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# How are fans teams' consumption behaviors impacted by their federations' innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy

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## ABSTRACT

Fans' consumption intentions towards their favourite teams' products and services are essential outcome variables for sport federations and clubs. However, the factors that could affect these outcomes are not yet clear. This study analyzes how the fandom level and the innovativeness's perceived organizational legitimacy impact their fans' consumption intentions. Data was collected in Costa Rica by using a structured questionnaire. The results show that consumption intentions behaviour are partially mediated by the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy. Moreover, the multimedia consumption intention is moderated by normative interpersonal influence. Specifically, fans use the National Football team as a tool for their self-identity; while judgements made towards the National Football Federation's innovation' capacity to open new markets, regulate their consumption intentions. Hence, federations should create innovative legitimacy policies to ensure fans' consumption intentions. These findings contribute to Social Identity and Social Judgement Theories showing how they are intertwined in a sport context.

## KEYWORDS

Innovativeness; legitimacy; multimedia consumption; official merchandise consumption; sport fan; normative interpersonal influence

## Introduction

Sport broadcasting generates a massive spectator audience (Knobloch-Westerwick, Abdallah, and Billings 2020). Viewers are mostly fans that try to keep on track with their favourite teams, and it does not matter if they follow the sport events through TV, radio, online streaming, or at the stands (Coates, Humphreys, and Zhou 2014). Additionally, fans show their fandom through official merchandise usage, which is vital from the income point of view of the sport institution (Fisher and Wakefield 1998), and the identification and acceptance within the in-group for the individual (Heere and James 2007).

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In this relationship between the fan and the consumption of multimedia and official merchandise, sport marketing literature has given relevant attention (e.g. Kim, Trail, and Ko 2011; Alonso-Dos Santos, Velasco-Vizcaíno, and Pérez-Campos 2020). However, no attention has been paid to how this consumption on the part of the fans could depend on whether (or not) they perceive the actions carried out by the Federation (an entity that organizes, regulate, and oversees the sport team) as appropriate.

It is common for Federations to make innovative management decisions beyond the sport field (for example, selling official merchandise in new markets) that could indirectly affect the consumption of official merchandise and multimedia by fans. This effect could not necessarily be based on the Federation's innovative decisions, but rather on the degree of legitimacy perceived in it to make such decisions. In fact, many of the actions carried out by the organizations could be perceived as not legitimate to the extent that they disagree with a set of beliefs (in this case from the fans) regarding the fulfillment of expectations, knowledge, and the structure to perform properly and thus ensure the goals' accomplishment (Fidan and Balci 2018). That is how the role that legitimacy plays on fans' consumption intention behaviors should be relevant (Reimann et al. 2012), because it can impact the judgements made by individuals (Bitektine 2011) as to whether the Federation is legitimate, in this case, to innovate opening new markets.

Considering that there is little study background in the literature that addresses this role of legitimacy in the innovative context, the present study seeks to fill this gap. It seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the mediating role played by the National Football Federation's perceived organizational legitimacy to innovate (POL), in the relationship between the fandom level of the individual (FLI - if they were or not a big fan of the Costa Rica National Football Team), and multimedia consumption intention (MMCI - if they see or hear their games and news in the media), and FLI and official merchandise consumption intention (OMCI). Additionally, the moderating role of normative interpersonal influence (NII) in the Relationship between FLI and a) POL, b) MMCI, and c) OMCI is examined. Moreover, this study will be held in a specific context with no previous studies, Costa Rica, by evaluating the Costa Rica Football Federation and the Football National team.

Specifically, this study makes three important contributions to the sport management literature and innovative management practices. First, this study allows us to understand how the legitimacy behind the federations' innovative decisions can affect the consumption of official merchandise and multimedia by fans. Second, how interpersonal regulations influence the Relationship between FLI and legitimacy to innovate, and between FLI and two consumption variables, such as official merchandise and multimedia. Finally, this study contributes to the understanding of how both Social Identity Theory and Social Judgment Theory play an essential role in the judgment made towards the Federation by the fans, modifying in this way, their consumption intention towards the sport team under their regulation.

## **Conceptual development**

### ***Social judgement theory (SJT) and social identity theory (SIT)***

Theorists argue that social judgement involves a categorization process regarding an attitudinal anchor that guides the evaluation process (Kyle et al. 2004). This anchor works as

an acceptance latitude, and therefore, it also imposes the conditions for a latitude of rejection (Rhine and Severance 1970). In many cases, the decision could be as easy as assimilating information that supports the a-priori individuals' opinion or rejecting those which are antagonistic to their preconceptions (Amos et al. 2019); nonetheless, much incoming information falls somewhere in between these two extremes, forcing individuals to a weighting process (Hoffmann, von Helversen, and Rieskamp 2019)

Disregarding contextual and individual differences, there is a common framework for individuals to proceed with their judgements, which includes legitimacy, status, and reputation (Bitektine 2011). Bitektine (2011) argues that legitimacy is allocating the evaluated object to a known organizational form, status is the allocation to a rank group, and reputation involves evaluating the organization's future conduct/performing. Although the three variables are conjunctly analyzed, legitimacy should be considered the first step in the latter, and from this point forward, the focus of the attention of this study.

