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Review

Organisational impression congruence: A conceptual model of multi-level impression management operation in sports service organisations

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ABSTRACT

The management of images projected to consumer audiences is a key task for sport service organisations; however, the number of "touch points" (interactions between employees and consumers) adds complexity to the process. In this article, the authors present a conceptual model of organisational impression congruence (OrgIC), proposing that organisations will elicit positive consumer-related outcomes if there is alignment between the desired organisational image(s), those projected by the organisation at the management/strategic level, and those projected by customer-facing employees. The conceptual model is underpinned by theories associated with impression management, reputation (as an outcome of impression management action), and cognitive dissonance theory as the basis for outcomes of in/congruence. The authors discuss possible implications and outcomes in relation to previous literature emanating from various fields (e.g., sport management, management, and marketing), and suggest directions for future research. Through the model of OrgIC, the authors contribute to theoretical development and discussion, and provide a tool that could be useful for evaluating the way that sport service organisations present themselves to consumers, and other external audiences.

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1. Introduction

Both organisations and individuals have ideas about how they would like to be viewed by external audiences, be they consumers or other stakeholders. To this end, they engage in impression management. The images we project have implications for how we are viewed by others; that is, people make value judgments about us based on the impressions that we make. This is the same for sport organisations as it is for people, as it is important that they manage the images projected to their consumers. In the case of sport service organisations—such as golf clubs, fitness centres, and stadium concessions operators—the overall impressions that consumers form are not only informed by images projected by the organisation

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(via marketing communications, branding, etc.), but also during a number of "touch points," or direct interactions with front-line employees. Desirable images that are positively interpreted by consumers can lead to positive outcomes (e.g., purchase behaviour, trust), while poorly received images can have the opposite effect (Elsbach, 2003). On this basis, the projection of coherent images across the various levels of sport service organisations presents a considerable management challenge, and one that merits scholarly attention.

To date, however, few scholars have attempted to investigate impression management at multiple levels of analysis, instead focusing on the behaviours of individuals (e.g., Leary & Kowalski, 1990) *or* organisations (e.g., Elsbach, 2003). This considerably limits the ability to understand the complex interactions between sport service organisations and their consumers, to identify areas that require mangerial attention, and to address them effectively. As Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, and Gilstrap (2008) suggested, "[we must find] ways to integrate IM research across levels to identify relationships and effects that may reside at multiple levels of analysis, including cross-level and multi-level effects" (p. 1098). Indeed, similar calls have long been made for organisational research in general (see Rousseau, 1985). We propose that the first step toward addressing this issue within the present context is to conceptualise the impression management actions of internal stakeholders at different levels of sport service organisations, in order to theorise the cross- and multi-level effects described by Bolino et al. (2008).

To this end, we present a conceptual model of Organisational Impression Congruence (OrgIC). Specifically, we propose that when organisational impression management behaviours and individual (i.e., employees) impression management behaviours align, the organisation is able to project its desired images to external audiences. Here, desired images are those that are explicitly decided upon by high-level employees who are responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation (e.g., CEOs, upper management), and are related to a sport service organisation's brand. Desired images are an essential component of a sport organisation's marketing strategy, and have been discussed alongside various terms within the literature, including brand image (Reynolds & Gutman, 1984), brand concept (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnes, 1986), and brand direction (Rubinstein, 1996). Within the model, the aforementioned employees who are responsible for the sport service organisation's strategic direction are considered to be part of the organisational level, while all other employees (e.g., those in customer-facing roles) make up the individual/employee level. Impression management behaviours at the organisational level include items such as integrated marketing campaigns (inclusive of traditional and social media) and other external communications, while individual level impression management behaviours are typically limited to direct interactions with consumers during the service encounter.

Fig. 1 illustrates how, when organisational impression management is working optimally, the behaviours of actors at organisational and collective/employee levels of analysis produce congruent reputations. This projects a coherent organisational image to consumers, leading to positive outcomes (e.g., developing consumer trust, psychological connection to organisations, etc.). Conversely, when organisational and individual impression management outcomes do not align, incongruent images are projected, potentially leading to negative outcomes (e.g., confusion amongst consumers, cognitive dissonance, distrust, etc.).

In detailing a conceptual model of OrgIC, we discuss the appropriate conceptualisation of impression management outcomes at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., organisational and collective/employee). Possible consumer outcomes are offered, in addition to directions for future research, and empirical testing of the model. Accordingly, we propose that three principal contributions are made: (a) OrgIC provides managers with a conceptual model that can be used to make
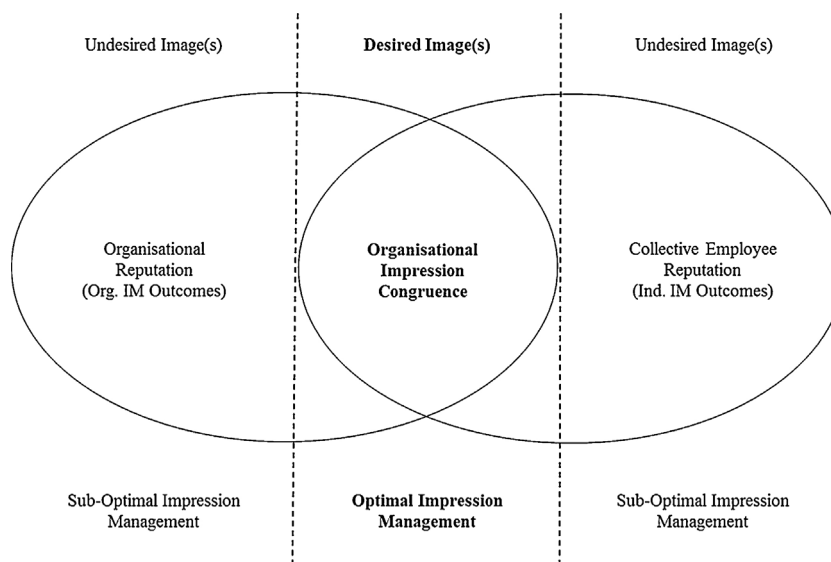

Fig. 1. Conceptual model of OrgIC: Organisational and collective (employee) reputational outcomes of multi-level impression management actions.

attributions about how actions performed at various levels of the organisation contribute to the impression it makes with consumers; (b) we theorise the nature and consequences of coherent and incoherent image projection at multiple levels; and (c) we answer calls for multi-level impression management research and provide a conceptual basis for future development of this line of inquiry. Furthermore, sport management scholars have typically borrowed theories and concepts from "parent disciplines" (Chalip, 2006), yet it is important that we continue to develop and adapt them in order to address issues pertaining to our field (Cunningham, 2013; Doherty, 2013).

