

# From Participation to Consumption: The Role of Self-Concept in Creating Shared Values Among Sport Consumers

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**Introduction:** The contribution of sport organizations to solving social issues has been acknowledged. However, little is known about how sport organizations can turn social issues into business opportunities as a means of creating shared value (CSV). Building on self-concept theory, a framework was established to examine how sport organizations can promote sport participation and simultaneously drive sport consumption—as a means of CSV—by enhancing consumers' sport self-concept.

**Methods:** A total of 311 participants recruited from a CSV program delivered by a sport organization completed a time-lagged survey. Structural equation modeling was performed with Mplus 8.3 to test the framework.

**Results:** The results revealed that consumers' sport self-concept was enhanced by their perceptions of sincere interest from employees of the sport organization, while effect of their perceptions of praising was insignificant. Sport self-concept has a positive association with their levels of sport participation and simultaneously influences their intention to purchase the sport organization's products due to self-congruity.

**Discussion:** This study contributes to CSV literature by demonstrating the role of sport self-concept in CSV in a sport setting. Our findings suggest that sport organizations might focus on strengthening consumers' sport self-concept to create both social and economic value through their CSV.

**Keywords:** shared value creation, sport self-concept, sport marketing, social value, economic value

## Introduction

Generating positive social impact is an imperative mission of sport organizations.<sup>1,2</sup> A sport organization is broadly defined as an entity that provides sport-related goods, services, and activities in the market.<sup>4</sup> For decades, sport organizations – and especially professional sport teams and sportswear brands (eg, Adidas and Nike),<sup>5,6</sup> – have actively engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) by donating money and conducting community outreach.<sup>1,7</sup> However, outcomes of traditional CSR activities were not as significant as expected because of a lack of long-term strategic focus and connections with organizations' core business interests.<sup>8–10</sup> In light of the limitations of traditional CSR, scholars have begun to explore more strategic approaches, such as cause-related marketing,<sup>11,12</sup> triple bottom line frameworks<sup>13</sup> and corporate social marketing<sup>14</sup> to optimise sport organizations' social performances.

Following this trend, this study extends previous literature by using the concept of creating shared value [CSV];<sup>15</sup> to explore how sport organizations may create social outcomes that strategically align with their core business. CSV refers to corporate strategies that allow a corporation to simultaneously solve social problems in relation to its value chain and pursue economic benefits.<sup>9</sup> For example, Adidas has partnered with a non-profit organization to produce and sell low-cost sportswear to disadvantaged communities in India;<sup>16</sup> this partnership creates social value by providing quality, affordable products to people who are in need, while a positive economic outcome is achieved through market expansions.<sup>15</sup> In 2021, Adidas grew its profits by 53% in India.<sup>16</sup> Beyond this example, researchers have provided additional evidence of

how sport organizations have benefited from adopting CSV.<sup>8,17–19</sup> While these studies shed light on the salience of CSV, more research is needed to further understand how shared value can be created in the sport domain.

Some recent Research<sup>9,20,21</sup> highlighted consumers' role in CSV, as they are stakeholders for whom organizations should take responsibility,<sup>18,22</sup> and the premise of CSV is to sustain competitiveness by generating economic benefit and simultaneously fulfilling unmet societal needs.<sup>15</sup> However, the extant research addressing the effect of CSV on consumers tended to focus on enhancing corporate reputations.<sup>9</sup> Thus, its findings do not answer the question of what social needs are met and how the fulfilled needs drive consumers' purchase intention with a specific organization.

Given the gaps in the CSV literature, the purpose of this study is to assess what social and economic value may be created by sport organizations from the consumer perspective. More specifically, by investigating a CSV program delivered by a sport organization, we seek to understand how sport employees may encourage sport participation for health among consumers as a means of CSV and concurrently enable the sport organization to leverage business opportunities by increasing consumers' purchase intention of their products. A conceptual framework were established based on self-concept theory and self-congruity theory.<sup>23,24</sup> This framework proposes that high levels of sport self-concept motivate consumers' sport participation for health, and their intention to buy products of a certain brand. In this sense, if consumers' sport self-concept is influenced when interacting with employees of sport organizations, then sport organizations may create shared value by encouraging sport participation and simultaneously drive sales of its products among consumers.

