

# The Dynamic Interplay of Team Image and Cheerleader Involvement-the Impacts on Consumer Willingness to Purchase Tickets in Chinese Professional Baseball League

Ching-Wei Ho, Yu-Bing Wang\*, Yu-Xiang Xu

Department of Marketing, Feng Chia University, Taichung 40724, Taiwan

\*Corresponding author: [yubing@mail.fcu.edu.tw](mailto:yubing@mail.fcu.edu.tw)

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**Abstract** The evolution of cheerleading in Taiwan's baseball culture has gradually become integrated into the lives of fans. Today, fans no longer attend baseball games solely due to their attraction to players, teams, or game content. Instead, they may attend games for other reasons, such as cheerleaders, theme days, and other factors that contribute to the overall game experience. Consequently, when the debate arises about whether cheerleaders or players should take center stage on the field, the topic of this study emerges. This research aims to understand the impact of considering "cheerleaders" and "players" as commodities. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how introducing player knowledge and cheerleader involvement separately affects team image. Furthermore, it intends to explore whether player knowledge, cheerleader involvement, and team image separately influence fans' willingness to purchase tickets for games. Lastly, the study aims to determine whether team image acts as a mediator in the relationships between player knowledge and ticket purchase intent, as well as between cheerleader involvement and ticket purchase intent. **Methods:** This study focuses on fans of various teams within the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) as the survey participants. A total of 429 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 24.0 and SmartPLS 4. The analysis methods employed in this study include descriptive statistics, reliability, and the use of a variety of methods including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), and mediation analysis, to achieve the research objectives. **Results:** 1. There is a positive relationship between player knowledge and cheerleader involvement with team image that directly influences fans' willingness to purchase tickets. However, increasing the level of cheerleader involvement does not have an impact on the willingness to purchase tickets. 2. Player knowledge and team image have a positive relationship with the willingness to purchase tickets. 3. Cheerleader involvement does not have a positive relationship with the willingness to purchase tickets. 4. Team image acts as a mediator in the relationship between player knowledge and the willingness to purchase tickets. **Conclusions:** 1. When fans increase their knowledge about the players, and when the team enhances its own image, it directly influences fans' willingness to purchase tickets. However, increasing the level of cheerleader involvement does not have an impact on the willingness to purchase tickets. 2. When fans increase the level of cheerleader involvement or their knowledge about the players, it does affect fans' perception of the team's image. 3. Player knowledge does not necessarily require mediation, while cheerleader involvement does require mediation. Both can indirectly affect the willingness to purchase tickets through the team's image.

**Keywords:** *player knowledge, cheerleader involvement, team image, willingness to purchase tickets*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

In March 2023, the World Baseball Classic (WBC)

officially started, and the Chinese team brought its fans many touching moments. Even though they didn't qualify for the tournament, the performance of the players made this long-lost national sport reappear in front of the people again, and no matter whether they usually watched or not, they all started to pay attention to baseball in this period, and a wave of popularity emerged in the society. In

addition to the wonderful performance of the players, the cheerleaders of the Chinese team also attracted a lot of attention from the world and became an alternative light in Taiwan [1].

The Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL), which will start in 2023, also wants to absorb the benefits of the WBC craze, but the strategy of the league and its teams is not to focus on the players as the protagonists, but rather on the world-famous cheering culture. From the league's opening event this year, only six players were present, while 19 cheerleaders were present at the opening event [1], which may cause people to wonder whether it's the cheerleaders who are the main characters or the players.

The issue of cheerleaders being the protagonists is not due to the WBC tournaments, but has been around for years, as most of the fans are still attracted to the players and the teams and therefore watch and spend money in the stadiums. However, the event that really sparked the issue of cheerleaders was the signing of the popular Korean cheerleader, Lee Do Hye, by Lotte Peach Monkeys, which made the cheerleaders outnumber the 26 registered players of the first team [1], and the discussion of whether the players or cheerleaders are the protagonists of the stadiums has resurfaced.

The main revenue of professional sports events comes from spectators coming to the games and spending money, so the operation of professional sports events and the willingness of spectators to come to the games and spend money are inextricably linked [2]. Therefore, attracting spectators to come to the games can be considered as an important issue for the management of professional sports, and the world-famous cheerleading culture is precisely one of the factors that can be utilized to motivate the fans of the CWGB to come to the games. However, it is a major issue for the team to maintain a balance between the players and cheering squads for the players, originally the protagonists of the game, not to lose their luster.

With the emergence of the topic of cheerleaders, it also means that nowadays it is not only the players that will affect the image of the baseball team, but even the cheerleaders will become part of the reason, and postgraduate students are thinking about whether or not it can be assumed that if the cheerleaders or the players perform positive deeds or have negative scandals, it will in turn affect the image of the team, which will indirectly affect the fans' willingness to spend money on going to the stadiums to watch the game. The question is, do fans go to the stadium to watch the players who are the main characters, or do they just want to watch the cheerleaders? Does it mean that just being associated with cheerleaders can attract fans which results in their spending money in the stadium?