SIT is widely used within the sport literature (Knobloch-Westerwick, Abdallah, and Billings 2020), arguing that individuals create through sport institutions a social identity that transcend personal and private identity (Yousaf, Bashir, and Mishra 2020). In this regard, sport and sport institutions offer a valuable tool of identity for individuals. The association with a club creates a sense of attachment with a larger social structure (Heere and James 2007), enabling a socialization space (Hill and Green 2000) irrespective of the competition or even the club's performance (Branscombe and Wann 1991).

The individual pursuing a social identity (SIT) could be influenced by the institution's legitimacy perception (SJT) that organizes and regulates the appropriate development of the sport competitions or teams. In other words, through the judgement made towards the innovative decisions of the organizing institution, individuals could modify their consumption intention towards the sport team under their regulation.

### ***Innovation in sport organizations***

Innovation is considered one of the critical factors that influence the long-term success of companies in the competitive markets of nowadays (Damanpour and Gopalakrishnan 2001; García Pérez De Lema and Gálvez Albarracín 2012; Koc and Ceylan 2007; Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez, and Sanz-Valle 2016). Innovation involves change, new ways of providing services, or manufacturing products and can enable economic or social progression (Ratten and Ferreira 2017). Hence, any innovation's goal is to create or add new value, which could be the economic or social value, or both of them (Hipp and Grupp 2005). In recent years, market and commercialism have also enhanced innovations in sport (Tjønndal 2019).

Thus, in the sport industry, innovation plays an essential role in the development of sport (Tjønndal 2017; Ratten and Ferreira 2017) and is a growing research field alongside entrepreneurship (González-Serrano, Jones, and Llanos-Contreras 2020). Nowadays, to stay competitive in the current world market, sport organizations need to innovate to meet the rapidly changing demands and expectations of consumers (González-Serrano, Valentine, and Crespo 2014). According to Tjønndal (2017, 293), sport innovation could be defined as "proactive and intentional processes that involve the generation and practical adoption of new and creative ideas, which aim to produce a qualitative change in a sport context". Thus, innovation refers to new ideas to introduce changes to sport organizations, coaching, sport events, and performance to gain a new competitive advantage (Tjønndal 2017).

Innovation in the sport sector can be implemented both at an individual and an institutional level (Caza 2000; Viljamaa 2007).

An important feature of sport innovation is its capacity to create both private and public value at the same time (Tjønndal 2017). In this vein, Ringuet-Riot, Hahn, and James (2013) highlight that sport innovations are crucial to finding solutions to sort out problems and requirements in maximizing the performance of both individuals and organizations. From this perspective, innovation represents a valuable process of sport development.

Finally, it is essential to highlight a specific sport organization representing a significant percentage in the sport industry, non-profit organizations. These organizations are surrounded by competitive pressure to differentiate themselves from commercial sport providers (Vos, Breesch, and Scheerder 2012). They need to mobilize resources, personal knowledge, and skills to implement new ideas (Winand et al. 2016). Non-profit organizations from the sport sector such as sport clubs and sport federations cope with challenges as they compete for membership and resources such as sponsorship, grants, facilities, and volunteers (Vos and Scheerder 2014; Wicker and Breuer 2011; Winand et al. 2013). Thus, innovation in sport federations is considered even more important than in other profit-oriented sport organizations.

Although innovation is considered a critical factor in sport organizations to maintain their competitiveness, there are still some challenges. In particular, maintaining legitimacy and stakeholder support is crucial for state sport because of several persistent problems (Sam and Tore Ronglan 2018). Legitimacy has gained importance, which influences whether enterprises garner recognition and support (Wang and Zhou 2020). Hence, when developing these innovations, sport organizations should consider the way they develop them. It is essential to embed legitimacy in innovation activities (Wang and Zhou 2020) in the sport sector. However, this is still an undeveloped studied area, and many researchers suggest that this phenomenon should be further investigated (Fisher, Kotha, and Lahiri 2016; Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack 2017).

### ***Fandom level of the individual, a major role for the individual's identity***

Fan, as a concept, has been ordinarily linked to sport (Gantz et al. 2006) and is widely accepted as an antecedent of relationship equity within the sport industry (Cadwallader, Boyd, and Thomas 2012).