2. Theoretical foundations and proposition development

In this section, we introduce the theoretical foundations of OrgIC, review relevant literature, and present a conceptual model. First, we discuss a working definition of impression management within the present context, followed by a review of its theoretical underpinnings. Next, we offer a review of studies that have applied theories of impression management, with particular emphasis on multi-level analysis. Multiple levels of reputation are presented as outcomes of impression management activities, which inform the congruent or incongruent impressions described within the conceptual model.

2.1. Foundations of impression management

Many definitions of impression management have been offered since it became a popular topic in the early 1980s. For example, Tedeschi and Reiss (1981) suggested that it refers to "any behavior by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impressions formed of that person by others" (p. 3). Alternatively, Schneider (1981) defined impression management as "an attempt by one person (actor) to affect the perceptions of her or him by another person (target)" (p. 25). These definitions provide a good idea of the goals of impression management; however, they refer specifically to the actions of individuals, thus precluding their use in sport service organisations, and other multi-level contexts. For this reason, we rely on the definition offered by Bolino et al. (2008): "Impression management describes efforts by an actor to create, maintain, protect, or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience" (p. 1080).

2.1.1. Origins of impression management

The origins of impression management lie in Goffman's (1959) writings on self-presentation, and his dramaturgic model of social life. Goffman conceptualised social life as a theatrical production, in which people engaged in social interactions are actors attempting to control the images they project to their audience in pursuit of certain ends. In other words, individuals and sport organisations have desired images of themselves that they would like to project to other people. Motivations for impression management will differ from case to case, but there must be some social, psychological, or material objective attached (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). For example, a concession stand worker at a sporting event may be affable when interacting with customers to procure tips; while a sport organisation may sponsor a charity event in order to appear conscientious, and encourage consumers to view their products more favourably. As Goffman (1959) noted,

> Control [of others] is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he [*sic*] can influence this definition by expressing himself [*sic*] in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his [*sic*] own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him [*sic*] to mobilise his [*sic*] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his [*sic*] interests to convey (p. 137).

Although Goffman (1959) addressed actors' use of self-presentation to shape the impressions that others held of them, the focus of his work was on influencing the interaction situation. Subsequent theorising by Jones and colleagues suggested that the use of impression management tactics is often intended to have a more direct effect on how an actor is viewed by others (Jones, 1964; Jones & Wortman, 1973). In particular, they addressed the motivational, cognitive, and evaluative functions of self-presentation that one engages in during interactions with others. As such, Jones and Pittman (1982) defined strategic self-presentation as "those features of behavior affected by power augmentation motives designed to elicit or shape others' attributions of the actor's dispositions" (p. 233).

One aspect of Goffman's conceptualisation that has been retained in impression management theorising is the separation of the "back stage" where the performance is crafted, from the "front stage" upon which it is performed (Goffman, 1959). This conceptualisation of distinct spaces of social interaction lends itself particularly well to service contexts, as it emphasises making some actions visible to consumers, while others are hidden (Grayson & Shulman, 2000). The impression management actions of service employees are subject to both social scripts (cultural expectations of behaviour within a given situation) and role expectations (Sarbin & Allen, 1968) set out by the organisation. The extent to which employees fulfil—or fail to fulfil—their roles when interacting with consumers is subject to situational and dispositional antecedents, which scholars have attempted to model.

2.1.2. Impression motivation and construction

In regard to the aforementioned antecedents to role fulfilment, Leary and Kowalski (1990) proposed that impression management comprises two principal components: (a) impression motivation, and (b) impression construction. First, impression motivation quite simply concerns the extent to which people are motivated to manage the images they project to

others. The authors define three underpinning antecedents: the goal relevance of impressions (the importance of creating an impression for achieving certain desired ends); the value of desired goals (motivation as a function of the importance of the goal); and the discrepancy between one's desired and current image.

Second, impression construction refers to the process of deciding how to go about projecting images to others. The authors stated that the content of impressions is determined by a number of variables in combination: self-concept (how people see themselves); self-beliefs (the extent to which people believe they are able to project the desired image); desired and undesired identity images (selecting images that are consistent with how people would like to be, or distancing themselves from how they would *not* like to be); role constraints (social limitations on how to behave in certain roles); target values (the values of those to who the images are being projected); and current or potential social image (the effect of how people think they are currently regarded, and how they may be regarded in the future).

Leary and Kowalski's (1990) two-component model provides a comprehensive account of the processes involved in impression management behaviour, which is incorporated into the OrgIC model's preliminary phase (see Fig. 2). This phase illustrates how impression management outcomes form at multiple levels of analysis. As the sport service organisation's desired images are disseminated to employees (e.g., through staff training and/or internal marketing), those role expectations are negotiated through individual impression motivation and construction. The extent to which employees' activities align with the sport service organisation's desired image is subject to these negotiations. As MacIntosh and Doherty (2005) noted, an organisation's expectations of employees "may be directed, but is not ultimately determined, from above" (p. 3). Desired organisational images and the actual impression management actions at the organisational level are separated in Fig. 2 to represent possible discrepancies between intended images and those that are actually communicated to external audiences.