## 1.2. Motivation and Purpose of the Study

### Research Motivation

After the five teams of the Chinese Professional Baseball Association (CPBA) established cheerleading squads, the number of people attending the games increased, and because of the emergence of cheerleading squads, several new issues have emerged, such as: 1. Do fans go to watch the game or to watch the cheerleaders?; 2. Who is the protagonist of the CPBA?; 3. Do cheerleading

fans vs. game fans go to the field to watch the players' on-field performance?; 4. Does the cheerleaders' aura overshadow the game and lose the meaning of baseball's "essence" [3,4,5,6]?

This year, the Lotte Peach Apes signed popular Korean cheerleader Lee Duo Hui, who has been dubbed by fans as the "strongest foreign aid in the history of Chinese professional baseball." At her debut on April 14, the number of people in the stadium reached 7,651, compared to the 5,000-plus people who attended another game that started at the same time. The April 15th game attracted 8,562 people, nearly twice the average number of people that attended a single game of the CPBA last year [7]. Moreover, its peripherals were sold out, in contrast to the many players' merchandise that remained [8]. It is fair to say that, with the existence of Lee Do-hui's IP, the Rakuten Peach Apes' box office and merchandise revenues increased significantly.

Regarding the balance between cheerleaders and players of a game, sportscaster Chang Fu-ning pointed out that the existence of cheerleaders is not a bad thing, but rather a way for teams to attract fans to the stadium. In his previous broadcasts of Lotte Peach Monkey games, he found that many fans initially entered the stadium because of their interest in the cheerleaders, but over time, as they saw their favorite team winning, they began to care about the game itself. The presence of cheerleaders can provide fans with a more diversified entertainment experience and indirectly motivate them to become interested in baseball games. Among the academics who disagreed, some thought that the importance of cheerleaders should not be over-emphasized, but they did not deny the mode of operation of baseball clubs. Perhaps the game itself is not exciting enough, and the performance of the cheerleaders is more attractive to the audience. However, no matter what kind of audience they are, as long as they buy a ticket and attend the game, they are good fans who support the team. The important thing is to find a balance between making the game itself more appealing and having the cheerleaders bring energy and entertainment to the game.

### 1.3. Purpose

This study aims to investigate the reasons for attending baseball matches to find out whether the fans attending baseball matches are mostly fans of the cheerleaders or fans of the matches and the players they support, and which type of fans are the majority.

There are not many studies on product involvement and product knowledge of brand image in China, and most of the studies in China use product involvement and product knowledge as interference variables. This study examines the effects of product involvement and product knowledge on brand image and purchase intention by defining products as "cheerleaders" and "players."

According to the background and motivation of the study, the objectives of this study were "whether fans go to the stadium to watch and spend money because of the cheerleaders," "whether fans go to the stadium to watch and spend money because of the players," "to explore the impact of player knowledge on the image of the baseball team," "to explore the impact of the involvement of the

cheerleaders on the image of the baseball team," and "to explore whether fans go to the stadium to watch the game or the cheerleaders ."

## 1.4. Research Process

The first step of the research process is to establish the background and motivation of the study, the second step is to determine the research questions and objectives, the third step is to explore the relevant literature from various scholars, the fourth step is to construct the research framework and research hypotheses, the fifth step is to conduct a questionnaire survey based on the theories of the scholars, and then after the questionnaires are collected, in the sixth step, the data will be analyzed and compiled by the statistical software, and finally, the appropriate recommendations will be made.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Product Knowledge

#### 2.1.1. Products

[9] define a product as anything that can be offered to the marketplace to draw attention in order to buy, use, or consume, and that may satisfy people's needs or ideas. Products do not only include tangible objects such as cars, computers, or mobile phones; broadly speaking, products also include services, activities, people, places, organizations, and ideas or a mixture. From the above, we can assume that "players" and "cheerleaders" can be products of a team.

#### 2.1.2. Product Knowledge

When consumers choose a product, they often use their own experience with the product to find information about the product or refer to their previous experience with similar products to make a purchase decision [10] and previous studies have shown that Prior Knowledge affects information processing [11]. [12] found that product knowledge affects consumers' evaluation of products. In short, consumers make purchase decisions based on past knowledge, familiarity with the product, and information such as previous purchasing experience or recommendations from friends and relatives [13,14].

#### 2.1.3. Product Involvement

The earliest definition of involvement was proposed by [15], and then [16] applied the concept of "involvement" to the study of consumer behavior. The scholar believed that consumers would offer two different levels of responses when viewing TV advertisements. High personal involvement is more likely to be associated with TV advertisements, and therefore consumers at different levels of involvement will have significant differences in their purchasing and communication behaviors. After this argument was made, the importance of involvement theory and the study of involvement level gradually began to be noticed by marketing scholars, and the study of involvement level has gradually become one of the mainstreams of academic research [17]. [18] pointed out

that the concept of "involvement" would be interpreted differently in terms of consumer attitudes and behaviors according to different research topics. =As scholars have begun to generalize the use of involvement across different domains, there is currently no clear definition of how involvement should be measured.

#### 2.1.4. Brand Image

##### 1. Brand

[19] defines branding as a communication tool between suppliers and consumers that conveys product information through symbols, designs, names, or terminology and establishes a link with suppliers. From the consumer's point of view, branding is the most effective way of recognizing a product, helping to differentiate between preferred and disliked options, and providing relevant consumer information. Brand identity helps consumers recognize products and also helps them distinguish between different products and brands.