## Research Context

Because CSV research is still at an early stage, the research context illustrates how sport organizations may create shared value. This research was conducted within the specific context of the Nike Run Club in Shanghai (hereafter NRCSH). To support a switch in marketing focus from basketball to running sportswear, Nike launched a running-based CSV program in five major Chinese cities in 2014, including NRCSH<sup>3</sup>. The NRCSH aims to inspire people to go running as part of a healthy lifestyle which increased the popularity of running in China.<sup>19</sup> Employees of the NRCSH, who are certified coaches, offer consumers various running classes six times a week at no charge, with options for beginners to advanced runners (NRC, n.d.). To strengthen consumers' positive running experiences, they created a motivational climate by applying autonomy-supportive behaviours,<sup>25</sup> such as running along with participants, playing recreational games, and praising consumers for their performances. By participating in NRCSH classes, consumers can maintain a regular schedule of running, which has been found to improve people's health and quality of life.<sup>26</sup> Enhanced health represents a means of social value.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the launch of the NRCSH contributes to Nike's business interests by increasing the population of runners, who are also potential consumers (NRC, n.d.);<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, the NRCSH conduct various marketing activities to increase consumers' image of Nike's brand. For instance, when delivering classes, NRCSH employees – who are professional runners – wear Nike's latest products. Their appearance can align the image of a professional runner with the brand image,<sup>27</sup> which may imply that professional runners should wear Nike's sportswear. Such marketing strategies may drive consumers' intention to buy products from the brand.

In this example, Nike's strategy can create social outcomes (ie, promoting sport participation) as well as economic outcomes (ie, expanding markets and increasing brand congruity), which is consistent with the aims of CSV.<sup>15</sup> According to the China Runners Annual Report,<sup>28</sup> the number of runners who ran at least three times a week increased by 20% in 2021 compared to 2020. From the business perspective, people's self-reported expenses on running shoes increased to \$303 in 2021, and their preferences for Nike over other sport brands increased by 8.1%.<sup>28</sup>

## Literature Review

### Creating Shared Value

The concept of CSV is defined as

policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates.<sup>15</sup> [p. 66]

The core principle of CSV in generating social and economic outcomes has attracted attention from scholars across disciplines, including marketing,<sup>20,21</sup> hospitality,<sup>29</sup> tourism<sup>30</sup> and sport management<sup>8,18,19</sup>. Corporations can advance their competitiveness by solving social problems that contribute to their business returns.<sup>15,31</sup> There are some overlaps between CSV and other similar concepts, particularly CSR.<sup>32,33</sup> However, in practice, corporations implement CSV with specific business philosophy, driving forces and implications that differ from CSR.<sup>9,21</sup>

Companies are not capable of solving all social problems through CSV.<sup>9,15,32</sup> Instead, CSV proposes that companies should be more active and strategic in recognising unmet needs in the market and redesigning their products to fulfil those needs<sup>15</sup> rather than responding to stakeholders' pressures.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the CSV approach consists of a series of activities aimed at value creation in the long run rather than a one-off activity for goodwill.<sup>9,19</sup> Moreover, under a CSV approach, solving social issues is a part of business operations and should yield a direct economic return,<sup>15,33</sup> while CSR is often implemented through peripheral activities such as donations and volunteering that may enhance corporate reputation but have only indirect connections with core business.<sup>10,32</sup> To this end, CSV activities are internally driven by companies seeking business returns and hence are pursued so long as they obtain substantial economic benefits.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, CSR activities are often responses to external pressures that usually cease when the activities no longer receive positive public attention.<sup>32,33</sup> Consequently, corporate activities following a CSV approach focus on outcomes that should create social and economic value simultaneously,<sup>15</sup> while CSR activities emphasise the process of enhancing corporate reputations and often neglect the outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the rationale of CSV is not to diminish the importance of CSR but to energise a more strategic approach that promotes the betterment of society and business.<sup>17</sup>

## Creating Shared Value in Sport Organizations

While some scholars have suggested a positive relationship between sport organizations' community support and their financial performance,<sup>4,7,34</sup> CSR is sometimes ineffective in securing profitability.<sup>10,35</sup> CSV may become an attractive business model for sport organizations to gain community support and competitiveness within a target market. To understand this dynamic, sport management scholars have begun to explore the applicability of CSV in sport contexts<sup>8,17–19</sup>. For example, Hill et al<sup>8</sup> examined how a professional sport league reconceived its products and markets by delivering a CSV program in the UK. It achieved social value by promoting children's sport participation for health. Simultaneously, by engaging in the program, children's levels of identification with the league and its sport increased, which may be transferred to the league's future markets and thus contributes to the program's economic value.