Although Leary and Kowalski (1990) referred to impression management at the individual level, the process described in their model is equally applicable at the organisational level. A sport service organisation's top management team will engage in impression management activities in pursuit of the organisation's desired image, and the nature and execution of those activities will depend upon antecedent facets—for example, the discrepancy between the organisation's desired and current image.

Leary and Kowalski (1990) also went some way to clarifying the role of identity in the study of impression management, noting that there are "conceptual drawbacks to regarding the maintenance of private self-images and the maintenance of
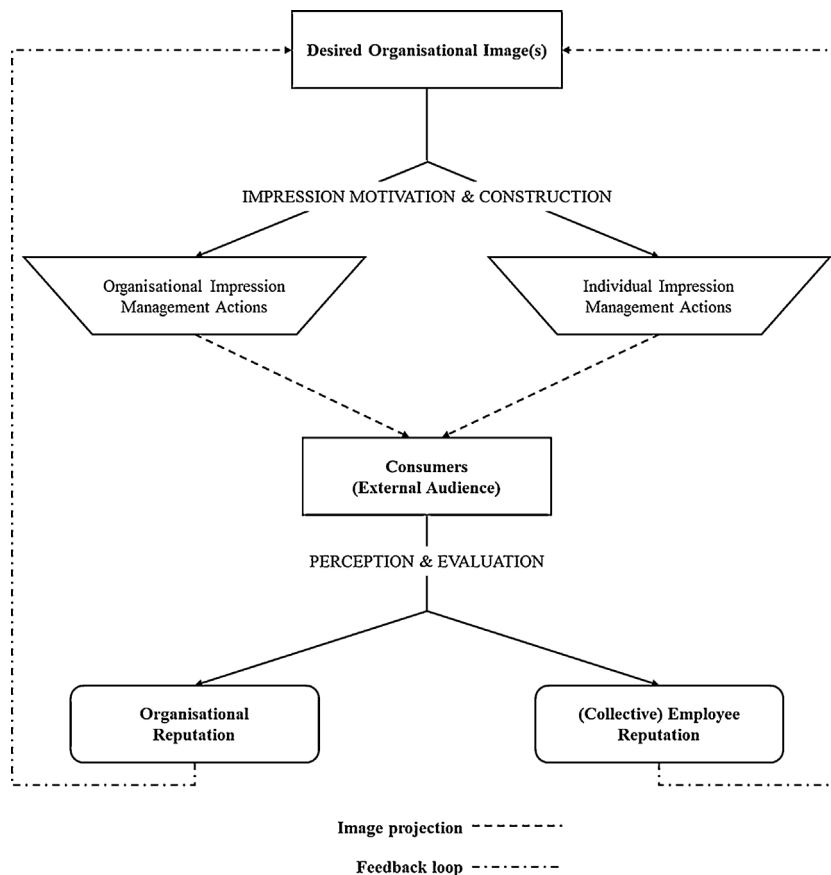

Fig. 2. OrgIC preliminary phase: Development of collective employee and organisational reputations through impression management actions.

public impressions as the same phenomenon" (p. 34). With reference to Tedeschi (1986), they suggested that many aspects of public image have little or no bearing on how individuals see themselves. Fundamentally, impressions and images are not identities. Wartick (2002) noted that identity represents the organisation's self-image, or the view held by insiders, such as employees, managers, etc. When an individual or sport service organisation engages in impression management, they are controlling how this self is portrayed to external audiences (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). This is conceptually and functionally different to the estimation in which the sport service organisation is held by public/consumer audience members.

Accordingly, impression management refers less to the *performance* of identity—the revealing of the "true" self—than it does to the selection of which *aspects* of identity the actor wishes to reveal, obscure, or manipulate. Impression management may, over time, begin to have an effect on one's identity; however, this cannot be seen as inevitable, and impression management must be retained as a distinct process to identity formation (Schlenker, 1980). Elsbach (2003) provided a simple distinction, noting that insiders are the primary perceivers of identity, while outsiders (e.g., consumers) are the primary perceivers of reputation. In this regard, the conceptual model of OrgIC considers impression management activities that result in images projected to external stakeholders, in line with a host of other scholars (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980; Schneider, 1981).

Having described the central tenets of impression management, we must also account for the impression management actions of individuals (employees) and sport service organisations that present images to consumers. As such, we review prior research conducted at both levels of analysis in the following section.

2.2. Impression management research

OrgIC is predicated upon impression management outcomes at both the individual and organisational levels of analysis. As such, it is pertinent to review some of those outcomes that have been studied at each level.

2.2.1. Individual level of analysis

In relation to the present context, sport management scholars have rarely addressed the impression management actions of individuals working in service positions. Studies concerning employees have most often been limited to the impression management of professional athletes, particularly via social media (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012; Pegoraro, 2010). The nature of athletes' employment, among other factors, is obviously different to that of an individual in a customer-facing service role; thus, existing sport management research provides limited insight into individual impression management as it pertains to OrgIC.

More relevant insights can be located in the services literature, where scholars have studied the impression management behaviours of individual workers, such as management consultants (Clark & Slaman, 1998), and migrant hairdressers (Bax, 2012). Building on the notion of service delivery as a performance (Berry, Zeithaml, & Parasuraman, 1985; Grönroos, 2000), Grove, Fisk, and Laforge (2004) proposed the use of the Stanislavsky method of actor training for service workers. According to this method, an actor becomes completely immersed in his/her role, facilitating the delivery of a realistic and believable performance. The Stanislavsky method is most applicable to services requiring high customisation and personalisation (e.g., upscale restaurants and hotels); thus, the applicability of this type of training for front-line workers in the sport industry (e.g., ticket takers and concessions workers) is questionable. However, Grove et al. (2004) provide a strong basis for viewing service encounters as theatrical scenarios, as well as the use of dramaturgic training to improve service through impression management.