##### 2. Brand image

[20] discussed that brand image is the subjective perception that consumers have of a brand and the associations that they form in their minds about that brand. Consumers associate things with a brand to form a subjective impression, and [21] defines brand image as the associations consumers have with a brand in their minds. In other words, corporate image refers to the links in people's memories associated with a company, which includes a composite of personal beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and impressions interacting with each other [22]. [23] suggested that corporate image can be regarded as consumers' perception of a company's name, culture, business philosophy, and products and services. In other words, corporate image is the result of the interaction of all the experiences, knowledge, and feelings that consumers have in their memory of a company. [24] argue that a company's corporate image represents the impressions and perceptions of employees, customers, shareholders, and the general public.

#### 2.1.5. Purchase Intention

Based on the theoretical framework of the social psychological model, purchase intention plays the role of a bridge between consumers' behavior and their attitudes. Therefore, purchase intention is often regarded as an important predictor of subsequent purchase behavior [25,26,27,28], and scholars have demonstrated that consumers with higher purchase intention tend to have a higher likelihood of future purchase behavior. On the contrary, those with lower purchase intention have a lower likelihood of subsequent purchases. The likelihood of purchase for low willingness-to-buy consumers is significantly lower than that of high willingness-to-buy consumers [28,29], and therefore willingness-to-buy is often an important guideline, reference, and consideration for marketers and merchants [30,31]. Following are some key points of this study.

## 2.2. Inter-organizational Relationships and Research Assumptions

### 1. Relationship between product knowledge and brand image

[32] investigated the effect of perceived brand image on consumers' purchase intentions towards non-deceptive counterfeiting, as well as the direct and indirect effects (mediating and moderating effects) of product involvement and product knowledge, and the findings indicated a negative relationship between partially supported product knowledge and consumers' perceptions of brand image.

[33] conducted a study on the impact of customer product knowledge, brand awareness, and brand image on the purchase intention of pharmaceutical raw materials. The target population of this study was the employees of domestic pharmaceutical companies who are in the workforce and involved in the raw material trade and procurement operations. After the survey, 330 valid paper questionnaires were collected and analyzed by SPSS, and the results of the study showed that product knowledge has a positive effect on brand image.

Summarizing the research above, it can be concluded that product knowledge has an impact on purchase intention, not only limited to the positive relationship, but also the existence of negative relationships, therefore summarizing the past scholars' studies of the impact of product knowledge on brand image, the hypothesis of this study.

**H1: There is a positive relationship between player knowledge and team image.**

### 2. Relationship between product involvement and brand image

[32] investigated the effect of perceived brand image on consumers' purchase intentions towards non-deceptive counterfeits, as well as the direct and indirect effects (mediating and moderating effects) of product involvement and product knowledge and found that perceptions of brand image do not change significantly depending on the level of product involvement.

[34] studied the relationship between brand image, customer loyalty, involvement level, and purchase intention. The target population of the study was smartphone users, and 195 valid questionnaires were returned from a web-based survey. The result of the study was that the level of involvement had a positive and significant effect on brand image.

Summarizing the research of the above scholars, it can be concluded that product involvement has an impact on brand image, not only a positive relationship, but also the existence of a negative relationship, therefore summarizing the past scholars' studies of the impact of product involvement on brand image, putting forward the assumptions of the present study.

**H2: There is a positive relationship between the involvement of cheerleaders and the image of the team.**

### 3. Relationship between brand image and purchase intention

According to [21] a positive image of a brand increases consumers' willingness to buy, and [35] pointed out that when consumers are not familiar with a product, they tend to choose the brand with a higher reputation and awareness, which means that brand image has an effect on

consumers' willingness to buy. Therefore, if the brand image is good, it will increase consumers' willingness to buy; conversely, if the brand image is poor, consumers' willingness to buy may be lower. Therefore, brand image is closely related to consumers' purchase intention.

Summarizing the above studies, it can be concluded that brand image has a significant correlation with purchase intention. Therefore, summarizing the effects of brand image on purchase intention, we put forward the hypotheses of this study.

**H3: There is a positive relationship between team image and willingness to buy tickets.**

### 4. Relationship between product knowledge and purchase intention

[12] suggest that consumers with extensive product knowledge are more concerned with objective impressions of product use and recognize the importance of product information. When evaluating the quality of a particular product, these consumers are more likely to use intrinsic clues (e.g., product features and functionality) as the basis for their judgment. In contrast, consumers who lack product knowledge tend to use external cues (e.g. brand reputation and packaging) to judge quality. Consumers are more likely to buy a product when they have a certain degree of familiarity and confidence in the product, and this increased familiarity and confidence can increase their willingness to buy because they believe that the choices, they make will meet their needs and lead to satisfactory outcomes[36].

In making life decisions, consumers evaluate the merits of a product based on their pre-existing impressions of the product and the 'knowledge' stored in their brain memory. In addition, they may proactively seek information about the product and combine it with their experience of using similar products to make a decision on subsequent actions [37].

[37] studied the effects of product knowledge, perceived value, and consumer ethics on the purchase intention of sweet potato consumers. A questionnaire survey was conducted along with regression analyses to discover that the results of the study showed that there was a positive effect between product knowledge and purchase intention.