In a multinational sport organization, Wu et al<sup>19</sup> found that employees perceived their organization's CSV activities in terms of its contribution to social, economic and sport values. Kim et al<sup>20</sup> found that sport fans' awareness of CSV programs (ie, benefits for the local community and team) implemented by their favourite teams enhance their team trust. As a result, sport fans reported increased willingness to attend more games in the future. Strategies for CSV may remedy the challenge that confronts many social programs, namely that realising social outcomes is time-consuming.<sup>7</sup> Although these studies provide contextual support for investigating CSV within sport settings,<sup>8,19</sup> what social and economic value a sport organization creates has not yet been examined.

## Self-Concept Theory

*Self-concept* is defined as the thoughts, feelings, and understanding people have regarding who and what they are in relation to experiences with and interpretations of external contexts.<sup>23,36</sup> Self-concept theory postulates that people frame their perceptions of themselves within a collection of positive experiences and knowledge.<sup>36–38</sup> Although self-concept was once treated as a global construct,<sup>23</sup> more recent literature has argued that the examination of a domain-specific self-concept, such as an academic or sport self-concept, is more reliable in predicting attitudes and subsequent behaviours related to the domain.<sup>37,39</sup> For example, a successful athlete is likely to have a strong perception of sport self-concept;<sup>39</sup> hence, examining athletes' sport self-concept is more appropriate than their global self-concept to understand their sport-related behaviours.

Sport self-concept refers to the formation of self-concept based on one's sport experiences and skills.<sup>37,39</sup> We adopted this definition as the current study focuses on how people's sport self-concept and subsequent outcomes were influenced when interacting with employees of a sport-related CSV program. Previous research posits that sport self-concept results

in certain positive outcomes, such as improved sport participation, physical and mental health and social cohesion.<sup>39–41</sup> The overarching rationale for sport self-concept as a motivation for positive outcomes emphasises that people who perceive themselves positively regarding their sport experiences feel competent through their engagement in a specific sport.<sup>37,42,43</sup> To maintain this positive feeling, people continue to devote efforts to enhancing their sport self-concept.<sup>39</sup> This study examines the influence of motivational climate because increasing autonomous motivation significantly affects one's continuous participation in programs like NRCSH to which participants do not have obligations.

## Self-Congruity Theory

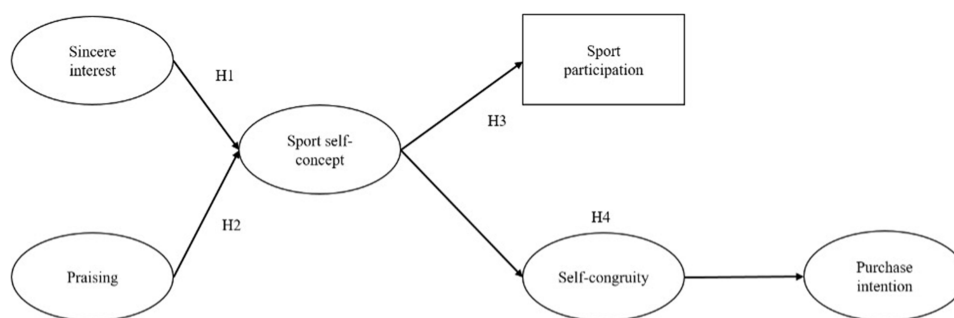
As a sub-theory of self-concept,<sup>24,44</sup> self-congruity theory suggests that consumers tend to purchase given products from organizations when they perceive similarities between the organizations' image and their own self-concept.<sup>24,45</sup> Aligning with the function of symbolic purchase,<sup>44,46</sup> this theory postulates that when consumers perceive a considerable level of self-congruity, they are motivated to purchase the brand's product as a reinforcement of their actual selves (ie, who they really are) or to pursue their ideal selves (ie, who they want to be);<sup>42,45</sup> According to Sirgy<sup>47</sup>, self-congruity is significant and reliable in predicting subsequent purchase intentions and behaviours because it "leads to the satisfaction of self-concept needs" (p. 200). The higher the level of congruity one perceives between self-concept and a brand, the more likely the person is to purchase the brands' products. Hence, self-congruity was suggested as a mediator that explains the relationship between one's self-concept and consumption.<sup>47</sup>

## Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Promoting sport participation may serve as a "hot spot" for sport organizations to create shared value.<sup>8,19</sup> This study seeks to examine what and how social and economic value may be created by a sport organization from consumers' perspectives. A conceptual framework was established based on self-concept theory and self-congruity theory (Figure 1).<sup>23,24</sup> According to self-concept theory, people's domain-specific self-concept (ie, sport self-concept) is improved by positive experiences of participation and environmental factors, such as praise from peers.<sup>23,37</sup> High levels of sport self-concept then motivate persistent sport participation, which enhances health,<sup>26,37</sup> and therefore represents a means of social value. Based on self-congruity theory,<sup>24,42</sup> a sport organization's engagement in cultivating and promoting sport self-concept may drive people's intention to purchase its products through the perceived congruence between consumers' self-concept and the organization's image.<sup>46</sup> Within this framework, we hypothesise that sport organizations may create shared value by reinforcing consumers' sport self-concept,<sup>39</sup> which creates social value by promoting consumers' sport participation and thus fosters good health<sup>15</sup> and simultaneously creates economic value by stimulating sport consumption through perceived brand congruity.<sup>42</sup>

## Influence of Employee's Support on Consumer's Sport Self-Concept

Within the current research context, NRCSH employees strengthen consumers' positive experiences of NRCSH running classes by applying specific behaviours, including running with consumers, facilitating various social interactions [eg,



**Figure 1** Hypothesized model.

**Note:** The circles represent latent variables. The rectangle represents observed variable.

greeting and talking with consumers, playing games, sharing running tips) and praising and respecting consumers' performance. According to Coatsworth and Conroy<sup>25</sup>, these employee behaviours function to increase people's motivation for sport participation and are characterised as *autonomy-supportive behaviours*. Researchers argue that employees can use autonomy-supportive behaviours to facilitate consumption when interacting with consumers.<sup>48,49</sup> These behaviours provide consumers with a motivational climate in which they are encouraged to express their self-concept.<sup>44,49,50</sup> For instance, Brown and Fry<sup>49</sup> found that when consumers perceive autonomy support – such as being cared for, respected or praised – from service providers, they feel more satisfied and confident regarding their choices, resulting in numerous positive outcomes such as enjoyment, behavioural persistence, increased purchase intention, and brand loyalty.

This body of research identifies two primary categories of autonomy-supportive behaviour: sincere interest and praise.<sup>49,51</sup> *Sincere interest* demonstrates the extent to which sport employees (ie, coaches of a training class) care about their consumers (ie, trainees), such as portraying their respect for consumers and their interests in understanding consumers' feelings and views.<sup>49,51</sup> *Praise* represents the sport employees' positive attention to and acceptance of the consumers' sport skills and performances.<sup>51</sup> Similar to Brown and Fry<sup>49</sup> and Conroy and Coatsworth<sup>51</sup> in the current research context, employees of a sport organization's CSV program motivate consumers to participate in sport by using praise and increasing consumers' perceptions of employees' sincere interest during employee-consumer interactions. Based on the above discussions, we hypothesise the following:

H1: Consumers' perceptions of sincere interest from sport employees have positive associations with their sport self-concept.

H2: Consumers' perceptions of praise from sport employees have positive associations with their sport self-concept.

## Influence of Sport Self-Concept on Sport Participation for Health

According to Porter and Kramer<sup>15</sup>, enhancing health conditions on the societal level represents an important social value within the CSV model. As such, a central premise of the current study is that sport organizations can contribute to people's health by encouraging sport participation in communities. Sport participation means taking part in all forms of sport and physical activities that improve people's physical fitness and enhance subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction through positive sport experiences.<sup>26,52</sup> Previous researchers have argued that the more people participate in sport, the more likely they are to have better subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction.<sup>40,53</sup> Sport self-concept serves as a source of motivation that directs people's behaviours in a way that reinforces their self-concept.<sup>37,39</sup> In the sport domain, studies have provided evidence of a positive effect of one's sport self-concept on sport participation.<sup>37,51</sup> However, the current study was conducted in a setting where consumers are aware that the NRCSH has business intentions when delivering running classes to shape their self-concept. Based on previous literature and the importance of understanding whether the relationship between sport self-concept and sport participation is observed in a business context, we hypothesise:

H3: Consumers' sport self-concept is positively associated with their sport participation.

## Mediation of Self-Congruity

Previous research has assessed how a brand establishes self-congruity by shaping its image or personality to better fit consumers' self-concept.<sup>36,44,45</sup> However, whether self-congruity can be fostered by influencing consumers' self-concept has not yet been examined. Sirgy<sup>24</sup> proposed the possibility of organizations achieving self-congruity by gradually influencing and changing consumers' self-concept. However, Sirgy also pointed the difficulty in changing one's self-concept which is stable. Because of the influence of sport on people's self-concept,<sup>37,43</sup> sport organizations may have the potential to activate the self-congruity effect by encouraging consumers' sport participation.<sup>8,42,48</sup> For example, Abel et al<sup>48</sup> and Hang<sup>42</sup> suggested that the environment of a sport organization, such as a fitness club or golf course, may influence consumers' self-concept over the course of frequent patronage. Positive perceptions of self-congruity were identified as a significant predictor of consumers' intentions to purchase products for sport participation.<sup>42,46</sup> In the current research context, we seek to understand how a sport organization's CSV program creates economic value in a way that facilitates consumers' purchase intentions by changing their sport self-concept; we therefore hypothesise that:



H4: Consumers' perceptions of self-congruity positively mediate the relationship between their sport self-concept and purchase intentions.