Becoming a fan and a big fan is not a magical event, although in many cases, it represents a prescribed affiliation due to, for instance, nationality (Knobloch-Westerwick, Abdallah, and Billings 2020). You do not open your eyes and realize you are now a supporter (Funk and James 2001). Individuals could first become a fan of a sport, then a team and afterward to a specific athlete (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999). They could actually start with the national team through patriotism itself (Gerke 2019), or simply get associated initially to a sport institution to sense the feeling of being part of the community (Heere and James 2007) and therefore diminishing isolation (Kim and Kim 2020).

Watching sport events is exciting and an affective experience (Kim and Kim 2020), which provokes high emotional activation (Unanue et al. 2020). Sport events open spaces for socialization, interaction, and a sense of community (Gantz et al. 2006). In this matters, it is easier for a fan to watch a game through the media (Kim, Trail, and Ko 2011) rather than assuming the costs and risks of attending to the stadium (Coates, Humphreys, and Zhou

2014). Therefore, creating a sense of comradery among them when watching games live (Tamir 2019), could augment the multimedia consumption intention.

On the other hand, official merchandise consumption intention is usually associated with positively identified fans (Cadwallader, Boyd, and Thomas 2012), with higher engagement with the sport club (Cordina, Gannon, and Croall 2019). The team logo on a jersey is perceived as a brand itself by 59% of consumers (Kwon and Armstrong 2006), while individuals experience both reflective and impulsive motives to purchase official sport team merchandise (Chen et al. 2019).

In this matters, innovation has proven to be a key for sport institutions (Yoshida, James, and Cronin 2013), suggesting that innovativeness enhances consumption intention (Wang, Cheng, and Hsiao 2020) and that through it, the classic on-field performance constraint could be weakened (Richelieu and Webb 2017). Therefore, a higher level of perceived legitimacy on the sport institution innovativeness could be reflected on the viewership and official merchandise usage by fans. In contrast, the fandom level of the individual could, in fact, enhance this perceived legitimacy.

Becoming a big fan demands an emotional commitment (Hwang 2017). While the attachment increases, individuals integrate the team into their self-identity (Prayag et al. 2020), making the sport/team a central element in their lives (Tamir 2019), to the extent of seeing themselves as members of the sport institution instead of mere consumers (Heere and James 2007). This process is how, in this sense of belonging scenario, fans tend to increase their consumption to strengthen their bond with the team through multimedia and merchandising products (Kim, Trail, and Ko 2011), guiding us to our first three hypotheses:

H1: Higher levels of fandom increase the multimedia consumption intention.

H2: Higher levels of fandom increase the official merchandise consumption intention.

H3: Higher levels of fandom increase the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy.

### ***The role of legitimacy in the fans' judgement evaluation***

Drawing on SJT, legitimacy perception is considered a baseline needed to succeed (Hutchins, Sinha, and Nandan 2019) and a required characteristic to access additional judgement upgrades (Bitektine 2011). Legitimacy 'is a generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman 1995, 574).

Regardless of their nature or industry, all institutions seek legitimacy perception, as it has been considered in different research contexts (Aurenhammer 2020; Greenwood and Roederer-Rynning 2020; Munta 2020; Adhikari, Pell, and Cheah 2020). The majority of these studies suggest that legitimacy could be achieved through collective justification (McKeown et al. 2020).

Currently, people in large cities tend to experience less intimate relationships (Heere and James 2007). Therefore sport events and sport institutions help individuals in their socialization (Gantz et al. 2006) and interpersonal relationships (Hunt, Bristol, and Bashaw 1999) through the creation of innovative gathering spaces (e.g. live streaming communities;

fan-zones) during sport events. Official team apparel is an easy way for individuals to look-alike and become a social member instantly.

It has been suggested that general settings are not transferable to sport settings (Nalbantis, Fahrner, and Pawlowski 2017). Sport transmissions gather the biggest audience of all TV shows (Knobloch-Westerwick, Abdallah, and Billings 2020), continuously leading the battle for entertainment dollars (Hill and Green 2000). This massification process could enhance the legitimacy of the activity by supporting a latitude of acceptance widely accepted by a specific population (Rhine and Severance 1970).

Within sport, legitimacy has been suggested to directly impact sponsorship sales (Navarro-Picado 2019) and the public acceptance of sport-educational systems (Thomsen and Nørgaard 2020). the creation of an interlocutor could help diminish violent events between the police and fans or within rival fans (Stott et al. 2020). Fans deal with an internal legitimacy; an individual perception that he/she is a member of that group, and an external legitimacy; which stands to the perception that third parties (e.g., recognition from the National Football Federation) consider the individual as an appropriate fan (Biscaia et al. 2018). Nonetheless, little is known regarding the impact of the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy (POL) on fan consumption intention, guiding us to the next hypothesis:

H4a: Innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy mediates the relationship between the individual's fandom level and the individuals' multimedia consumption intention.

H4b: Innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy has a direct impact on the individuals' multimedia consumption intention.