**H4: There is a positive relationship between player knowledge and Willingness to purchase tickets.**

### 5. Relationship between product involvement and purchase intention

According to [38], consumers' purchase intentions are influenced by a number of factors, including the objective price, quality, value, and attributes of the product, as well as the degree of consumer involvement in the product. Together, these factors influence the purchase decision-making process.

Consumers' degree of involvement does not have an impact on their willingness to buy, and there is no significant change in their willingness to buy regardless of whether the degree of involvement is high or low [39].

In the research mentioned above, scholars concluded that product involvement may or may not be significantly related to purchase intention; therefore, the hypotheses of this study are summarized from the past research on the effect of product involvement on purchase intention.



**H5: Cheerleader involvement and consumer willingness to buy tickets.**

## 6. Brand image and the relationship between product knowledge and purchase intention

According to [21], a positive image of a brand increases consumers' willingness to buy, which means that when a brand's image is enhanced in a positive direction, consumers will increase their willingness to buy.

According to [33], there is a positive relationship between product knowledge and brand image, which implies that when consumers increase the level of product knowledge, the brand image of the product will also increase.

Summarizing the findings and hypotheses of the above scholars, it can be concluded that product knowledge has a positive effect on brand image, and brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that brand image may play an intermediary role in product knowledge and purchase intention, which means that product knowledge further motivates consumers' purchase intention through brand image. Based on the above, the hypotheses of this study are proposed.

**H6: Team image has a mediating effect between players' knowledge and willingness to buy tickets.**

## 7. Brand image mediates the relationship between product involvement and purchase intention.

According to [40], brand image is significantly related to purchase intention, which indicates that when the image of a brand is positively uplifted, consumers will increase their purchase intention.

According to [34], there is a positive relationship between product involvement and brand image, which means that when consumers increase the level of product involvement, the brand image of the product will also increase.

Summarizing the findings and hypotheses of the above scholars, it can be concluded that product involvement has a positive effect on brand image, and brand image has a positive effect on purchase intention. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that brand image may play an intermediary role in product involvement and purchase intention, which means that product involvement further motivates the consumers' purchase intention through brand image, and based on the above, the hypotheses of this study are proposed.

**H7: There is a mediating effect of team image between cheerleading involvement and willingness to buy tickets to the stadium.**

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Framework

After exploring the literature on players' knowledge, cheerleaders' involvement, team image, and willingness to buy tickets, the framework of this study was summarized as H1: players' knowledge has a positive relationship with team image; H2: cheerleaders' involvement has a positive relationship with team image; H3: team image has a positive relationship with willingness to buy tickets; H4:

players' knowledge has a positive relationship with willingness to buy tickets; H5: involvement has a mediating effect on willingness to buy tickets; H6: Team image has a mediating effect between player knowledge and willingness to buy tickets; H7: Team image has a mediating effect between cheerleading team involvement and willingness to buy tickets. The structure of this study is presented in Figure 1 below:

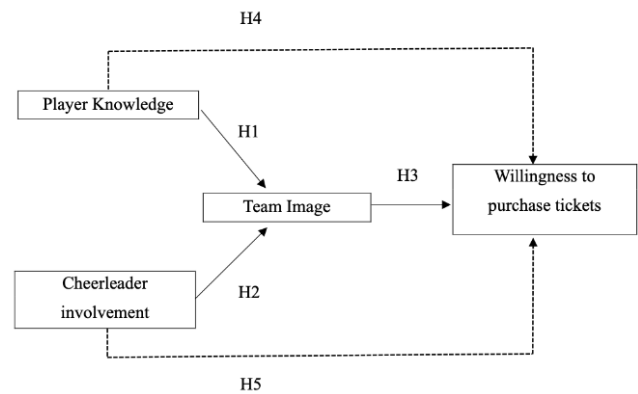


Figure 1. Research Framework

### Definition of Operational Variables

The items of this study were "player knowledge," "cheerleader involvement," "team image," and "willingness to buy tickets to the stadium," and Likert's five-point scale was used. A scale of 1 to 5 was used, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree," 2 meaning "disagree," 3 meaning "no comment," 4 meaning "agree," and 5 meaning "strongly agree."

#### 1. Product Knowledge

With reference to the studies of [35,41], and based on [41] measurement scale, this study developed an operationalized definition of product knowledge as "treating the player as a product of the team, and exploring fans' familiarity and expertise with player knowledge," and developed a variety of questions.

#### 2. Product Involvement

In this study, we refer to the studies of [42], and [43], and based on [42] scale, we developed the operationalized definition of product involvement as "viewing cheerleading as a product of the team and exploring the various constructs of fans' involvement with the cheerleading team," and developed a variety of questions.

#### 3. Team Image

This study referenced [23] study, used the measurement scale as the main focus, and developed the operational definition of brand image as "viewing the baseball team as a brand and exploring fans' perceptions and thoughts about the team's image" with the development of various questions.

#### 4. Purchase Intention

In this study, we refer to the studies of [28], [44], and [45], and develop the operationalized definition of purchase intention as "fans' intention to buy tickets to attend a game and their consumption intention when attending the game" and developed the relevant questions.