## Methods

### Research Participants and Data Collection

Data were collected from NRCSH members who registered in the NRCSH online community and participated in training sessions within the three months prior to data collection (access to participant's contact information was granted by the NRCSH). Overall, there were 2677 NRCSH members who met the selection criteria. Before delivering the survey, a minimum sample size was calculated based on the item-to response ratio of 1:5.<sup>54</sup> Because the model included 22 items, the minimum sample size should be 110.

A two-wave time-lagged design was employed to measure the independent and dependent variables separately. This design can reduce possibilities that respondents provide similar responses patterns for all items measured which causes common method bias.<sup>55</sup> The first questionnaire was distributed to the 2677 potential respondents via email, and 645 individuals responded. The second-wave survey was provided to those 645 respondents eight days after they returned the first questionnaire,<sup>55</sup> and it was completed by 311 individuals. Of those 311, 75.2% were male. The mean age of the respondents was 33.4 years old ( $SD = 5.4$  years); 80.7% had at least an undergraduate degree; 67.8% had an annual income above the average annual income of China residents [ie, USD \$13,000].<sup>56</sup> On average, the respondents ran 20.9 kilometres per week ( $SD = 10.2$  kilometres).

### Measurements

A 7-point Likert scale (ie, from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 7 = "Strongly Agree") was adopted to measure all model variables (see Table 1 for descriptions of the items) except for the scale of sport participation, which was measured by asking respondents to report their weekly running mileage. To measure sincere interest and praise, the Coaches' Autonomy Support Questionnaire (CASQ),<sup>51</sup> was adopted. Modifications were made by replacing *coaches* with *NRCSH employees* to adapt to the current study (eg, "NRCSH employees listen to my reflection during training."). The constructs of sincere interest and praise were measured in the first-wave survey (hereafter referred to as T1). The remainder of the constructs were measured in the second-wave survey (hereafter referred to as T2) eight days later. Marsh et al's<sup>38</sup> domain-specific self-concept scale was administered in the current study. We replaced *mathematics* with *running* in all questions to adapt to the current research focus. The representative question was "I feel competent when running". Sport participation was measured by asking respondents to indicate their average weekly mileage.<sup>57</sup> Self-congruity was measured with Sirgy et al's<sup>24</sup> five-item self-congruity scale. The purchase intention measurement was based on a four-item scale assessing consumers' willingness to buy a specific brand.<sup>58</sup> We replaced *Brand X* with *Nike* for the scales of self-congruity and purchase intention (eg, If I were shopping for a sport brand, I'd consider Nike.).

### Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the translated survey, a pilot test was conducted prior to the main study. A questionnaire with measurements for all the constructs was distributed to NRCSH runners in December 2018. Through convenience sampling, 203 participants completed the survey; these participants were then excluded from the main study. The data were analysed for multivariate normality and internal consistency using IBM SPSS 26.0.

In the main study, we applied structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine the hypotheses using the Mplus 8.3 statistical package. SEM is an appropriate statistical method for studies examining latent variables that cannot be directly measured,<sup>54</sup> such as the sport self-concept in the current study. Comparing to traditional statistical methods, SEM considers the imperfect nature of measurements and hence includes measurement errors when specifying models.<sup>59</sup> It is more reliable for estimation. Following Hair et al's<sup>54</sup> procedures, a measurement model was first tested by a confirmatory factor analysis. A structural model was then developed to assess the hypothesised relationships.

Overall model fit was examined based on the goodness-of-fit indices.<sup>59</sup> Cut-off values of 0.95 for comparative fit index (CFI), 0.08 for standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) and 0.06 for root mean square error of

approximation (RMSEA) suggest a good model fit. The standard factor loading exceeding 0.60,<sup>54</sup> average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, construct reliability (CR) values greater than 0.70<sup>60</sup> and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios smaller than 0.85<sup>61</sup> support the reliability and validity of the scales.