H5a: Innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy mediates the relationship between the fandom level of the individual and the individuals' official merchandise consumption intention.

H5b: Innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy has a direct impact on the individuals' official merchandise consumption intention.

### ***Normative influence of relevant others; doing things just because you are expected to***

Interpersonal influence is a 2-dimension construct that captures the individuals' need to self-categorize into a relevant group by buying, using or behaving in a manner that complies with the expectations of members from that focused group (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). This could be done by seeking information or through normative actions.

While one of the dimensions is more informational, in the sense of observing and gathering information (Simpson, Siguaw, and Cadogan 2008; Koh and Leng 2017), the normative dimension refers to individuals' tendency to conform to social norms (Zhan and He 2012). It has been suggested that susceptibility to third party influence creates a sense of interdependence (Wallace, Buil, and de Chernatony 2020), guiding negative opinions (Sarkar et al. 2020), positive opinions (Khurana, Kumar, and Sidhpuria 2020), or the purchase of aspirational (Kastanakis and Balabanis 2012) or luxurious brands (Kiatkawsin and Han 2019; Ngo et al. 2020).



Up to some extreme, people perceive the necessity to fit in and be accepted by others who are members of an *important* social group (Scheinbaum et al. 2020). Individuals with higher levels of interpersonal influence search for both the need for approval and the avoidance of disapproval (Sharma and Klein 2020). This trait is commonplace for all human beings as individuals learn to rely on third party judgements as sources of evidence (Teo, Leng, and Phua 2019). It has been argued that in conditions of less experience (first time buying a product) vs. higher experience (subsequent purchases), people tend to be more susceptible to interpersonal influence (Simpson, Siguaw, and Cadogan 2008).

Individuals build social connections through brands (Escalas and Bettman 2005), for example, the localness of a brand (Batra et al. 2000). The National Football Team (Gerke 2019) could serve as a normative platform for fandom since early ages in childhood, due to a learned acceptable social behavior (Friestad and Wright 1994) or collective legitimation conduct (McKeown et al. 2020). As time passes and the individual gets older, he/she could behave consistently according to the focused social group (Childers and Rao 1992), which enhances the legitimacy of the groups' trends.

Going forward in this study, we will focus on the normative dimension of interpersonal influence, as our dependent variables are all behaviors and demand visible actions, not necessarily information seeking. In this regards, it is important to notice that according to normative interpersonal influence (NII), individuals tend to avoid sanctions or receive rewards through their compliance (Kim and Kim 2015). They try to push people to behave in a specific manner to be accepted within a target social group (Wang, Yu, and Wei 2012). This effect is suggested to be stronger during visible public situations (Zhan and He 2012), because highly noticeable incidents give them a better chance to gain positive impressions (Sharma, Sivakumaran, and Marshall 2010) in contrast of doing so in private. Nonetheless, innovation in the sport context depends on the proactiveness evaluation (Ratten 2011) and consumer characteristics (Mahan 2011) when assessing innovative action's legitimacy. Therefore, friends, family, co-workers, and other relevant others, could impact decisions (Ebren 2009) on whether to buy or not official apparel or where and with whom to watch a game, guiding us to the last hypothesis (Figure 1).

H6a: Higher levels of Normative Interpersonal Influence moderates positively the Relationship between Fandom Level of the Individual and Multimedia Consumption Intention.

H6b: Higher levels of Normative Interpersonal Influence moderates positively the Relationship between Fandom Level of the Individual and Official Merchandise Consumption Intention.

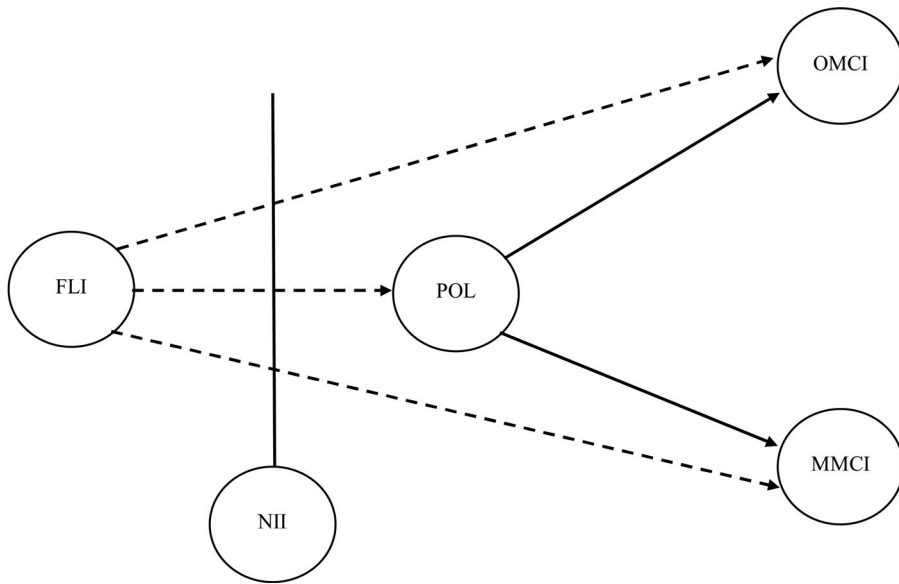
H6c: Higher levels of Normative Interpersonal Influence moderates positively the Relationship between Fandom Level of the Individual and innovativeness Perceived Organizational Legitimacy.