### 3.2. Data Collection Methods and Subjects of the Study

#### 1. Data Collection Methods

In order to ensure the hypothesis of this study, fans of each team in the CPBA were selected as the target population. The questionnaire was distributed online, and the convenience sampling method was used to collect the samples. The reason for choosing web-based questionnaires is that questionnaires completed by respondents in an online environment are more reliable [46]. The difference between web-based questionnaires and traditional questionnaires lies in the fact that web-based questionnaires have the characteristics and advantages of almost zero cost, no time constraints, no space constraints, fast feedback, and good anonymity, and respondents can answer independently and avoid being interfered with by other people [47]. Web-based questionnaires also have their drawbacks, such as bias in sample selection, inability to confirm the respondent's state of mind, possibly not representative, and possible duplications.

#### 2. Objectives of the Study

This survey was conducted using a web-based questionnaire from May 22-24, 2023. The target population of this survey was the fans of the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL), which included members of the Facebook clubs CITIC Brothers Fans Club, Flavorful Dragon, Unified Lions Backup Group, TSG Hawks-CPBL, Ape Fans Biggest Party, and Chinese Professional Baseball - Fubon Hustlers. The beginning of the questionnaire also asked the respondent to give an e-mail account in order to exclude duplicates. A total of 430 questionnaires were collected, of which 429 were valid, and only one questionnaire was invalid due to missing a question.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of Sample Basic Information

After the questionnaires were collected, the basic information of all the respondents was counted and calculated using the SPSS statistical software, and narrative statistics were conducted according to the basic information of the fans:

1. Gender: 247 males (57.6%); 182 females (42.4%).
2. Age: 79 persons under 20 years old accounted for 18.4%; 146 persons 21-30 years old accounted for 34%; 78 persons 31-40 years old accounted for 18.2%; 101 persons 41-50 years old accounted for 23.5%; 20 persons 51-60 years old accounted for 4.7%; 5 persons 60 years old and above accounted for 1.2%.
3. Proportion of fans: CITIC Brothers 181 (42.2%); Uni-Lion 79 (18.4%); Lotte Taoyuan 48 (11.2%);

Fubon Hustle 23 (5.4%); Flavorful Dragon 93 (21.7%); and; TSC Eagle 5 (1.2%).

4. Over the past year, the number of fans entering the stadium to watch the game: 0 times totaling 110 people accounted for 25.6%; 1-3 times totaling 124 people accounted for 28.9%; 4-6 times totaling 86 people accounted for 20%; 7-10 times totaling 47 people accounted for 11%; and 11 or more times totaling 62 people accounted for 14.5%.
5. Duration of support: less than 1 year, 77 people (17.9%); more than 1 year but less than 3 years, 85 people (19.8%); more than 3 years but less than 5 years, 43 people (10%); more than 5 years but less than 7 years, 23 people (5.4%); more than 7 years, 201 people (46.9%).
6. Fans' past purchases of team-related merchandise: 0 times totaling 103 people (24%); 1-3 times totaling 106 people (24.7%); 4-6 times totaling 82 people (19.1%); 7-9 times totaling 22 people (5.1%); and 10 or more times totaling 116 people (27%).

### 4.2. Reliability and Validity Analysis

#### 1. Reliability analysis

In this study, according to [48], when Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is  $\geq 0.70$ , it is high reliability;  $0.35 \leq \text{Cronbach's } \alpha < 0.70$ , it is fair; and Cronbach's  $\alpha < 0.35$ , it is low reliability. The same scale will be used in this study, and please see Table 1.

#### 2. Validity analysis

##### (1) Content validity

In this study, we will adopt the recommendation of [49] on factor loadings of 0.5 as a criterion, and delete the questions in the questionnaire that have factor loadings less than 0.5. All the questions had factor loadings greater than 0.5, so none of the questions in this questionnaire were deleted.

##### (2) Convergent validity

As can be seen from Table 2, the factor loadings and structural reliabilities of this study's confirmatory factor analysis were all in line with the standard, and the mean values of the extracted variances were all above the standard value of 0.5, so the questionnaires in this study had an astringent validity, and the mean values of the extracted variances, the factor loadings, and the structural reliabilities of the dimensions were all in line with the standard.

##### (3) Distinctive validity

The discriminant validity of this study was based on the criteria that the square root of the mean extraction variance (AVE) of each construct must be greater than the correlation coefficients of the other constructs, and that the correlation coefficients of the constructs must be less than 0.85 as proposed by [50,51], which were used to examine whether the study constructs had good discriminant validity or not.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Analysis Collation Table

