates their co-branded products from other offerings on the market.

1. Introduction

The global sports industry encompasses a diverse range of business entities engaged in producing sport-related products and services. In 2023, the market for sporting goods, including athletic footwear, exercise equipment, licenced sports products, and athletic apparel, reached US$213 billion,

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underscoring its substantial economic impact (Statista, 2024). With the rise in competition and market saturation, sports manufacturers face unprecedented challenges in maintaining market share and consumer loyalty. Nike has dominated this sector with the highest market share, with sales reaching over US$51.5 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2024), followed by Adidas, Puma, New Balance, and Under Armour. In response to intensified competition, brands have increasingly turned to innovative branding strategies, such as co-branding. For instance, between 2021 and 2022, Puma's performance significantly improved, as evidenced by large increases in its market share and sales globally. This beneficial shift was largely attributed to the use of co-creation techniques, such as prominent partnerships with BMW and Ferrari. Post-collaboration, Puma saw substantial revenue growth, increasing from approximately US$4.4 billion in 2015 to US$6.8 billion in 2021, and continued to rise to US$9.2 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2024).

Co-branding, as opposed to influencer and ambush marketing, has become a particularly persuasive tactic in the ever-changing field of marketing strategies (Oh et al., 2020). Although influencer and ambush marketing are equally capable of creating customer engagement and endorsements, co-branding presents unique benefits that make it particularly relevant for this study. Also known as co-marketing, joint branding, or brand alliances, co-branding involves the collaboration of two or more independent brands on a single product or service. This strategy leverages the combined brand equity to promote new offerings and enhance market appeal. Co-branding has proven successful in various sectors, including fashion, where it has been shown to increase brand awareness, enter new markets, reduce costs, and add value for loyal customers (Oeppen & Jamal, 2014; Zhang et al., 2022). Unlike ambush marketing (which often operates in a less collaborative manner) or influencer marketing (which relies heavily on individual endorsements), co-branding fosters mutually beneficial relationships that can drive long-term brand loyalty and shared success. Recent research underscores the strategic importance of co-branding in building strong brand associations and expanding market reach (Liu & Li, 2023).

Despite its advantages, co-branding presents challenges, particularly in selecting compatible partners. The choice of an appropriate business partner is crucial, as it can significantly impact the success or failure of the co-branded initiative (Kania et al., 2021; Oeppen & Jamal, 2014). Recent developments in the marketing landscape have emphasised brand value over mere product attributes (Aqeel et al., 2017). As such, successful co-branding can enhance brand image and provide a competitive edge. Illustrative examples of co-branding include Nike's collaboration with Apple, resulting in products like the Apple Watch Nike and Nike+ iPod Sports Kit, which feature both brands' logos and advanced technological features. Similarly, partnerships like Puma's collaborations with Ferrari and BMW demonstrate how sports brands use co-branding to leverage the reputations of their partners across various product categories. However, co-branding initiatives are not without risk, with failure rates estimated at 80%–90% due to negative events, including brand transgressions, product-harm crisis, or service failures (Nguyen et al., 2020; Turan, 2022; Yu et al., 2021).

Despite the popularity of such collaborations, empirical research on their effectiveness within the sports industry remains limited (Turan, 2022; Yu et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021). Moreover, there is a notable gap in understanding the factors that drive consumers' perceptions of co-branded sports products (Turan, 2022). Furthermore, other existing academic papers contribute to a range of other aspects, such as theories underlying research in the field, motivations behind establishing co-branding partnerships, partner selection criteria, antecedents, mediators and moderators of success, positive and negative outcomes, and contextual factors influencing co-branding (Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017; Pinello et al., 2022; Turan, 2021). Despite the significant number of sports industry sales – US $370 000 million in 2022 and expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate of 10.61% during the forecast period, reaching US$677 million by 2028 (360 Market Updates, 2023) – little empirical research on the effectiveness of co-branding has been conducted in the context of sports (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). This study aims to address this gap by exploring the drivers behind consumers' consideration of co-branded sports items and identifying the key factors that influence their perceptions of value for these brands.

The remainder of this paper outlines the study's problem statement, literature review, conceptual model and hypotheses, methodology, and data analysis and results. Lastly, the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented.