## Methods

### *Data collection system and sample*

All responses were obtained between November 2019 and February 2020. After eliminating incomplete questionnaires and/or invalid answers, a total of 405 valid responses were officially collected. Subjects are students from different programs (degree and continuing





**Figure 1.** Research model.

education) in the School of Business at Universidad de Costa Rica. All respondents were 18 years or older with a mean of 25.83; 208 women, 195 men, and two undetermined.

### Measures

Scales used in the current study are based on previously employed measurements. Back-translation was needed because scales were initially in English, and the final questionnaire was applied in Spanish (Chapman and Carter 1979). Content validity was obtained through an expert-judgement made preceding the final Spanish version (Crocker and Algina 2006).

To assess official merchandise consumption intention (OMCI), a three-item scale was used (Kim, Trail, and Ko 2011), including ‘*I am likely to purchase National Football Team’s licensed merchandise the future*’. Multimedia consumption intention (MMCI) is also a three-item scale based on Kim, Trail, and Ko (2011), which includes items such as ‘*I will watch or listen to the National Football Team’s games through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.)*’.

NII measurement is based on the normative dimension of the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). This scale has eight items, including questions like ‘*I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase*’.

On the other hand, respondents were asked to respond to a series of assertions regarding the National Football Federation’s innovativeness degree of legitimacy when opening new markets for its current products (for example, selling in other countries and/or selling its products aimed at companies). This is how POL was captured through an eight-item scale based on (Fidan and Balci 2018) with some required adjustments. One example of the items

included in this scale is ‘*The structure of the National Football Federation is designed to meet the sport industry’s standards when innovating*’.

All these measurements used a 7-point Likert type ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, or definitely no to definitely yes accordingly (see appendix).

To capture FLI, the Big-Fan Index (O’Roark, Wood, and DeGaris 2010) was employed. This measurement allows respondents to evaluate their fandom as a continuum, moving from (0) no-fan up to (3) big-fan. It has been argued that when the concept is clear and singular, a single-item approach is better due to its ease to answer by the respondent (Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007), helping the questionnaire in its parsimony and ease of administration (Fuchs and Diamantopoulos 2009). This fact was supported by Van Driel, Gantz, and Lewis (2019) and used in different studies (Billings and Ruihley 2013; Schallhorn, Knoll, and Schramm 2017).

## Results

### Factor analysis

Once data was ready, an EFA using SPSS was employed to address the reliability and dimensionality of measures (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Cronbach’s alpha threshold was set to a minimum value of .7 (Nunnally 1994). Afterwards, the scales’ unidimensionality was tested through a factor extraction based on the existence of eigenvalues higher than 1. Additionally, factor loadings were set to a threshold of .5 points or higher with a significant total explained variance.

A CFA was then performed through AMOS, which contributes with more security in samples that could not accomplish multivariate normality (Casaló, Flavián, and Guinaliú 2011). Model fit was accomplished with an RMSEA 0.052, CFI 0.973, IFI 0.973, TLI 0.967 and a normed  $\chi^2$  of 2.08. According to the results obtained (see Table 1), no items were eliminated as high levels of convergence,  $R^2$ , and model fit were achieved. A composite reliability test was performed (Jöreskog 1971), with a threshold of 0.65 (Steenkamp and Geyskens 2006) in order to avoid the suggested underestimation made by Cronbach’s alpha (Smith 1974). Additionally, convergent validity was tested through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), using a 0.5 threshold (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Finally, discriminant validity was tested by determining that the AVE’s square root for each latent variable is bigger than the correlations among any pair of constructs (Yadav, Balaji, and Jebarajakirthy 2019) (Table 2). All these results suggest adequate psychometric properties of the measurement scales.