Components/Questions	M	SD	FL	T
<b>Player Knowledge [<math>\alpha = .962</math>, AVE = .839, CR = .969]</b>				
PK_1 I think I know more about the players on that team.	3.72	1.206	0.916	55.760
PK_2 I think I have sufficient knowledge about the players of that team.	3.65	1.188	0.929	77.883
PK_3 I've watched most of the team's performances and I'll get a better idea of the team's style of play.	3.94	1.193	0.904	74.607
PK_4 I think I know the players of the team from the past to the present game performance.	3.58	1.202	0.925	94.507
PK_5 I think I can provide others with knowledge about the players on that team.	3.66	1.243	0.914	89.339
PK_6 I think I can compare the different types of players on that team.	3.61	1.245	0.907	74.827
<b>Cheerleaders involved [<math>\alpha=.939</math>, AVE=.767, CR=.952]</b>				
PI_1 When watching a game, I think it's important for the cheerleaders to provide support.	4.13	1.021	0.905	54.470
PI_2 When watching a game, I am attracted by the cheerleaders' support.	3.98	1.147	0.861	37.444
PI_3 When watching the game, I think the cheerleaders' support is necessary.	4.14	1.029	0.937	119.708
PI_4 When watching a game, I think it's valuable for the cheerleaders to provide support.	4.19	1.009	0.918	73.138
PI_5 I would like to learn more about cheerleading.	3.54	1.235	0.800	33.191
PI_6 I think the game and the cheerleaders are closely related.	3.64	1.177	0.826	35.777
<b>Ball team image [<math>\alpha=.939</math>, AVE=.803, CR=.953]</b>				
<b>BI_1 The team I support has a favorable image in my mind.</b>				
BI_2 I think the team I support has a good image in the minds of the fans	4.10	0.962	0.885	59.663
BI_3 I think the team I support has a better image compared to other competitors	4.12	0.943	0.901	68.756
BI_4 I think the team I support has a good reputation with the fans	4.06	0.978	0.913	75.237
BI_5 thinks the team I support has a better reputation compared to other competitors	4.06	1.008	0.899	64.771
<b>Willingness to Buy Tickets for Inbound Consumption [<math>\alpha=.916</math>, AVE=.707, CR=.935]</b>				
PIN_1 In the future I will be attending the games of the teams I support.	4.28	1.075	0.863	47.714
PIN_2 I'll keep coming in to watch more matches of the teams I support.	4.23	1.101	0.888	59.071
PIN_3 I will attend the next home game of the team I support.	3.70	1.371	0.762	26.955
PIN_4 I will buy the apparel of the team I support.	3.82	1.279	0.890	62.993
PIN_5 I will buy merchandise related to the team I support (not apparel).	3.86	1.264	0.888	66.011
PIN_6 I will buy souvenirs of the team I support (e.g. 300 Boom statue, 100th Rescue Memorial, etc.).	3.37	1.298	0.739	31.046

Note: Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), factor loadings (FL), item t-values (T), and average sampling variability (AVE), Construct reliability (CR)

Table 2. Distinctive Validity Collation Table

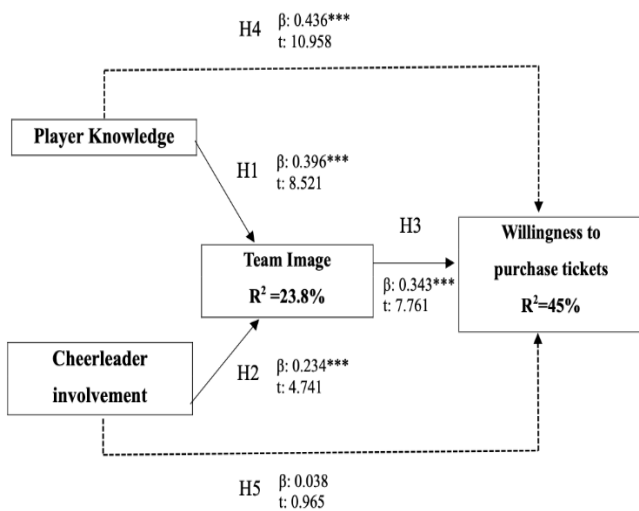
	AVE Value	Player Knowledge	Cheerleader Involved	Team Image	Willingness to Buy Tickets
Player Knowledge	0.839	0.916			
Cheerleader Involved	0.767	0.139	0.876		
Team Image	0.803	0.429	0.289	0.896	
Willingness to Buy Tickets	0.707	0.589	0.198	0.541	0.841

Note: Source of information (compiled in this study)

### 4.3. Model Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The study used SmartPLS 4 software as the measurement model, Figure 2 shows the raw report generated by SmartPLS 4. In the model, PLS will generate weights and loadings to explain the formative and reflective indicators, and the explanatory power of potential variables is represented by R Square. Path Coefficients are denoted by  $\beta$ , and their significance is judged by the t-value.

The t-value of each path can be obtained by Bootstrapping, and the t-value must be greater than 1.96 to be considered significant. Meanwhile, the p-value of the paths in this study is also calculated to detect the significance of the paths, and the p-value is usually represented by an asterisk; more asterisks represent the higher explanatory power of the pathway, which is highly significant. The following figure shows the modeling results of this study:



Note: Source of Information

Figure 2. Analysis Results

From the above graph, it can be roughly understood that team image ( $R^2=23.8\%$ ) is affected by player knowledge ( $\beta: 0.396***$ ) and cheerleader involvement ( $0.234***$ ), and player knowledge and cheerleader involvement can explain 23.8% of the total variation of team image. It can be concluded that both player knowledge and cheerleader involvement have significant results on team image. Next, willingness to buy tickets ( $R^2=45\%$ ) is significantly affected by player knowledge ( $\beta: 0.396***$ ), team image ( $\beta: 0.343***$ ) has a significant effect on Willingness to purchase tickets, and cheerleader involvement has a less significant effect on willingness to buy tickets. From this, it can be initially estimated that hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 of this study are valid, while H5 is not support.