2. Problem Statement

Co-branding integrates the constituent brand's and individual brand's traits and transmits the corresponding values of both brands to the resulting co-branding (Yu et al., 2021). The goal of co-branding is to develop collaborations, raise awareness, and increase the value of the brands involved by leveraging each brand through the transfer of associations from one to the other and distinguishing them from the competitors (Aaker, 1991; Singh et al., 2016). Over the last two decades, there has been a considerable increase in the number of brand collaborations, as people become more aware of the growth prospects presented by this strategy. This prospective branding strategy has practical implications for various businesses, including the sports industry. Despite these and many other examples of effective co-branding, the strategy faces problems that can lead to failure, as demonstrated by several cases in practice (Ahn et al., 2020; Barron, 2023; Singh et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2022). A failing brand alliance can have negative spillover consequences that affect each partner brand's equity (Barron, 2023), as seen with the Swatch and Tiffany & Co. co-branding.

Co-branding's appeal in commercial practice has been reflected in significant academic studies over the years (Barron, 2023; Besharat & Langan, 2014; Newmeyer et al., 2018; Turan, 2022). Despite the significant academic focus on co-branding, empirical evidence for the success drivers remains fragmented and confusing (Dalman & Puranam, 2017; Turan, 2021). Furthermore, Ahn et al. (2020)

stated that the fragmentation of literature linking drivers of co-branding alliance and implementation outputs of co-branding make it challenging for scholars to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the co-branding phenomena.

To ensure the effectiveness of their co-branding strategies, marketers need to know what drives co-branded product purchases. Surprisingly, prior research on the conditions in which co-branding is effective emphasises ingredient branding, which incorporates functional attributes of one brand into an existing, dominant brand as an ingredient. Nevertheless, several factors influence consumers' positive perceptions and effectiveness of co-branding (Singh et al., 2016; Turan, 2021). Some of the success factors that have received attention in co-branding literature include partner brands' brand attitude, perceived brand quality, brand equity, brand familiarity, fit between the brands, brand involvement, variety seeking, need for uniqueness, and consumer brand consciousness (Yu et al., 2021). However, prior research has not investigated the entire range of drivers, instead concentrating on individual factors while ignoring the rest. For example, some studies have only investigated the relationship between "fit among partner brands" and the "evaluation of co-branding" (e.g., Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017; Yu et al., 2017), whereas others have only examined the relationship between "partner brand characteristics" and the "evaluation of co-branding". Moreover, Pinello et al. (2022) emphasised that scholars focus on a specific input – that is, the "fit" between partners and/or products in co-branding alliances – and overlook how consumers perceive co-branded products (consumers' perceptions of co-branded products' functionality or symbolism; consumer brands/products aspects). Additionally, previous research mainly centres on the impacts of co-branding strategy on conceptual, brand-related factors, and few studies have examined the effects of various attributes of co-branding combinations, such as price, uniqueness, and quality, on purchase intention. Consequently, there are requests to look at all drivers that influence co-branding decisions (Turan, 2022).

Lastly, while this subject of study has been explored in prior research (Pinello et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2016; Turan, 2021), the sports consumer market has not received adequate attention, particularly in South Africa. Several studies have been undertaken in nations, such as China (Nie et al., 2024a; Yu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022), the United States of America (Childs & Jin, 2020), and the United Kingdom (Abdolmaleki et al., 2023). To fill this gap in co-branding literature in a sports context, consumers' perceptions of co-branded products need to be identified, established, and incorporated into the examination of co-branding's overall impact on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Thus, this study addresses this limitation by investigating the influence of perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, and perceived value on brand consideration of co-brands from the perspective of South African consumers of sports products.

2.1. Research aims and objectives

2.1.1. Research aim

The aim of this study is to examine the drivers of co-brand consideration.

2.1.2. Research objectives

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set:

- To identify the drivers of co-branding acceptance by consumers; and
- To analyse how South African sports consumers' perceptions of products are influenced by co-branded products.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Co-branding defined

Literature on co-branding has seen various terms (e.g., strategic alliance, composite branding, and joint branding) used interchangeably to refer to the concept of co-branding (Rao et al., 1999; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). For the purpose of this study, co-branding is defined as a brand partnership between two or more brands in a short- or long-term arrangement that involves using multiple brand names, logos or features for the same product (Nie et al., 2024b; Yu et al., 2021). Turan (2021) further described co-branding, also named brand alliance, as a marketing strategy in which two or more brands are presented simultaneously to consumers as one product.