### Evaluation of the structural model

Using AMOS for SPSS, a structural equation model was developed to test hypotheses 1 through 5b; results appear in Figure 2. The model fit achieves satisfactory values with an RMSEA = 0.071, a CFI = 0.950, the IFI = 0.950, the TLI = 0.939, and a normed  $\chi^2$ =3.49. Results suggest that OMCI is positively affected by being a fan (.578,  $p < .01$ ) and the perceived organizational legitimacy (.216,  $p < .01$ ), while MMCI is positively affected by being a fan (.703,  $p < .01$ ) and the perceived organizational legitimacy (.173,  $p < .01$ ). These results support hypothesis 1, 4b, 2 and 5b respectively. On the other hand, being a fan has a direct

**Table 1.** Confirmatory factor analysis, composite reliability, and convergent validity.

Item	Standardized Solution	t-Value	Item R <sup>2</sup>	Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
MMCI_01	.777	30.840***	.604	Multimedia	.894	.77	.53
MMCI_02	.925	34.793***	.855	Consumption Intention			
MMCI_03	.888	34.442***	.789				
OMCI_01	.903	30.353***	.816	Official Merchandise	.938	.79	.56
OMCI_02	.891	30.131***	.794	Consumption Intention			
OMCI_03	.947	30.233***	.898				
POL_01	.627	57.870***	.392	Perceived	.846	.93	.63
POL_02	.610	51.142***	.374	Organizational Legitimacy			
POL_03	.552	53.623***	.305				
POL_04	.694	59.803***	.482				
POL_06	.687	55.935***	.472				
POL_06	.588	56.643***	.345				
POL_07	.617	56.346***	.379				
POL_08	.745	55.690***	.555				

Note: \*\*\* stands for significance at  $p < .01$  level.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis and discriminant reliability.

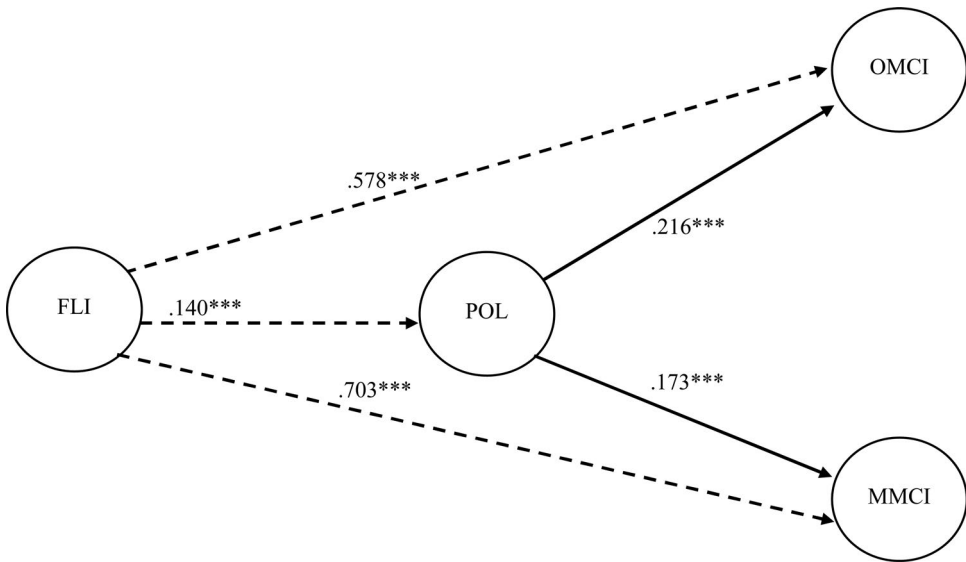
Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Multimedia Consumption Intention	<b>.73</b>			
2. Official Merchandise Consumption Intention	.676	<b>.75</b>		
3. Perceived Organizational Legitimacy	.223	.257	<b>.79</b>	
4. Fandom Level of the Individual	.701	.589	.125	n.a.
Mean	3.622	2.643	3.819	1.18
Standard deviation	1.984	1.659	0.955	0.939

Note: All correlations significant at  $p < .01$  level. Values in diagonal are square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent variables.