With regard to consumer outcomes of impression management, Medler-Liraz and Yagil (2013) examined the relationship between ingratiatory behaviours of service workers, customers' emotional regulation strategies, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions. Ingratiation is one of numerous impression management strategies (see Mohamed, Gardner, & Paolillo, 1999), which are detailed in Table 1 as a reference. Data from a range of service employee–customer dyads (e.g., banks, cellphone and communication providers, hotels, and call centres) was used in the study. The authors found that ingratiation behaviour of employees was positively associated with "deep acting" (modification of behaviour through internal change, producing genuine emotional responses), which was in turn positively associated with satisfaction. A further positive relationship was observed between satisfaction and loyalty intentions. These findings support Grayson and Shulman's (2000) assertion that service employees carry much of the responsibility for organisational representation to consumers; thus, the consideration of impression management at multiple organisational levels is imperative for understanding the source of external perceptions.

Studies in the broader management field have most often been located outside the realm of service delivery, with scholars instead addressing dyadic intra-organisational interactions between corporate employees and supervisors (see Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003 for a review). However, a number of studies exist in which scholars have investigated impression management by service employees as it relates to encounter satisfaction, which has itself been positively associated with desired organisational outcomes (e.g., customer loyalty, intentions to re-patronise, and word-of-mouth recommendations: Athanassopoulos, Gounaris, & Stathakopoulos, 2001; Bolton & Lemon, 1999).

For example, Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, and Sideman (2005) investigated the relationship between authenticity of interpersonal performances by service employees (Study 1: hotel check-in staff; Study 2: restaurant servers), and consumers' satisfaction with the service encounter. In the first study, the authors found that authenticity significantly

Table 1
Summary of organisational impression management tactics and definitions.[a]

Tactic/behaviour	Definition
Direct tactics	
"Techniques for presenting information about one's own traits, abilities, and accomplishments" (Cialdini, 1989, p. 45).	
Assertive tactics[b]	
Ingratiation	Using flattery and favour rendering to appear likeable.
Intimidation	Using threats or harassment to appear dangerous/powerful.
Organisational promotion	Seeking to create/maintain an attribution of competence.
Exemplification	Doing more/better than is necessary to appear dedicated/superior.
Supplication	Portrayal as being weak/dependent to obtain help.
Defensive tactics[c]	
Accounts	Providing explanations for negative events (after the fact) to escape disapproval.
Disclaimers	Providing explanations for negative events (before the fact) to avoid disapproval.
Organisational handicapping	Making success appear unlikely to provide ready-made excuse for failure, reduce expectations.
Apologies	Accepting responsibility for a negative event, offering to make amends, promising to do better in future.
Restitution	Offers of compensation to those negatively impacted.
Prosocial behaviour	Engaging in behaviours to atone for transgression, convince audience of positive identity.
Indirect tactics	
"Techniques undertaken to enhance or protect one's image by managing information about the people and things with which one is simply associated" (Cialdini, 1989, p. 46).	
Assertive tactics	
Boasting	Boasting about positive connections to favourable others.
Blaring	Publicly minimizing connections to unfavourable others.
Burnishing	Enhancing the favourable attributes of a positively linked other.
Blasting	Exaggerating the negative attributes of a negatively linked other.
Defensive tactics	
Burying	Concealing connections to unfavourable others.
Blurring	Blurring connections to favourable others by strategically omitting information.
Boosting	Minimizing the unfavourable attributes of a positively linked other.
Belittling	Minimizing the favourable attributes of a negatively linked other.

[a] Tactics and definitions sourced from Bolino et al. (2008) and Mohamed et al. (1999).
[b] Assertive tactics refer to those used by organisational actors to boost image.
[c] Defensive tactics adopted by organisational actors in response to undesirable situations.

increased perceptions of friendliness, but only when service tasks were performed well. In the second study, Grandey et al. (2005) found that authenticity increased perceptions of friendliness when the restaurant was less busy, but did not have a significant effect during busy times. Authenticity did, however, positively impact overall consumer satisfaction irrespective of task performance or busyness.

These findings have two implications for the proposed model of OrgIC. First, encounter satisfaction has been linked to overall satisfaction with service providers (Bitner, 1990; Mano & Oliver, 1993); thus, albeit somewhat intuitively, individual employees' self-presentation *can* affect consumers' overall impressions of an organisation. As Hartline and Ferrell (1996) noted, "Because the delivery of service occurs during the interaction between contact employees and customers (the service encounter), the attitudes and behaviors of contact employees can influence customers' perceptions of the service" (p. 52). This aligns with our previous assertion regarding the necessity of considering impression management at multiple levels of analysis. Second, the differences between Grandey et al.'s (2005) two studies indicate that consumers have differing expectations for service encounters in different contexts (i.e., restaurant versus hotel). As such, research that pertains specifically to sport service encounters would be beneficial to the general understanding of sport consumer behaviour.

The aforementioned research has contributed a great deal to the overall understanding of how employees' impression management actions influence consumers' perceptions of service encounters; however, scholars have rarely considered (a) how individual self-presentation contributes directly to consumers' external perceptions of the organisation; or (b) how images projected by individuals interact with organisational images to influence those perceptions. The conceptual model of OrgIC addresses these issues, as it relates to a broader, aggregated outcome of impression management (i.e., reputation), and treats individual and organisational impression management as interrelated. As such, impression management research at the organisational level is reviewed in the following sub-section.

2.2.2. Organisational level of analysis

In order to study impression management at the organisational level of analysis, it is important to acknowledge that sport organisations, as well as individuals, can function as social actors. As Scott (2003) noted,

> We will fail to perceive the importance of organisations for our lives if we view them only as contexts—as arrangements influencing the activities of individual actors. Organizations also must be viewed as actors in their own right, as "collective social actors." They can take actions, utilize resources, enter into contracts, and own property (p. 7).

Along similar lines, organisations engage in impression management actions—through the strategic actions of their top management team—in much the same way as individuals (Elsbach, 2003). Bolino et al. (2008) note, "Just as individuals use IM to influence the perceptions that others have of them, organizational representatives and spokespersons also use IM in an effort to influence the way that others view the organization as a whole" (p. 1094).