Research identifies multiple sorts of co-branding (Turan, 2022). Vertical co-branding combines brands at distinct stages of the value chain – for example, Nike and Apple partnered to create the Nike+ fitness products. The collaboration resulted in the development of the Nike+ iPod Sports Kit, which allowed users to track their workout performance through a combination of Nike footwear technology and Apple's iPod technology. Contrastingly, horizontal co-branding takes place when brands are at the same level of the value chain, and contribute comparable or complementary resources, as shown with Castle Lager and the Springbok rugby team. Castle Lager, an iconic South African beer brand, partnered and co-branded with the Springbok rugby team, capitalising on the team's national pride and sports fan base (Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Cooperative branding involves equal brand treatment in collaborative advertisements. For instance, Nike and Apple partnered to launch the Nike+ product line, integrating Nike's athletic gear with Apple's technology.

Complementary branding involves combining items in marketing campaigns – for example, action camera brand GoPro partnered with Red Bull, a leading energy drink and extreme sports organiser. The collaboration involved producing content featuring extreme sports athletes sponsored by Red Bull using GoPro cameras. Red Bull also promoted GoPro cameras in its events and on its media channels (Carter, 2022). Furthermore, Kotler and Keller (2016) defined ingredient co-branding as identifying and enhancing brand equity of product components. For example, Nando's and Avozilla burgers.

Known for its peri-peri chicken, Nando’s occasionally features Avozilla burgers on its menu, highlighting the use of the rare Avozilla avocado variety, which attracts avocado enthusiasts and foodies. Symbolic co-branding enriches a host brand’s image through associations with a partner brand’s symbolic attributes (Yu et al., 2021), as is the case with Nike and Michael Jordan’s Air Jordan sneakers. Nike’s collaboration with Jordan adds symbolic value to the Air Jordan line, associating it with Jordan’s athletic prowess and cultural influence.

3.2. Successful co-branding in sports industry

Co-branding has become a prevalent marketing strategy in the sports industry, with various brands in the marketplace increasingly adopting this tactic (Rees, 2022). Examples of co-branding in the sport industry include Adidas’s collaboration with luxury fashion brand Stella McCartney, Puma with Ferrari, Adidas with Kanye West, Under Armour with JBL and, most notably, Nike with Apple. Co-branding is a powerful marketing strategy that can attract new customers, refresh a stale brand image, increase market share, and help companies develop technologies through knowledge exchange. According to Morgan et al. (2021), co-branding in sports industry can be in a form of athlete-brand co-branding (e.g., Michael Jordan and Nike). Nike and Jordan are excellent examples of successful co-branding in the sports industry (Wang, 2023). Not only did they create one of the most iconic co-branding partnerships in sports history, but the collaboration of these lifestyle brands has lasted for over three decades.

Manufacturer brands in the context of sports (sports manufacturing brands) have used co-branding tactics across a wide range of product categories, such as sportswear and sports technology products. More recently, co-branding has become a new marketing trend in the wearable sports device segment (e.g., Apple Watch Nike+; Fitbit Ionic: Adidas edition). This is an interesting marketing trend because wearable sports device is one of the fastest-growing industry segments, as is evidenced by the fact that 120 million devices were bought in 2022 (Statista, 2024). This growth reflects ongoing advancements in technology and increased consumer interest in health and fitness tracking. The market is expected to keep expanding as innovations and new features enhance the functionality and appeal of these devices.

The co-branding marketing tactic has been applied to numerous sports products under various sports manufacturing brands (e.g., Under Armour co-branded with JBL, Apple co-branded with Nike, Fitbit co-branded with Adidas). Nike’s co-branding partnership with Apple (i.e., Nike+ iPod Sport Kit) and Adidas’s co-branding partnership with Stella McCartney (i.e., sportswear line) are two of the most successful examples of co-branding in the sports context (Yu et al., 2021).

3.3. Overview of co-branding

Co-branding and brand extension strategies seek to strengthen the parent brand, while also extending customer value perceptions to the new product. These two approaches address the same fundamental issues: how brand equity transfers to the new product and how the new product eventually affects brand equity (Kania et al., 2021). However, a co-branding strategy may be more beneficial than a brand extension strategy because a second brand can provide a perception of additional value to both the co-branded product and the primary brand, which the main brand cannot accomplish independently (Zuhdi et al., 2020). Kania et al. (2021) argued that customers incorporate additional visual cues, such as branding and product form, into their assessments of a product's performance, even when confronted with competing features.