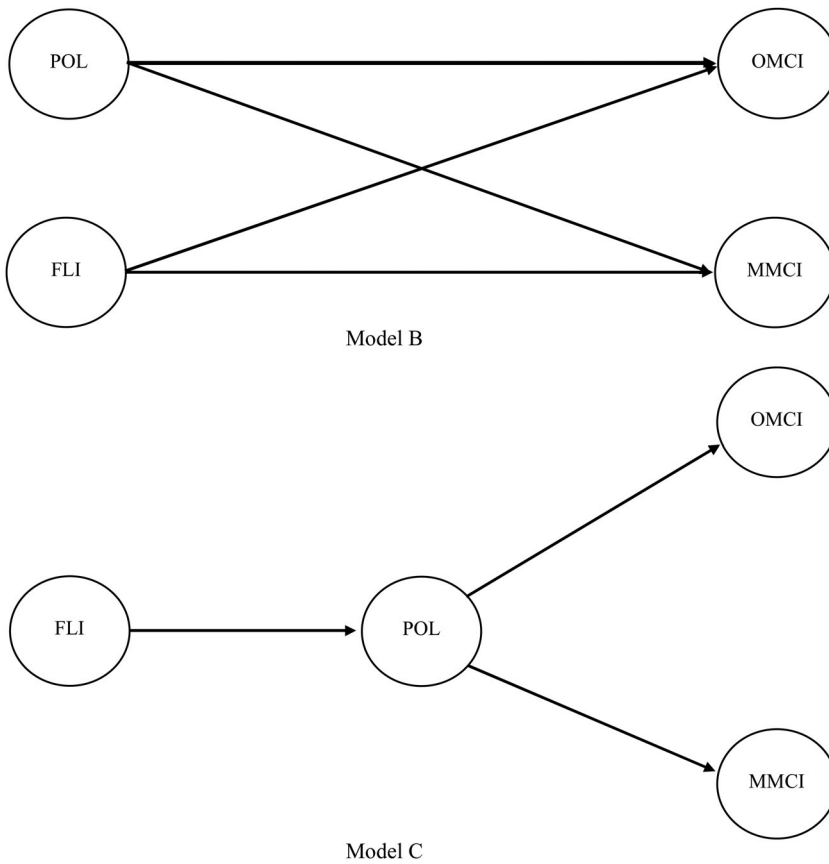
effect on POL (.140,  $p < .05$ ) giving support to hypothesis 3. Finally, a positive relationship was found between being a fan and OMCI ( $p < .01$ ) and MMCI ( $p < .01$ ) both of them appear as partially mediated by POL; supporting hypotheses 4a and 5a, respectively (Figure 2).

The model was contrasted against alternative models, which prove to have lower fit and, therefore, justify the selection of the original partial mediation model shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows the contrasting models, with model B (direct effects) having an RMSEA = 0.071, a CFI = 0.948, the IFI = 0.948, the TLI = 0.937 and a normed  $1 X^2=3.06$ , and model C (full mediation) accounted for an RMSEA = 0.129, a CFI = 0.830, the IFI = 0.831, the TLI = 0.797 and a normed  $1 X^2=7.69$ .

A multi-sample analysis was performed to test NII's moderating effect, which corresponds to hypothesis 6a through 6c. The sample was divided into two groups corresponding to the moderating variable's arithmetic mean, eliminating those cases half standard deviation



**Figure 2.** Structural equation model.



**Figure 3.** Rival models.

up and down. One group accounted for 127 individuals with high NII, while the other for 152 with low NII. This same methodology has been used in previous research (Casaló, Flavián, and Guinalíu 2011).

Before analyzing the results, a CFA invariance test between the two different groups (high and low NII) was performed (Silva, Monteiro, and Sobreiro 2020). Three tests are recommended; 1) control for configural invariance; good model fit when running the model with two groups. 2) Check for metric invariance through a CFI difference between unconstrained and measurement weights below .01, and finally 3) structural invariance; insignificance of the chi-square differences between the unconstrained and the constrained model (Cheung and Rensvold 2002). Configural invariance is supported with RMSEA = 0.049, CFI = 0.951, IFI=.952, TLI=.939, and normed 1  $X^2$ = 1.66, while metric invariance is also satisfactory with a CFI difference of .004 (.951-.947). Chi-square difference test ( $X^2 = 364.32$  dF = 22 vs  $X^2 = 281.86$  dF = 170) was not accomplished, nonetheless, we assume invariance as 2 out of 3 tests were satisfactory, and the suggestion made by Cheung and Rensvold (2002) regarding restrictiveness and lack of practicality of the chi-square difference test, backed more recently by other researchers (French and Finch 2006).

By generating an individual structural solution for each group, multi-sample analysis allows distinguishing the differences between the two models' coefficients. Table 3 shows these test results, arguing that there is no difference between high and low NII individuals when analyzing the relationship between being a fan and OMCI and being a fan and POL. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference between high and low NII individuals when the relationship corresponds to being a fan and MMCI. This finding suggests that high NII has a positive effect on fans when they confront the idea of watching a game through the media but is indifferent when deciding whether to buy official merchandise or setting a legitimacy judgement of the sport institution.

## Discussion and conclusions

This paper's main objective is to test how the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy of a Federation (organizing institution) could impact the consumption intention behaviors of the fans towards the National Football Team (sport team). A model based on SIT and SJT was developed, to address whether perceived organizational legitimacy regarding its innovativeness opening new markets, mediates or not the fans' multimedia and official merchandise consumption intention relationships.

As expected by SIT, findings suggest that higher fandom has a positive effect on multimedia and official merchandise consumption intention. Nonetheless, the most important finding is that, in line with SJT, these relationships are partially mediated by the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy when opening new markets. To know, the

**Table 3.** Multi-sample analysis – High NII vs Low NII.

Constraint	Estimated Coefficient (Low)	Estimated Coefficient (High)	(d.f) $X^2$ differences	Probability
FLI→OMCI	.544***	.586***	(1) .595	.441
FLI→MMCI	.699***	.753***	(1) .354	.060*
FLI→POL	.080***	.084***	(1) .009	.925

Note: \*.10 \*\*p<.05 \*\*\*p<.01.

higher the perceived organizational legitimacy on the Federation (regulatory/administrative institution), the higher the consumption intention on the sport team. Therefore, it can be seen how non-profit organizations are also being pressured to seek a competitive advantage through innovation (Núñez-Pomar, Escamilla-Fajardo, and Prado-Gascó 2020), if they want to ensure their fans engagement and consumptions.