A number of sport management scholars have addressed organisational impression management in different contexts, such as using corporate pro-environmental behaviour to obtain favourable results in referenda on public stadium subsidisation (Kellison & Mondello, 2012); fan responses to teams' corporate social responsibility activities (Walker & Kent, 2009); and online self-presentation by professional soccer clubs (Lamertz, Carney, & Bastien, 2008). Furthermore, organisational impression management in the sport industry has been conceptually linked to revenue generation through *brandpression* management (Agyemang & Williams, 2013), a marriage of organisational impression and consumer-based brand equity.

In a study that is particularly pertinent to the proposed model of OrgIC, MacIntosh and Doherty (2007) examined external perceptions of organisational culture according to clients of a Canadian private fitness company. In the interests of clarity, Hatch and Schultz (1997) noted that organisational culture differs from organisational identity in that, "Organizational culture [is] a symbolic context within which interpretations of organizational identity are formed" (p. 360). Although typically approached as an internal consideration, scholars have also noted that aspects of organisational culture become visible to external stakeholders, thus impacting the way those groups perceive organisations (Kowalczyk and Pawlish, 2002). MacIntosh and Doherty (2007) found that clients' perceptions of organisational culture helped shape their overall impressions of the company. Specifically, the authors found that certain factors (e.g., industry performance) were strongly identified by participants, but were not significant contributors to client satisfaction or intentions to end patronage, while other factors (e.g., integrity—the extent to which the company delivered on promises to clients) were found to be strong predictors of both outcomes, but were not identified as being characteristic of the organisation.

These findings highlight the way in which organisational perceptions are formed through interactions with different levels of the organisation. For example, "industry performance" denotes a comparison between images projected at the organisational level by the fitness company in question and its rivals, whereas "confidence in staff members' ability and knowledge" refers to images projected by employees. As such, MacIntosh and Doherty's (2007) study is particularly indicative of the need for scholarship concerning impression management at multiple levels of analysis, particularly as the authors explicitly note that clients' perceptions of organisational culture were largely informed by their interactions with employees during service delivery.

A similar indication can be found in Agyemang, Williams, and Kim's (2015) case study of the National Basketball Association's (NBA) investment in employee assistance programmes to reduce instances of player scandal that are believed to have damaged the reputation of the organisation. The authors refer to corporate scandals; however, the issues cited concerned instances of individual transgression, including the way in which individual self-presentation affects organisational image. In attempting to address this issue of public perception, the NBA essentially acknowledged incongruence between its desired image, the image projected by the organisation, and those images projected by their employees (players). Similarly, the OrgIC model concerns the overall impressions that consumers hold of the organisation and its employees, namely through reputation. This is discussed in Section 2.3.

2.3. Development of reputation through impression management

Reputations are part of common parlance, and people assign them to individuals, groups, and organisations whenever thinking of or engaging with them. Part of the reason for this is that people rarely, if ever, have complete information about the "true" identity of another person or organisation. As such, they use reputations to fill in those gaps and try to predict future behaviour (Baumeister, 1982; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). If consumers knew *everything* about a sport service organisation, there would be no need to engage in impression management. Subsequently, fostering a good reputation among consumers becomes one of the most important tasks for sport service organisations' top management teams. In this sense, reputation should be viewed as a strategic resource that has tangible value (Rindova, Williamson, & Petkova, 2010).[3]

Despite the extent to which it has been studied, to date, there is no established theory of reputation, leading Ferris et al. (2014) to describe it as "intuitively accessible, yet scientifically elusive" (p. 243). Academic definitions of reputation have tended toward a particular level of analysis (e.g., individual: Ferris et al., 2003); thus, it is perhaps best to use the more general definition offered by *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1997), which simply describes it as the "estimation in which a person or thing is commonly held."

An important addition to this definition is that reputations are assigned by others retrospectively, and are formed based on past behaviour over time (Ferris et al., 2014). With reference to the functions of impression management described by

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[3] Reputation is obviously not the only outcome of impression management behaviours, and scholars have acknowledged several others (e.g., legitimacy, power, and status: see Jones & Pittman, 1982). We have chosen to base the conceptual model of OrgIC on reputation as it is an overarching construct that is necessarily applicable in all impression management scenarios (in which the audience comprises many stakeholders). While the definitions and relevance of other constructs may change depending upon the context of the service encounter, reputation offers a constant unit of analysis upon which determinations of in/congruence can be made.

Goffman (1959) and Jones and Pittman (1982), it is intuitive that reputation, defined as such, would result from these actions. Tedeschi (1981) alluded to this very point, proposing that an "actor's self-presentations may subtly lead to the development of power resources or reputational characteristics" (p. 15).

Several other scholars have addressed the relationship between projected images and the formation of reputations (e.g., Highouse, Brooks, & Gregarus, 2009; Rindova, 1997). For example, Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) proposed that reputations are the outcome of audience perceptions of projected images. A supporting characterisation is offered by Whetten and Mackey (2002), who discussed reputation as "the reciprocal of image," (p. 400), stating that, "organizational reputation is a particular type of feedback, received by an organization from its stakeholders, concerning the credibility of the organization's identity claims" (p. 401). This feedback is represented in Fig. 2. To elucidate this point, Whetten and Mackey (2002) drew upon Czarniawska's (1997) analogy of organisational identity as being akin to autobiography. As an extension, they proposed that an organisation's reputation is *biographical*, in that the audience receives and interprets the images that are projected through organisational impression management. Although the aforementioned scholars referred to reputation formation at the organisational level of analysis, Baumeister (1998) proposed that individuals utilise a similar feedback loop comprising self-presentation and audience evaluation.

Within the OrgIC model, the sport service organisation and its (individual) employees engage in impression management actions that may or may not be aligned with producing the organisation's desired image. The extent to which they do or do not align with this image will be determined by the processes of impression motivation and impression construction described earlier (see Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Consumer perceptions of all received images will lead to the formation of organisational reputation and collective/employee reputation (as an aggregate of individual reputations). Consumers may assign individual reputations from their service experiences with individual employees; however, these are incorporated into the collective/employee reputations that form, as is discussed henceforth.