A perceived fit between the two parent brands is an important factor that influences customers' perceptions due to the reliance on pre-existing attitudes and external cues (Loken et al., 2023; Wason & Charlton, 2018). Loken et al. (2023) discovered that consumers' feelings towards a specific brand alliance impact their subsequent attitudes towards the individual brands comprising that alliance. Consumer attributes like age and gender, self-complexity, capacity for brand loyalty, involvement, consumer-brand identification, and brand attributes, such as complementarity and similarity, influence the relationship between a co-branded offering and co-branding alliance performance (Zuhdi et al., 2020). A brand alliance is viewed favourably when the partners that established it had comparable brand personalities (Zuhdi et al., 2020). Wason and Charlton (2018) identified the possible reasons that are used as an influencing base for creating brand alliances, which include category fit, cultures, self-representation, consumer aspirations, and product consumption. Product fit and brand fit appear to influence consumers' perceptions of the capabilities of two complementing product categories, with product fit having a stronger positive association with customers' attitudes towards the co-branded product (Wason & Charlton, 2018).

When markets are cluttered with competing brands, the risks of developing new brands are high and innovative goods are frequently duplicated; thus, co-branding can be used to achieve synergy that takes advantage of the qualities of the constituent brands (Zuhdi et al., 2020). Mitchell and Balabanis (2021) addressed a critical topic in co-branding, namely: how the brand equity of the constituent brand is transferred to that of the new product, the co-brand, and how the co-brand affects the brand equity of the constituent brands. Combining two brands to create a co-brand may provide consumers with more guarantees about the product's quality than a single branded product (Wang, 2023). According to Mitchell and Balabanis, (2021), another advantage of co-branding is the benefit of relationships. Suppliers, manufacturers, and partners benefit from sharing their expertise, capabilities, and experiences. The reduction in the likelihood of new competitors entering the market benefits current suppliers of co-branded products. Lastly, they may benefit from stability in their customer marketplaces.

4. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

4.1. Conceptual model

The principal theoretical basis of this study is the theory of perceived value. According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is consumers' overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on perceptions of what is received (benefits) and what is given (cost). This definition underscores the subjective nature of value, which can vary widely among individuals based on their personal needs, preferences, and expectations. The research model in Figure 2 demonstrates the relationships between the constructs – namely perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, perceived value, and brand consideration – which are discussed thereafter.

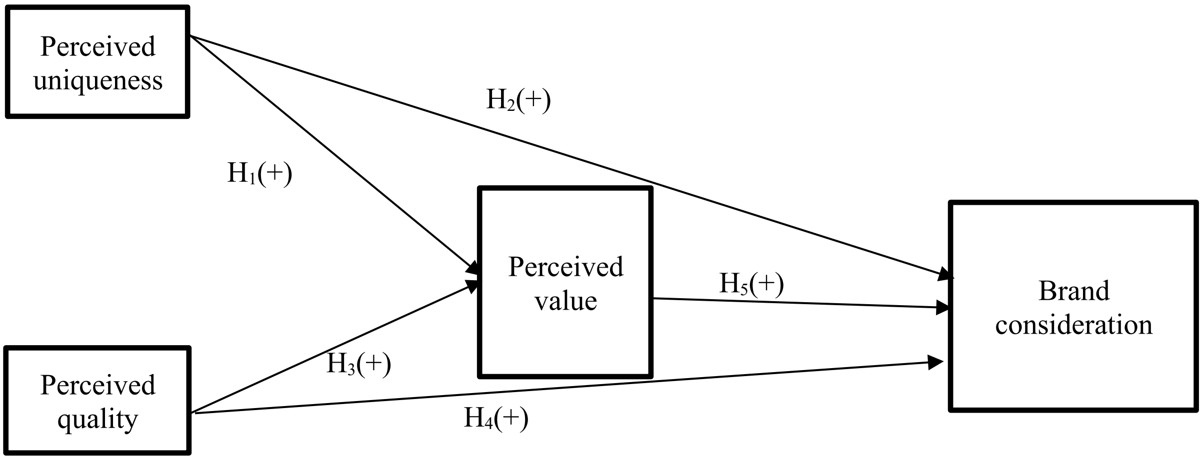

Figure1: Research model

Source: Author's own construction.