### 4.4. Intermediation Effectiveness Determination

The mediation effect of this study was determined by using [52] four-step approach to determine whether "the team image construct mediates the player knowledge construct and the ticket purchase intention to attend the game", and "whether the team image construct mediates the cheerleading involvement construct and the ticket purchase intention to attend the game construct". The mediating effect was examined using linear analysis in SPSS 24.0 statistical software.

From Table 3 and 4, it can be seen that four-step approach of [52] was used to verify that the team image construct has a mediating effect on the player knowledge construct and the ticket purchase and admission consumption intention construct, and that the mediating effect belongs to the partial mediating effect. The team image construct has a mediating effect on the cheerleader involvement construct and the ticket purchase and admission consumption intention construct, and the mediating effect belongs to the full mediating effect. The team image construct has a mediating effect on the cheerleader involvement construct and the ticket purchase intention construct, and its mediating effect is a full mediating effect.



**Table 3. The mediating effect of team image on players' knowledge, Team Image and Willingness to purchase tickets**

	Organizational Relationships	beta value	T-value	P-value	Is the structure noticeable from one to the other
<b>The mediating effect of team image on players' knowledge and Willingness to purchase tickets.</b>					
<b>Model 1</b>	X→M	0.422	9.624	0	Significant
<b>Model 2</b>	M→Y	0.534	13.049	0	Significant
<b>Model 3</b>	X→Y	0.193 ( $\alpha$ )	4.064	0	Significant
<b>Model IV</b>	X→Y	0.046( $\beta$ )	1.079	0	Significant
	M→Y	0.521	12.217	0	Significant
	$\alpha$	$\beta$	Does $\beta < \alpha$ ?	Is X → Y significant in Model IV	Intermediation Effectiveness Determination
<b>Relationship between <math>\beta</math> and <math>\alpha</math></b>	0.193	0.046	Accept	Significant	Partial establishment of intermediaries

Note: X: Player Knowledge, M: Team Image, Y: Willingness to purchase tickets.

**Table 4. The mediating effect of team image on cheerleaders' involvement and Willingness to purchase tickets**

	Organizational Relationships	beta value	T-value	P-value	Is the structure noticeable from one to the other
<b>The mediating effect of team image on cheerleaders' involvement and Willingness to purchase tickets.</b>					
<b>Model 1</b>	X2→M	0.282	6.077	0	conspicuous
<b>Model 2</b>	M→Y	0.534	13.049	0	conspicuous
<b>Model 3</b>	X2→Y	0.193 ( $\alpha$ )	4.064	0	conspicuous
<b>Model IV</b>	X2→Y	0.046( $\beta$ )	1.079	0.281	It's not obvious.
	M→Y	0.521	12.217	0	conspicuous
	$\alpha$	$\beta$	Does $\beta < \alpha$ ?	Is X → Y significant in Model IV	Intermediation Effectiveness Determination
<b>Relationship between <math>\beta</math> and <math>\alpha</math></b>	0.193	0.046	set up	It's not obvious.	Fully intermediated establishment

Note: X: Cheerleaders involved, M: Team image, Y: Willingness to purchase tickets.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Conclusion

The structure of this study was established by referring to the articles and literature published by related scholars. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether player knowledge can enhance the fans' image of the baseball

team and their willingness to buy tickets and spend money at the game; whether cheerleaders can enhance the fans' image of the team and their willingness to buy tickets and spend money at the game; and whether the team's image can affect the fans' willingness to buy tickets and spend money at the game.

This study collected and analyzed questionnaires via the Internet. The following sections will explain the effects of "player knowledge on team image,"

"cheerleader involvement on team image," "team image on consumer willingness to buy tickets at the gate," "player knowledge on consumer willingness to buy tickets at the gate," and "cheerleader involvement on consumer willingness to buy tickets at the gate."

#### 1. Impact of Player Knowledge and Team Image

Hypothesis H1: There is a positive relationship between player knowledge and team image. Based on the results of this study, which show that the higher the consumer's knowledge of a product, the higher the brand image will be due to the consumer's increased awareness of the product. Similarly, when brand image increases, consumers will also increase their awareness of the product because they support their favorite brand. This result is also consistent with scholars' suggestion that product knowledge affects brand image. Therefore, when fans' awareness of the players increases, fans' image of the team will increase and be significant, so the hypothesis H1 of this study is valid.

#### 2. Impact of Cheerleader Involvement and Team Image

Hypothesis H2: There is a positive relationship between cheerleader involvement and team image. The result of this hypothesis shows that the higher the level of consumer involvement in a product, the higher the brand image will be due to the increase in the level of consumer involvement in the product. Similarly, when brand image increases, consumers will be more involved in the product because they support their favorite brand. This result is also consistent with scholars' suggestion that product involvement affects brand image [34]. Therefore, when the fans' involvement with the cheerleading team increases, the fans' image of the team will also increase and be significant, so hypothesis H2 is valid.