2.3.1. Impression management of third parties

Scholars have tended to refer to organisational images as those projected by organisations themselves, as opposed to those projected by third parties. For example, Balmer and Greyser (2006) describe them as "the various outbound communications channels deployed by organisations to communicate with customers and other constituencies" (p. 735). Nonetheless, it is apparent that the reputations held by sport service organisations will not only depend upon the images emanating from the organisations themselves (at either the individual or organisational levels), but also those projected by third parties. As Rindova (1997) noted, "Regardless of how hard managers try to impose a firm's desired images on its constituents, constituents experience multiple influences… Institutional intermediaries [e.g., media, monitoring agencies, and competitors] facilitate the formation of impressions and evaluations of firms" (p. 192).

Accordingly, organisations must try to anticipate the extent to which their desired images will be refracted (Rindova, 1997), thus impacting the resulting reputation. While the conceptual model of OrgIC does not specifically depict the role of third parties in the impression management of sport service organisations, they represent an unavoidable part of the communication process. In other words, it is virtually impossible to project an image to consumers that will not be refracted in some way by some external entity. This is a reality that every top management team must consider when devising strategic communications, and a consideration that is implicitly built into real-world practice. The extent to which managers are able to successfully negotiate these obstacles is largely a question of understanding the environment in which a sport service organisation operates, and is beyond the capability of a conceptual model to predict.

2.4. Reputation at different levels of analysis

Ferris et al. (2014) noted that scholars have studied reputation at a single level of analysis (as opposed to multiple levels), almost without exception. The authors suggested that this sends an implicit message that the phenomena are somehow different at each level. In order to establish whether this was in fact the case, Ferris et al. (2014) conducted a comprehensive review of literature sourced from a number of disciplines (e.g., marketing, management, economics) to assess the similarities and/or differences between reputation phenomena at the individual, collective (e.g., team/unit), and organisational levels of analysis. Based on the antecedents and consequences of reputation described in previous research, Ferris et al. concluded, "reputation phenomena are essentially the same at all levels of analysis" (p. 241). In this regard, it is conceptually appropriate to consider individual and organisational reputations within the same conceptual framework.

Although the literature regarding the individual and organisational levels of analysis is well developed, Ferris et al. (2014) noted that their literature search produced few studies conducted at the collective level, particularly from the management and organisational science disciplines. In light of this, it is important to provide a clear conceptualisation of collective reputation, and how it functions within the OrgIC model.

In the present context, in which services are jointly produced by a number of actors, specific contributions of individuals are often obscured; thus, consumers have incomplete information about the production and delivery of the service. As such, the way that collective reputations are assigned becomes salient. Bar-Isaac (2007) suggested that consumers do not differentiate between individual and team reputations; however, the extent to which employees will be assigned a collective reputation will likely depend upon a number of factors (e.g., frequency of service encounters; proportion of encounters involving the same/different individual employees).

In sport service organisations, particularly larger operations where there is high employee turnover in consumer-facing roles (Schlesinger & Heskett, 1991), it is unlikely that the impression management actions of an individual will affect the collective/employee reputation among the larger consumer audience. Therefore, it is more likely that consumers' expectations of employees with whom they interact will be based upon their previous encounters with other team members in general (Bar-Isaac, 2007; Jeon, 1996). In light of this, collective reputation is conceptualised as an aggregate of individual impression management outcomes (i.e., consumer history dependence) (see also: Ertug & Castellucci, 2013; Tirole, 1996). To promote employee best-practice at the individual level, managers must address reputational feedback, which is discussed below.

2.5. Appropriation of feedback

It is vital that top management teams use reputation as a form of feedback to communicate areas of employee image incongruence to the workforce. It has long been established that customer service behaviours can be modified through the systematic application of behaviour management interventions (e.g., Brown, Malott, Dillon, & Keeps, 1980; Komaki, Blood, & Holder, 1980; Komaki, Waddell, & Pearce, 1977), such as conducting performance reviews, training employees to project desired images during service encounters, or introduction of/modification to internal marketing activities (e.g., employee motivation and satisfaction enhancement: see Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). In addition, top management teams should also address employee actions that *are* producing images congruent with those desired by the sport service organisation. These actions should be commended, both as a means of behavioural reinforcement and as an illustration of best practice (Crowell, Anderson, Abel, & Sergio, 1988).

Managing reputational feedback is also essential at the organisational level, and CEOs and top managers should ensure that consumer perceptions are accurately captured. Gray and Balmer (1998) suggested that this type of consumer research is typically outsourced to identity/image consultants; but a framework for determining OrgIC would increase the capacity for organisations to conduct research internally, using it to guide their evaluations. In either case, information gathered about organisational impression in/congruence stemming from organisational impression management actions can be used to modify communications methods, media, and other messages to consumers.

While reputation is a conceptually appropriate outcome of impression management, it is essential to understand how it operates at different levels of analysis. With regard to OrgIC, the organisational and collective/employee levels are of particular importance. This is both a conceptual and a practical consideration. First, establishing in/congruence between organisational and collective/employee reputations will produce inaccurate results if the phenomena operate differently across levels. Second, future development of scales to establish outcomes of OrgIC requires conceptual uniformity across levels of analysis.

At this juncture, one might question the necessity of impression management within the OrgIC model, when a large part of the emphasis is on reputation as an outcome. The simple explanation is that impression management, whether engaged in at the individual, collective, or organisational level is a precursor to reputation. In this regard, managers can attempt to affect certain activities that result in images being projected to external audiences. Looking only at reputation would provide little scope for managerial action. After all, every sport service organisation would like a good reputation, so a model of organisational *reputation* congruence potentially lacks utility.

2.6. In/congruent impression management outcomes

The following section describes the final step in the OrgIC model, in which congruence or incongruence is established. Hypothetical outcomes based upon previous literature are discussed.