4.2. Perceived uniqueness

Keller and Swaminathan (2020) defined perceived uniqueness as the distinction that separates a brand from its competitors. When buyers perceive a brand to be distinct, it is more likely to be recalled and recognised among a large number of competing brands, boosting the possibility of a favourable judgement (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). In the context of co-branding, perceived uniqueness relates to how users view the co-branded sports product to be unique. Previous studies have investigated perceived uniqueness in the context of co-branding (Su & Chang, 2018; Willim et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers (Chae et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2018) emphasise the importance of the influence of perceived uniqueness on perceived value. Thus, the study suggests that:

- *H_1: Perceived uniqueness of co-branded sports products has a significant positive influence on perceived value.*

Brand consideration has a direct relationship with purchase intention, but it also allows for the observation that users consider a variety of brands over time and then choose one based on utility comparisons (Neslin et al., 2014). Prior research has shown that perceived uniqueness has a considerable positive influence on purchase intention (Aztiani et al., 2019; Willim et al., 2023). For instance, Willim et al. (2023) asserted that the need for uniqueness might have a positive and considerable impact on consumers' intentions to acquire a co-branded product. Hence, the study hypothesises that:

- *H_2: Perceived uniqueness of co-branded sports products has a significant positive influence on brand consideration.*

4.3. Perceived quality

Perceived quality concerns consumers' perceptions of the overall quality and superiority of a product/service based on its intended purpose and general attitude towards the brand (Aaker, 1991; Rafdinal et al., 2024). Perceived brand quality is associated with consumers' judgements, which require consumers to compare their expectations to their perceptions of the actual performance of a product or service (Rodrigues et al., 2024). In this study, perceived quality refers to how people evaluate co-branded sports products in relation to their expectations. Research (Abidin & Subroto, 2023; Li & Shang, 2020; Meeprom & Silanoi, 2020) shows that users' sense of quality influences their perceived value. Therefore, this study proposes that:

- *H_3: Perceived quality of co-branded sports products has a significant positive influence on its perceived value.*

As per Amron (2018), perceived quality has a positive effect on purchasing decisions. Moreover, Muharam and Soliha (2017) found that perceived quality influences purchasing decisions. Similarly, Fatmawati and Soliha (2017) discovered that perceived quality has a beneficial impact on purchasing decisions. Consequently, this study suggests that:

- *H_4: Perceived quality of co-branded sports products has a significant positive influence on brand consideration.*

4.4. Perceived value

Users evaluate perceived value by comparing the cost and benefits of a co-brand to those of competing products or services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). It is critical to emphasise that this perceived value is determined by consumers' subjective views, not the enterprise's production efforts. Perceived value is a subjective judgement by consumers during the acquisition of products in which they measure the perceived advantages against their contributions (Gurler, 2024; Zeithaml, 1988). Prior consumer research emphasises the influence of perceived value of consumers' preferences, considerations, and decision-making (Dam, 2020; Turel et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2016). Accordingly, this study suggests that:

- *H_5: Perceived value of co-branded sports products has a significant positive influence on brand consideration.*

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Research approach

A research methodology refers to the method used to gather, analyse, and interpret data to understand a research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019). As per Saunders et al. (2019), the primary research methods are deductive and inductive. A deductive approach assesses the validity of a theory by developing and testing a hypothesis based on current theory, while an inductive method does not test a theory. As a result, a deductive research strategy was adopted in this study. Furthermore, this study pertained to quantitative investigations, which are better suited for deductive research (Saunders et al., 2019). The hypotheses were examined using quantitative data, an extensive review of literature, and a review of the perceived value theory (section 4).

5.2. Research strategy

The study used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data. Section A of the questionnaire measured consumers' perceptions, while section B obtained their demographic information. Respondents gave their informed consent before participating in the study. All the main constructs were assessed using reflective items derived from published research (Agarwal & Teas, 2001; Dawar et al., 1996; Erdem et al., 2006; Fang, 2008; Lam et al., 2013; Netemeyer et al., 2004). This survey used a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). Each construct comprised four items.

5.3. Sampling, data gathering, and sample characteristics

The population defined in this study was sports consumers residing in Johannesburg, Gauteng, who bought branded products. Johannesburg was chosen because it is the closest research area to the researcher and the population consists of a diverse set of people who mirror the entire country. Since no sample frame was available, participants were chosen using a non-probability sampling technique known as convenience sampling. The self-administered survey questionnaire was utilised to gather primary research data for the study. The questionnaire was disseminated by visiting sports stadiums, sporting events, recreational parks, shopping malls, and universities. Before the data collection process, the researcher obtained permission from the right authorities to visit these places (e.g., mall management, event organisers). The individuals conducting the study aimed to have interactions with the respondents, to provide the respondents with a description of why the study was being done, and to request the respondents complete the questionnaire willingly.