According to the recommended mediation analysis,<sup>54</sup> self-congruity as a mediator was examined to assess whether the indirect effect of the product of the paths from sport self-concept to purchase intention through self-congruity would be statistically significant. A nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5000 incidences of re-sampling was employed to calculate a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect. An indirect effect is identified if the 95% CI excludes zero.<sup>54</sup>

## Results

### Pilot Testing

As presented in Table 1, the values of item-to-total correlations among all items were over the cut-off point of 0.50.<sup>62</sup> The Cronbach's alpha scores of the scales were located between 0.86 and 0.94, supporting the internal consistency.<sup>63</sup> The results of the pilot study indicate that the scales are reliable in the Chinese context and can be used for the main study.

**Table 1** Psychometric Properties of All Items Analysed for the Pilot Study and Main Study

Scales/Items	Pilot Study (n = 203)		Main Study (n = 311)		
	ITTC	$\alpha$	Loading	CR	AVE
<i>Sincere interest (T1)</i>		0.92		0.91	0.72
NRCSH employees offer me choices about what we do for training.	0.77		0.80		
NRCSH employees treat me with respect.	0.93		0.90		
NRCSH employees care my opinion about what I want to do.	0.74		0.86		
NRCSH employees listen to my reflection during training.	0.79		0.83		
<i>Praising (T1)</i>		0.86		0.90	0.84
NRCSH employees praise me for things that I choose in training	0.73		0.71		
NRCSH employees praise me for attitude during training	0.84		0.91		
NRCSH employees praise me for my effort during training	0.81		0.91		
NRCSH employees praise me for decisions I made in training	0.83		0.85		
<i>Sport self-concept (T2)</i>		0.94		0.89	0.74
I feel myself share many similarities with other runners.	0.85		0.82		
Running is one of my best sports.	0.76		0.90		
I get good marks in running.	0.83		0.82		
I feel competent when running.	0.85		0.89		
In my training, I finish even the most difficult task.	0.83		0.86		
<i>Self-congruity (T2)</i>		0.92		0.93	0.84
The typical user of Nike reflects how I see myself.	0.84		0.87		
People similar to me prefer to wear Nike.	0.87		0.91		
I would like to be known as a Nike user.	0.81		0.94		
I feel a close connection to Nike users.	0.85		0.92		
<i>Purchase intention (T2)</i>		0.93		0.92	0.76
If I were going to buy a sport product, I'd choose Nike's.	0.82		0.88		
If I were shopping for a sport brand, I'd consider Nike.	0.87		0.92		
My willingness to shopping for Nike is higher than other sport brands.	0.90		0.93		
The probability that I'd consider buying Nike is high.	0.73		0.72		

**Abbreviations:** ITTC, Item-to-total correlation;  $\alpha$ , Cronbach's alpha; All standardized factor loadings were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ); CR, Composite reliability coefficients; AVE, Average variance extracted.

## Testing of Data Normality

A Skewness–Kurtosis test were performed before the SEM. The results showed that the values of Skewness ranged from  $-1.67$  to  $0.48$ , and the values of Kurtosis located between  $-0.35$  and  $5.49$ , which suggested the abnormal distributions of each variable were not of significant magnitude to affect the results of SEM.<sup>63</sup>

## Testing of the Measurement Model

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that the measurement model yields a good model fit ( $\chi^2(348.82) / df(160) = 2.18$ , CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04). Standard factor loadings, provided in Table 1, meet the recommended threshold of 0.60.<sup>54</sup> All the constructs had AVE values above 0.50 and CR values above 0.70.<sup>60</sup> These results support the construct reliability and convergent validity of the multiple item scales. Regarding the discriminant validity, Table 2 indicates that the square root values of AVE for sincere interest (0.92), praising (0.90), sport self-concept (0.86), self-congruity (0.92) and purchase intention (0.87) are greater than the correlation coefficients between any pair of the constructs, thus meeting the recommendations.<sup>60</sup> As further support of discriminant validity, the HTMT ratios across all constructs are smaller than 0.85.

## Testing of the Structural Model

The SEM yielded the following results for the goodness-of-fit indices of the structural model:  $\chi^2(428.22) / df(183) = 2.34$ , CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07, and SRMR = 0.08. Although some of the values are slightly below the recommended criteria, the combined indices suggest that the model fit is acceptable. Table 3 presents the standardised path coefficients, *t*-value, *p*-value, and the bias-corrected 95% CI of the hypothesised model. Sincere interest had a significant positive association with sport self-concept ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H1. Praising had a nonsignificant relationship with sport self-concept ( $\beta = -0.07$ ,  $p = 0.68$ ), and H2 is therefore not supported. Sport self-concept was positively associated with sport participation ( $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming H3.