2.6.1. Incongruent outcomes

The OrgIC model (see Fig. 1) illustrates how in/congruence between employee and organisational reputations is indicative of sub/optimal impression management. In line with impression management theories (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1982), we propose that when employees (collectively) and the organisation project the desired images, the sport service organisation's overall impression management goals will be realised. This manifests in the reputational outcomes at the collective/employee and organisational levels of analysis, as described in the previous section. It is proposed that achieving OrgIC will result in a number of favourable consumer outcomes (e.g., increased purchase behaviour, consumer loyalty, psychological connection, etc.), and the avoidance of negative consumer evaluation.

Underpinning this assertion is Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, whereby conflicting beliefs, attitudes, and/or behaviours produce feelings of discomfort (Elliot & Devine, 1994). In much of the consumer behaviour research concerning cognitive dissonance, scholars have addressed attitudes and behaviours related to product purchases (e.g., Menasco & Hawkins, 1978; Sweeney, Hausknecht, & Soutar, 2000); however, the central tenet of the theory is that, "If a person holds two cognitions that are inconsistent with one another, he will experience the pressure of an aversive motivational state" (Bem, 1967, p. 183). As such, the theory is equally applicable in the present context, when a behaviour (e.g., purchase) is implicitly—rather than explicitly—involved.

According to the conceptual model of OrgIC, incongruence between a consumer's beliefs and/or attitudes (i.e., reputations)[4] held about a sport service organisation at the employee and organisational levels would lead him/her to experience the aforementioned discomfort/negative state. In order to reduce this cognitive dissonance, individuals engage in one of four generalised strategies: (a) adaptation of their behaviour or cognition; (b) justifying their behaviour/cognition by changing the cognition; (c) justifying their behaviour/cognition by adding new cognitions; and (d) choosing to ignore the dissonant information (Festinger, 1957). Consequently, sport service organisations should seek to avoid impression incongruence/cognitive dissonance, as it could lead to consumers reducing or terminating consumption.

Based on the previous discussion of incongruence within the conceptual model of OrgIC, the following propositions are offered:

Proposition 1. When there is incongruence between the impression management behaviours of actors at the organisational and individual (employee) levels, reputational outcomes at each level will not align, resulting in cognitive dissonance among consumers.

Proposition 2. Cognitive dissonance among consumers will lead to unfavourable consequences for the sport service organisation, such as reduction or termination of service consumption.

It should be noted that the proposed consumer outcomes of OrgIC are contingent upon the images desired by the organisation also being desirable to consumers. Although an actor and audience will define aspects of a situation or context differently, many aspects of their definitions will typically coincide (Gardner & Martinko, 1988). Therefore, it is imperative that sport service organisations conduct sufficient consumer research to understand the needs, wants, and values of their audience. Similarly, there must be an understanding of customers' expectations of services prior to design and delivery (Engelland & Hensel, 1992). Essentially, for congruence between organisational levels to matter, there must first be congruence between what consumers desire, and what sport service organisations desire to deliver. Without this basis, the strategic direction embodied in impression management behaviours will be futile, irrespective of in/congruence between organisational levels.

2.6.2. Congruent outcomes

While cognitive dissonance explains the fallout from impression incongruence, cognitive *consonance*—which refers to simultaneously held cognitions that are consistent—underpins congruence between impressions projected at the employee and organisational levels. As proposed in the conceptual model of OrgIC, this will likely lead to positive organisational outcomes.

One such set of OrgIC outcomes relate to the sport service organisation's brand, and the brand associations that consumers make. In the interests of avoiding a tautology, it is helpful to differentiate between brands and reputations. Ettenson and Knowles (2008) noted that, "many executives talk about corporate reputation and brand as if they are the same. They are not, and confusing the two can lead to costly mistakes" (p. 19). The authors differentiate between *customercentric* brands that focus on the service being offered to consumers, and *companycentric* reputations that speak to the credibility and respect that an organisation commands from a variety of internal and external stakeholders (e.g., employees, consumers, etc.). Additionally, Keller's (2003) characterisation of brand image provides a helpful distinction, as he noted, "A positive brand image is created by marketing programs that link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand memory" (p. 70). In this case, the brand is an amalgamation of the images that a sport service organisation wishes to project, and reputations are consumer perceptions of those images.

According to Keller (2003), the strength of brand associations that consumers make with a particular organisation is dependent upon two factors: the personal relevance of the information (or images); and the consistency with which the information is presented. The second point is particularly pertinent to OrgIC, as the formation of organisational reputations is hypothesised as being contingent upon congruence between employee and organisational impressions. If both sets of images align with the desired brand over a long period of time, it is likely that consumers will make the intended brand associations.

In the consumer behaviour literature, Del Rio, Vazquez, and Iglesias (2001) found positive relationships between brand image and consumers' willingness to recommend the brand, pay a premium price for its products, and accept brand extensions. Within sport management, Gladden and Funk (2002) found that a positive relationship exists between brand associations and consumer loyalty among fans of sport teams. Other researchers have also demonstrated positive relationships between brand associations and brand equity (Chen, 2001), brand preference, and purchase intentions (O'Cass & Lim, 2002).

We propose that similar consumer outcomes can be accounted for by OrgIC, through the benefits of presenting consumers with a more coherent overall impression of the sport service organisation. Creating a unified image that incorporates both employees and the organisation as a whole reduces the potential for confusing, contradictory, or conflicted consumer assessments. As such, the following propositions were developed in relation to congruence within the conceptual model of OrgIC:

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[4] Money and Hillenbrand (2006) previously conceptualised reputation as a combination of beliefs and attitudes held about a focal unit, based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) causal model of beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours.

Proposition 3. When there is congruence between the impression management behaviours of actors at the organisational and individual (employee) levels, reputational outcomes at each level will align, resulting in cognitive consonance among consumers.

Proposition 4. Cognitive consonance among consumers will lead to favourable consequences for the sport service organisation, such as willingness to pay for services, positive recommendations, increased brand equity, and purchase/usage intentions.