The sample size comprised 250 respondents, of whom 53.3% were women, 43.5% were men, 0.7% specified "other" as their gender, and 0.7%preferred not to state their gender. From the results obtained, 49.5% of the respondents were aged 18–25 years, 31.6% were 25–40 years old, 17.2% were over 40 years old, and 1.7% indicated that they preferred not to disclose their age.

5.4. Ethics

The study underwent an ethical review process and received approval from the institutional ethical review board with the ethical code of 2022SCiiS010

6. Data Analysis and Results

The researcher applied the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique (Hair et al., 2021), making use of SmartPLS version 4.0.9.5 (Ringle et al., 2022), to the proposed research model. In assessing the model, the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1991) was followed. First, the validity of the measurement model was assessed; and second, the structural model was examined to test the hypotheses proposed for the study.

6.1. Validation of measurement model

The measurements were validated to evaluate the reliability and validity of the proposed measurement model. The measurements' validity was assessed utilising convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent validity was assessed using standardised factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency of reliability and the CR estimations all exceeded the 0.7 threshold, and the AVE for each construct was greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019) (see Table 1). The results in Table 2 show that the factor loadings were more than 0.7, thus the constructs were statistically validated.

Table 1: Convergent validity of the constructs

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Brand consideration	0.813	0.889	0.727
Perceived quality	0.825	0.895	0.740
Perceived uniqueness	0.899	0.930	0.769
Perceived value	0.763	0.862	0.676

Table 2: Factor loading

Factors	Estimate
BCP1 <- Brand consideration	0.841
BCP3 <- Brand consideration	0.885
BCP4 <- Brand consideration	0.831
PEQ3 <- Perceived quality	0.878
PEQ4 <- Perceived quality	0.832
PEQ5 <- Perceived quality	0.871
UNI1 <- Perceived uniqueness	0.833

Factors	Estimate
UNI2 <- Perceived uniqueness	0.915
UNI3 <- Perceived uniqueness	0.879
UNI4 <- Perceived uniqueness	0.878
VLU1 <- Perceived value	0.861
VLU2 <- Perceived value	0.866
VLU3 <- Perceived value	0.733

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015) was used to measure discriminant validity. This strategy is often regarded as a more robust approach to assessing discriminant validity than the Fornell-Larcker technique and cross-loadings assessment (Henseler et al., 2015). Henseler et al. (2015) stated that the HTMT should not surpass 0.85 to prove discriminant validity. The findings of the discriminant validity study in Table 3 show that, for all constructs, the HTMT was below the crucial 0.85 threshold, showing discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table 3: Discriminant validity – HTMT criteria

	Brand consideration	Perceived quality	Perceived uniqueness	Perceived value
Brand consideration				
Perceived quality	0.683			
Perceived uniqueness	0.559	0.451		
Perceived value	0.694	0.596	0.814	0.662

The structural model was analysed using SmartPLS 3 and the PLS-SEM technique. Table 4 (and Figure 2) shows the results of the structural model's PLS-SEM analysis. The results indicated that perceived uniqueness had a significant and positive relationship with brand consideration, providing support for H_1 ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.005$). The positive relationship between perceived uniqueness and perceived value was noted ($\beta = 0.423$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H_2. Furthermore, the results of this study showed a significant and positive relationship between perceived quality and perceived value ($\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$), thus H_3 was supported. Similarly, the relationships between perceived quality and brand consideration ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.000$) as well as between perceived value and brand consideration were positive and significant ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$), showing support for H_4 and H_5.

Table 4: Summary of hypotheses testing

	Path co-efficient	*p* values	Result
Perceived uniqueness -> Brand consideration	0.179	0.008	Supported
Perceived uniqueness -> Perceived value	0.423	0.000	Supported

	Path co-efficient	*p* values	Result
Perceived quality -> Perceived value	0.328	0.000	Supported
Perceived quality -> Brand consideration	0.355	0.000	Supported
Perceived value -> Brand consideration	0.292	0.000	Supported