To test the mediating effect of self-congruity, we first assessed the direct paths from sport self-concept to self-congruity and from self-congruity to purchase intention. The results in Table 3 indicate that the association between sport

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics and Discriminant Validity Tests of the Measurement Model

Construct		1	2	3	4	5
1	Sincere interest	0.92				
2	Praising	0.59	0.90			
3	Sport self-concept	0.27	$-0.07^a$	0.86		
4	Self-congruity	0.19	$0.11^a$	0.35	0.92	
5	Purchase intention	0.15	0.18	0.28	0.54	0.87
	<i>M</i>	6.32	6.42	5.28	5.23	5.19
	<i>SD</i>	0.88	0.90	1.53	1.48	1.42
1	Sincere interest	—				
2	Praising	0.78	—			
3	Sport self-concept	0.34	0.28	—		
4	Self-congruity	0.24	0.25	0.46	—	
5	Purchase intention	0.28	0.32	0.29	0.62	—

**Notes:** N = 311. The top matrix shows the results of the discriminant validity test applying Fornell and Larcker's<sup>60</sup> criterion; in this matrix, diagonal values represent the square-rooted average variance extracted, and the remaining values represent correlations between the constructs. The bottom matrix shows the results of the discriminant validity test applying HTMT<sub>85</sub> criterion. <sup>a</sup>Nonsignificant correlation ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Abbreviations:** M, Mean; SD, Standard deviation.



**Table 3** Summary for Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesized Paths		$\beta$	SE	t-value	p-value	Bootstrapping (95% CI)		Results
						Lower 2.5%	Upper 2.5%	
Direct effect								
H1	Sincere Interest $\rightarrow$ Sport Self-Concept	0.27	0.06	2.91	0.00	0.22	0.37	Support
H2	Praising $\rightarrow$ Sport Self-Concept	−0.07	0.07	1.16	0.68	−0.07	0.14	Reject
H3	Sport Self-Concept $\rightarrow$ Sport Participation	0.37	0.09	5.12	0.00	0.31	0.49	Support
	Sport Self-Concept $\rightarrow$ Self-Congruity	0.33	0.08	4.36	0.00	0.37	0.52	
	Self-Congruity $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.53	0.04	9.12	0.00	0.48	0.63	
Indirect effect								
H4	Sport Self-Concept $\rightarrow$ Self-Congruity $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.17	0.07	2.53	0.00	0.11	0.25	Support

**Notes:** N = 311. The absolute value of T-value should be greater than 1.96 to be significant at p-value < 0.01.

**Abbreviation:** CI, Confidence Interval.

self-concept and self-congruity is positive ( $\beta = 0.33, p < 0.01$ ), as is the relationship between self-congruity and purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.53, p < 0.01$ ). The bias-corrected 95% CI for the indirect effect of self-concept excludes zero [0.11, 0.25]. The coefficient of self-congruity within the relationship between sport self-concept and purchase intention is also significant ( $\beta = 0.17, p < 0.01$ ). Thus, H4 is supported.

## Discussion

Based on the investigation of a sport organization's CSV program, this study sought to understand how a sport organization may create social value and concurrently leverage business opportunities. The results reveal that consumers' perceptions of sincere interest positively influenced their levels of sport self-concept, while the impact of perceived praising was insignificant in this case. As hypothesized, consumers' purchase intentions and sport participation, which represented the shared value, were positively associated with a high level of sport self-concept. Self-congruity mediated the relationship between consumers' sport self-concept and purchase intentions. These findings provided empirical evidence of how a sport organization may implement CSV by promoting consumers' sport self-concept. More specifically, the example of the NRCSH reveals that Nike created social value by encouraging people's sport participation for health and simultaneously created economic value by driving those runners' intentions to purchase Nike's products. In addition, the findings indicate that the influence of praise on consumers' sport self-concept may not be as robust as suggested by the literature.<sup>25,37,49</sup> For example, in their study of community swim league participants, Coatsworth and Conroy<sup>25</sup> determined that participants' perceptions of praise as part of autonomy support from coaches significantly predicted their behavioural competence and perceptions of self. Notably, the effect of praise was stronger than that of sincere interest in Coatsworth and Conroy's<sup>25</sup> analysis.