3. Contributions, implications, and future directions

The conceptual model of OrgIC presented in the current paper contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, we answer calls for multi-level impression management research (Bolino et al., 2008; Dixon & Cunningham, 2006), and propose a new direction in the study of outcomes of impression management activities conducted by sport service organisations. This is achieved in three ways. First, scholars who have previously studied impression management outcomes have focused on dyadic interactions between employees and their colleagues and/or supervisors, with outcomes that are primarily instructive to individuals. By expanding the types of outcomes of impression management that are considered, OrgIC outcomes are oriented toward informing managerial action. Second, prior to Ferris et al.'s (2014) conclusion that reputation phenomena are the same at different levels of analysis, researchers had only focused on a single level in any one study (i.e., individual *or* organisational, but not both). This is expanded through the conceptualisation of reputation as an outcome of impression management at multiple levels, within a single conceptual framework. Third, the present conceptual model addresses the relative lack of scholarship pertaining to impression management outcomes for audiences that are external to the sport service organisation, such as consumers.

Additionally, the model also differentiates between images and identities that are involved in service encounters. Considerable attention has been paid to organisational identification and the implications for employers and employees. For example, Golant (2012) suggested that employees are more likely to "live the brand" if their roles are flexible, and they are given opportunities for individual interpretation. This has practical implications for sport service organisations, as they devise training and internal marketing schemes. How much focus should be placed upon internal marketing, versus role-specific training toward mastery of the service encounter?

We suggest that the extent to which identities are salient in sport service encounters is debatable, and that embedding organisational values might be unrealistic in this context. As Golant (2012) noted: "Authenticity is central because the concept of "living the brand" is very much concerned with how organisational values are deeply embedded in individual roles" (p. 116). Most customer-facing staff in sport service organisations are in tertiary level and/or temporary positions, and managers often have little time to dedicate to training. Accordingly, it might be preferable to train those individuals in impression management tactics, rather than attempting to instill organisational values. In this case, impression management functions as a manageable set of actions that can more feasibly align with the images the sport service organisation wishes to project.

It must also be acknowledged that there will be instances in which an actor projects images that are not part of the intended impression management action. In such instances, to continue Goffman's (1959) dramaturgic analogy, the curtain is unintentionally peeled back, and the audience is able to see the aspects of the actor's "true" identity. This can have implications for the projection of the image that was initially desired, and indeed, for the resulting reputation. Referring to such occurrences, Goffman (1959) stated, "Even sympathetic audiences can be momentarily disturbed, shocked, and weakened in their faith by the discovery of a picayune discrepancy in the impressions presented to them... a single note off key can disrupt the tone of an entire presentation" (pp. 51–52). This highlights the importance of maintaining and successfully executing impression management activities. In this regard, future research should be conducted that explores the potentially negative impacts of impression management crises.

Finally, the authors introduce the prospect of examining reputation at different levels of analysis in a comparative fashion. Establishing in/congruence between the multi-level reputations that form as a result of impression management actions necessitates measurement and comparison between these values. As such, one of the biggest challenges will be to empirically capture reputations at collective/employee and organisational levels. Identifying the degree to which OrgIC is/is not achieved can be instructive for managers and top management teams within service organisations. Empiricising in/congruence would enable scholars to investigate consumer outcomes of OrgIC (e.g., consumer loyalty, psychological connection, consumer-based brand equity, etc.) as an indication of where impression management outcomes are helping or hurting the organisation.

A further direction for future research will be to use the conceptual model of OrgIC as a framework for examining consumer outcomes based on (a) different types of sport service organisations, and (b) different consumer segments. In the former case, the characteristics of the organisation (e.g., large/small, for-profit/non-profit, and different types of services rendered) will likely produce different expectations of organisational impression in/congruence among consumer audiences. As noted, it is also likely that, due to the perceptual and socially-constructed nature of reputations, different consumer groups will respond in different ways to in/congruence. Sport management scholars have demonstrated extensively that consumers' attitudes and behaviours differ greatly based on individual factors (e.g., motives and constraints: Kim & Trail, 2010; psychological connection to sport objects: Funk & James, 2006). As such, it is pertinent to

examine consumer outcomes based on demographic, psychographic, and behavioural segmentation. The results of such investigations will not only help to build theory related to multi-level impression management in sport organisations, but also provide specific information that can be of benefit to managers operating different types of sport service organisations in various industries.

One limitation to the conceptual model of OrgIC is that impression management is not the only aspect of consumer experience impacting the reputation ascribed to an organisation. For example, impression management by both the organisation and its employees may be congruent with desired images, but if the core product is sub-standard, overall experiences may lead to negative consumer evaluation. However, wholesale changes to core products are often not possible, and one thing is certain—management of reputation has become a key responsibility for CEOs and top management teams in all industries (Gray & Balmer, 1998). Although no conceptual model can tell organisations which consumer segments to target, or how to strategically position their service within the marketplace, OrgIC can assist in the identification of impression management strengths and weaknesses, and serve as an evaluative tool to this end.

Furthermore, the conceptual model of OrgIC has greater applicability to sport service organisations in which there is a clear distinction between employees at the organisational and individual levels, than to those in which that distinction is less apparent. For example, it would be harder to establish in/congruence in a smaller sport service organisation where members of the top management team are also required to assist with direct customer interactions. As such, the model is perhaps more instructive for those operating in larger organisations. Despite this, the model can still serve as strategic tool for designing staff training, and identifying areas of improvement within sport service organisations of all sizes.

Consumer perceptions of the images projected by organisations and their employees are crucial to both short and long-term success. Sport service organisations attempt to project images that they believe will be attractive to their target audience, yet the success of these overarching communications is subject to successful interactions between consumers and employees during a number of different touch points. Understanding the outcomes of in/congruence through the proposed conceptual model of OrgIC represents an important contribution to sport and service management research, and a step toward increasing effectiveness in practice.

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