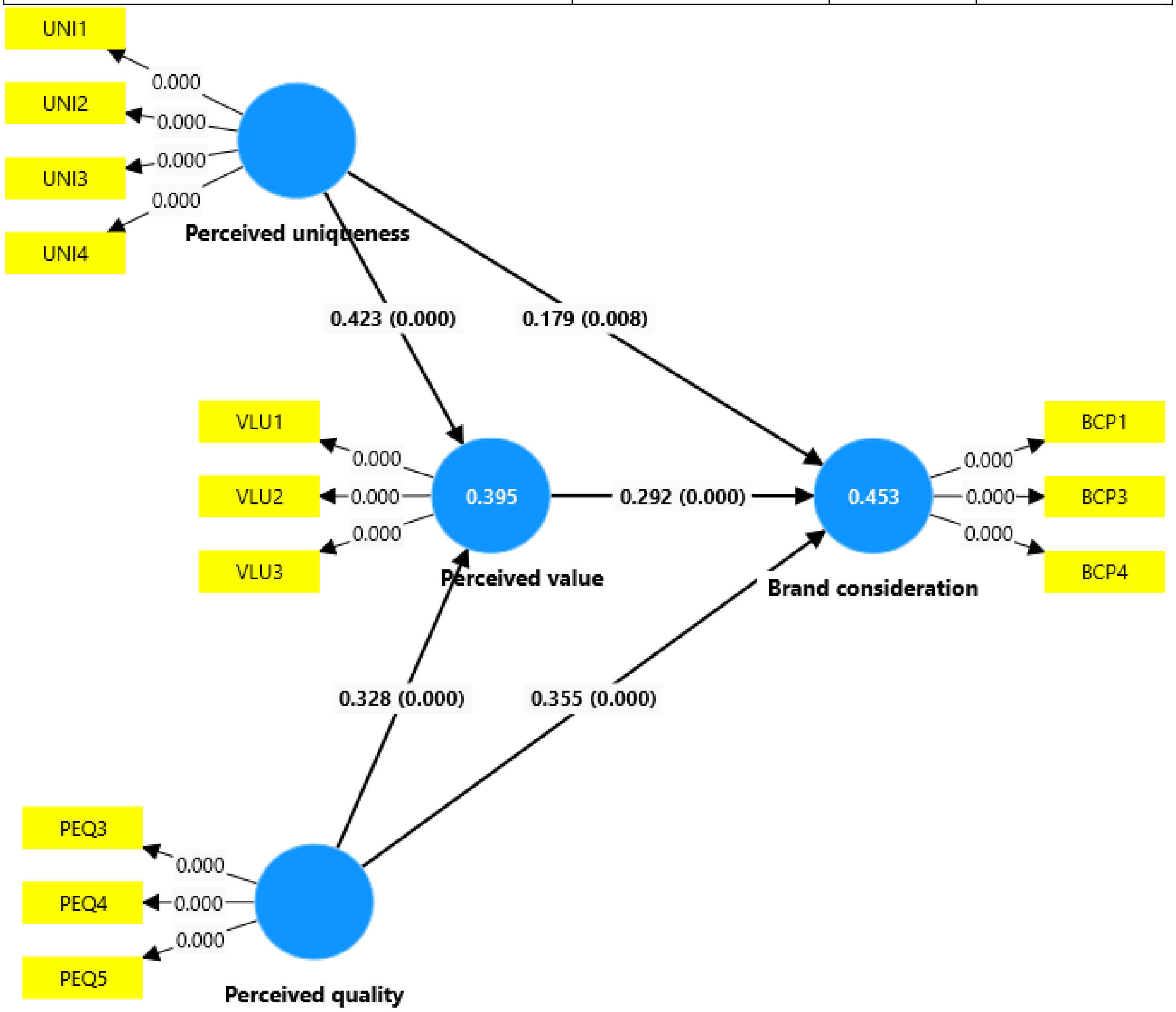

Figure 2: Structural model analysis with path coefficients and R^2 estimates

Source: Author's own construction.

6.2. Results discussion and implications

The study found a strong positive association between perceived uniqueness and brand consideration, supporting H_1 ($\beta = 0.179$, $p < 0.005$). This indicates that when consumers perceive a brand to be unique, they are more likely to consider it when making purchase decisions. These findings are consistent with those of Chae et al. (2020) and Dwivedi et al. (2018), who discovered a substantial positive link between uniqueness and brand consideration. Furthermore, according to brand personality theory (Aaker, 1996), perceived uniqueness can improve brands' distinctiveness, increasing consumer consideration. The study found a positive correlation ($\beta = 0.423$, $p > 0.001$)

between perceived uniqueness and perceived value, supporting H_2. This implies that a greater impression of uniqueness raises the perceived value of the brand. These findings are consistent with previous research (Aztiani et al., 2022; Willim et al., 2023), which found that perceived uniqueness increases the perceived value of a brand, since unique products are frequently considered more desirable. Moreover, perceived value theory (Zeithaml, 1988) states that uniqueness can increase perceived value, since consumers are prepared to pay more for things they regard as distinctive and special.