Thus, the results of this study empirically highlight the importance of innovation in non-profit sport organizations as previous studies have pointed out (Vos, Breesch, and Scheerder 2012; Vos and Scheerder 2014; Wicker and Breuer 2011; Winand et al. 2013), but adding the importance of carrying out innovation activities in a legitimacy way. This variable acts as a mediator of the MMCI and OMCI, which are essential outcome variables for the sport federations and clubs. These findings suggest that by carrying out legitimacy innovation activities, Costa Rica Football Federation and Costa Rica National Football Team could ensure that their fans watch or listen to their games, follow their news and buy their merchandising. Hence, there is a need to mobilize resources, knowledge and use skills to implement new ideas that are vital in this type of organization (Winand et al. 2016), but considering the legitimacy of these actions. Therefore, innovations in the sport sector are essential to improve organizations' performance (Ringuet-Riot, Hahn, and James 2013), in this specific case, through merchandising purchase intentions of their fans and fan engagement. These measures will positively impact the sport federation/clubs' income and, thus, on its performance.

These findings suggest that sport institutions should care not only for what happens in the field, or with the athletes but also on how the community perceives the innovativeness legitimacy of the upper-level institutions that regulate, organize and represent the teams. So, it could be stated that innovation is a promising phenomenon for a more efficient, profitable, and sustainable management of the sport sector (Núñez-Pomar, Escamilla-Fajardo, and Prado-Gascó 2020). Poor performance on the pitch could benefit from a high legitimacy perception of the organizing institution, while a poor legitimacy perception of this institution could ruin a good sporting result. Hence, these findings highlight that nowadays, innovation is vital to stay competitive in the current world market and achieve long-term success (García Pérez De Lema and Gálvez Albarracín 2012; Naranjo-Valencia, Jiménez-Jiménez, and Sanz-Valle 2016), in the sport federations.

Secondly, NII positively moderates the relationship between fandom and watching/listening to the games, aligning with SIT and the continually increasing figures of sport broadcasting viewers. Surprisingly, NII showed no effect on official merchandise consumption and on the innovativeness perceived organizational legitimacy. There is a chance that individuals analyze additional ingredients, such as the price; it is much cheaper to watch a game than to purchase a new jersey. Maybe individuals separate the sport events into the product (entertainment – socialization spaces) and brand (actually wearing official merchandise) (Torres-Moraga, Vásquez-Parraga, and Zamora-González 2008; Kwon and Armstrong 2006) therefore making them interested only in satisfying the first one.

On the other hand, that NII has no moderation effect on POL suggests that fans do not care about others' opinions regarding the legitimacy of their sport institution. POL judgement could be a more individual assessment that could, up to some extreme, be blurred by the amount of fandom that the individual has. Therefore, innovating in search of new markets is irrelevant for an established fan, as he is already part of the group. This information should be considered, and other types of innovations that could benefit these



established fans should be developed through the social responsibility lens (Zeimers et al. 2019). For instance, innovations to improve some existing services or products, or rewarding fans for their loyalty, could be good innovative strategies.

Finally, the study helps understand how SJT and SIT are intertwined in a sport context, where individuals deal with a double evaluation process, one towards the team and another towards the institution that administers/regulates this team. It is also interesting to notice that fans are motivated to engage in consumption behaviors through SIT, while through SJT the same individuals regulate their consumption intention. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of implementing innovation in the sport sector at the institutional level (Caza 2000; Viljamaa 2007), to increase sustainable sport federations performance.

It seems relevant for local sport federations to have clear values within their established mission and vision from a managerial perspective. These values must be connected to their fans, and that any actions taken by them should be communicated with transparency. Fans should find that local federations act consistently within the principles that characterize them and that what has been said and done by the Federation matches with those values. Hence, to consider innovation as a key value of the organization, the sport federation managers need to ensure sustainable long-term performance. The value of generating an entrepreneurial culture, and foster intrapreneurship within these organizations (González-Serrano et al. 2019), should be considered by the sport managers as a critical strategy.

This paper has the limitation that we only focus on one specific national team from one specific sport. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the findings from the current study. Further research is needed to account for individuals' varying judgments on their favorite teams/clubs, as national teams could enjoy a more wide sympathy. In contrast, different clubs within the same country boundaries could evoke different responses. Replication of this research is recommended for different sport scenarios and nationalities, which could help, among other variables, to control for cultural differences.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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