#### 3. The impact of team image on the willingness to buy tickets:

Hypothesis H3: There is a positive relationship between the image of a baseball team and the willingness to buy tickets to the stadium. The results of this study show that when a brand's image is reputable or better than other brands of the same nature, consumers will be more willing to buy the brand's products. When fans have a favorable image of a team, they are more likely to buy tickets and spend money in the stadium. This result is also consistent with scholars' suggestion that brand image affects purchase intention [53,54]. Therefore, the team's image enhancement is significant on the willingness to purchase tickets near the stadium, and therefore, hypothesis H3 of this study is valid.

#### 4. Impact of player knowledge on the consumption of tickets:

Hypothesis H4: Player knowledge has a positive relationship with the willingness to buy tickets to the game. The results of this study show that when consumers are more aware of a product, they are more likely to increase their willingness to buy that product. Similarly, when consumers' willingness to buy a brand increases, consumers will also increase their awareness of the brand's product. In other words, when fans' knowledge of the players increases, they will be more willing to buy tickets and spend money in the stadium. This result is also consistent with scholars' suggestion that product

knowledge affects purchase intention [12,36]. Therefore, player knowledge is quite significant on the willingness to purchase tickets to the game, so hypothesis H4 of this study is valid.

#### 5. Impact of cheerleading involvement on consumer willingness to buy tickets to the venue

Hypothesis H5: There is a positive relationship between cheerleader involvement and consumer willingness to buy tickets to the venue.

This study found that cheerleader involvement does not have a significant response on consumer willingness to buy tickets to the venue, and this result is also consistent with some scholars' suggestion that product involvement does not affect purchase intention [32,39], so consumers will not be influenced to buy tickets to the venue because of cheerleader involvement. Therefore, this study revealed that H5 is not valid, and consumers will not be affected by cheerleader involvement in terms of purchase intention to buy tickets to the venue, so hypothesis H5 is not valid in this study.

#### 6. The mediating effect of team image in the model

(1) Between player knowledge and willingness to buy tickets to the game:

Hypothesis "H6: Team image has a mediating effect between player knowledge and ticket purchase intention." Through [52] four-step approach, this study found that team image has a partial mediating effect between player knowledge and ticket purchase intention. Therefore, we know that players' knowledge can indirectly affect ticket purchase intention partially through the team's image, so this study hypothesizes that H6 is partially valid.

(2) Between cheerleader involvement and willingness to buy tickets:

Hypothesis "H7: Team image has a mediating effect between cheerleading involvement and ticket purchase intention." [52] four-step approach found that team image has a complete mediating effect between cheerleading involvement and ticket purchase intention. Therefore, we know that cheerleading team involvement can indirectly affect ticket purchase intention through the image of the team, so hypothesis H7 of this study is completely valid.

## 5.2. Research Contributions

With the advancement of information, instead of having to go to the stadium, home TV, radio, or newspaper to get information about a game, fans can now watch and get information online through internet platforms (YouTube, Twitch, Hani Video, or CPBL TV), which makes it much less likely that fans will want to go to the stadium to watch a game. While teams and leagues use cheerleaders, theme days, and players to attract fans and new viewers to their games, players and cheerleaders have gradually become part of a team's product. The motivation for this study was to observe this viewpoint and choose to use it as the basis for the hypothesis of this study. There has been no similar research or study on cheerleading and players as a product of a sports team in previous domestic studies, so this study examines cheerleading and players as a product of a baseball team.

### 5.3. Contribution of the Study to Practice

This study concludes that fans will increase their willingness to go to a game because of the players they support or because they want to see the players they support. However, fans do not go to a game only because of the cheerleaders, and this study suggests that the team can enhance fans' knowledge of the players in the following ways, which in turn will make the fans' willingness to spend money on the game increase: 1. A quiz on the knowledge of the players can be held before or during the live game, and fans can receive peripherals to know if they really know about the players and to let the fans who do not know about the players learn about the players; 2. Fans who answer correctly will be given peripherals to find out whether the fans really know the players and to inform those who don't know the players; 2. Lucky draws can be held on the fan page, with questions about the players' knowledge, so that the fans can participate and learn more about the players; 3. Highlights of the team's matches can be edited and published on the official fan page so that the fans can know about the team's performance and style; 4. Organize one or two Fan Knowledge King events per year, so that the contestants and the live and online audience can learn about the players through the questions, and so that the fans can reveal how much they know about the players; 5. In the home games player knowledge activities, two kinds of raffle tickets will be issued before the game: (1) the first will be at the end of the fifth inning and for better prizes, the answer cannot be changed and must involve the whole team in order to win; (2) the second will be announced at the end of the seventh inning and after the answer, the fans can change the answer and then submit it after the end of the game; 6. Enhance fans' knowledge of the players so that they can recognize the players and support the players' merchandise; 7. Enable players to participate in public welfare activities by having the players call on the fans to participate as well, to enhance the team's image and the fans' understanding of the players.

This study concludes that fans will be affected by the team's treatment of players, cheerleaders, and fans' performance, which will affect the fans' image of the team. This study suggests that the team can improve the fans' image of the team through the following ways, which will increase the fans' willingness to go to the stadium to watch a game and spend money: 1. Maintaining the team's good reputation and image; 2. Carrying out public welfare activities to improve the image of the team; 3. Keeping up with the latest stadium equipment to give fans a good impression; 4. Handling of the team's veterans to give fans a good impression; 5. Organize diversified theme day activities to enhance the team's image and increase the fans' Willingness to purchase tickets.

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