The study found a substantial positive association between perceived quality and perceived value ($\beta = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_3. This implies that higher perceived quality raises the perceived value of the brand. Studies (e.g., Abidin & Subroto, 2023) prove that perceived quality is a significant predictor of perceived value. The association between perceived quality and brand consideration (H_4) was supported ($\beta = 0.335$, $p < 0.000$), which shows that consumers are more likely to consider a brand with better perceived quality. These findings are consistent with extant research (Fatmawati & Soliha, 2017, Ramli et al., 2023) showing that perceived quality is an important element in brand consideration. Quality determines how customers view and select brands. Finally, support for H_5 ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a substantial positive relationship between perceived value and brand consideration. This means that higher perceived value increases the likelihood of brand consideration. These findings are consistent with those of Dam (2020) and Muzakir and Damrus (2018), who confirmed a significant positive relationship between perceived value and brand preferences.

This study offers crucial insights into the factors that drive brand consideration for sports co-branded products among South African consumers, demonstrating that perceived uniqueness, perceived quality, and perceived value are pivotal in influencing consumers' decisions. Our findings highlight that perceived uniqueness elevates brand consideration by distinguishing co-branded products in a market, while perceived quality builds product desirability. The findings suggest that buyers are more likely to consider purchasing sports co-branded products if they believe them to be unique, high quality, and valuable. By focusing on these dimensions, marketers can craft more effective strategies, such as launching limited-edition items to create a sense of exclusivity and implementing targeted advertising campaigns that underscore the superior quality and unique attributes of their products. These approaches not only strengthen brand positioning, but also align with consumers' expectations, driving higher engagement and purchase intent. In addition to advancing theoretical perspectives on co-branding, this study provides actionable recommendations.

Co-branding partnerships should focus on generating unique and exclusive items that stand out in the market. Unique collaborations can stimulate consumer interest and consideration. Marketers should emphasise what differentiates their co-branded products from other offerings on the market. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship between perceived uniqueness and perceived value, marketers of co-branded items should underscore the collaboration's uniqueness to increase their perceived value with consumers. Moreover, marketers should provide limited-edition co-branded products to foster exclusivity and improve perceived value. Additionally, the perceived value of co-branded items can be used to improve user consideration and preference by emphasising the value offered to consumers. High-quality co-branded products improve brand consideration, thus marketers should promote the product's quality by means of advertising initiatives and endorsements.

7. Conclusion

To summarise, the goal of co-branding is to develop synergies, raise awareness, and increase the value of the brands involved by leveraging each brand through the transfer of associations from one to the other and distinguishing them from their competitors. However, target customers' brand attention and adoption of co-branded items is less common than academics and industry professionals projected. Moreover, the sports consumer market has received insufficient attention, particularly in South Africa. Consequently, marketers, advertisers, policymakers, and strategy architects in this industry must grasp the fundamental elements that influence brand consideration for co-branded items. This would enable them to develop appropriate methods for promoting co-branded product acceptability. The study concludes that customers will consider co-branded products if they believe they are unique, high quality, and valuable. Hence, this study encourages co-brands to emphasise their uniqueness when marketing these products, to offer high-quality products, and to offer exclusive products that guarantee value to their target customers.

8. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study has shortcomings that suggest future directions for research, even if it has important implications for theoretical and practical issues. First, it is more difficult to record dynamic changes over time when a single cross-sectional descriptive design is used. To gain more thorough knowledge of how these characteristics change over time, future research on co-branded products should take a longitudinal approach to monitor changes in customers' intents and actions. Second, the scope of the current study is limited to co-branding; more research is needed to determine whether the findings apply to other types of brand alliances, such as ingredient branding. Third, the study's focus is solely on the sports industry, which raises questions about the necessity for additional research into other industries, such as fashion or technology, to see if the results hold true for other sectors. Finally, only respondents from Johannesburg were included in the study's sample. Expanding the research to include participants from other South African provinces would improve the findings' generalisability and provide a more nuanced understanding of regional variations in consumer behaviour. Future studies that address these shortcomings could yield a more comprehensive knowledge of co-branding dynamics and their ramifications in a variety of scenarios.

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