This discrepancy may be explained by how praise was perceived among participants in the NRCSH. Research on verbal praise summarises three types of behavioural reinforcement: completion-dependent, quality-dependent and performance-independent.<sup>64</sup> For the first two types, praise is based on how well people performed, while performance-independent praise is usually provided so long as people participate. When people find that the praise they receive has no relation to their performance, it is no longer a reinforcement that enhances their perceptions of competence and subsequent behaviours.<sup>64,65</sup> furthermore, it may even make "people engage in the activity less than they did before"<sup>68</sup> [p. 144]. Our field observation of the NRCSH classes supports the explanation of performance-independent praise: consumers were praised by NRCSH trainers so long as they participated in the training, regardless of how well they accomplished training tasks. As a result, consumers may have felt that NRCSH trainers praised them as part of the program requirements rather than out of genuine interest in their performances. Consequently, the praise failed to enhance sport self-concept.

## Theoretical Implications

There are several theoretical contributions that need to be highlighted. First, by confirming the theoretical framework within the context of a sport CSV program, this study explained how shared value was created by a sport organization. Specifically, we identified sport self-concept as a key construct – a “sweet spot”<sup>15</sup> – in forming a mutually supportive structure for sport organizations to create social and economic values. Hence, this research responded to a call by scholars indicating the importance of more studies that provide theoretical and empirical evidence of how CSV works in the sport domain.<sup>8,17,19</sup> Second, this study measured the social value with a direct behavioral outcome (ie, the average mileage a consumer ran weekly). This direct measurement supports Hills et al.’s<sup>8</sup> initial finding that sport organizations can promote sport participation as a way of creating social value. This study advances Hill’s research by demonstrating consumers’ purchase intention as a means of creating economic value.

Another key contribution to the literature provided by this study is an alternative way to enhance consumers’ self-congruity. Previous research investigating the self-congruity primarily focused on how a brand can change its image to meet consumers’ self-concept.<sup>42,45–47</sup> Our research advances the past studies by providing evidence that sport consumers’ self-congruity may be created by influencing their’ self-concept because of the strong impact of sport in changing people’s behaviours and psychological states.<sup>26,42,67</sup> As shown in the case of the NRCSH, employees led and encouraged consumers, especially those who lacked motivation for sport participation, to go out and run as part of a healthy lifestyle. By cultivating these new runners, NRCSH constructed their self-concept around running and strengthened their association with the brand (Nike), which further increased consumers’ self-congruity with Nike. By delivering the NRCSH, Nike creates social value by cultivating runners and encouraging sport participation for a healthy lifestyle. The company also creates economic value because those runners are likely to become loyal Nike consumers as their self-concept regarding running is highly associated with the brand. As such, the business opportunity is aligned with fulfilling social needs, thereby meeting the criteria of CSV.

## Practical Implications

The current study offers a practical proposition for sport managers to incorporate CSV into their organizations. The positive effects of sincere interest and the nonsignificant effect of praise on NRCSH participants’ sport self-concept suggest that creating a climate in which people are treated with kindness, respect and patience – characteristics of employees’ sincere interest in their customers – is imperative for enhancing the effectiveness of CSV programs. Simply praising and encouraging participants may be ineffective when interacting with adults. For programs similar to the NRCSH, such as Adidas Runners and NRC in other countries (eg, the UK, the US, Japan), the current findings suggest potential techniques for employees to bolster participants’ self-concept. For example, employees can extend a warm welcome when each participant arrives at the meeting point, facilitate interactions among participants and engage in more conversations with participants during breaks.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, the way employees praise and encourage participants should be task-oriented;<sup>49,50</sup> that is, participants need to know why they are being praised. Providing specific instructions about participants’ task accomplishments, performance quality and further improvements are more useful than vague compliments.

Second, the specific sport CSV program, namely NRCSH, demonstrated and examined in the current research provides an alternative for sport organizations to positively contribute to society. That is, compared to a CSR model, which holds “doing good in society” as a normative practice without aiming at profitability,<sup>7,10</sup> a CSV model redefines the practice to address societal problems and generate economic benefits simultaneously.<sup>9</sup> Following the CSV model, sport organizations can sustain their involvement in a social agenda as long as there is potential for revenue growth. Sport organizations should thus reconsider how their business goals connect with social initiatives.<sup>8,19,68</sup> To this end, our study suggests a way of implementing CSV by reconceiving products and markets in a sport context.

Although this study examined a CSV framework using the case of a sport manufacturer, its focus on the mutual benefits of promoting sport participation and expanding the core business market presents an alternative approach to sustainable development for other sport organizations. The British Basketball League (BBL) provides a pertinent example. The BBL was established at the same time as the Premier League of English football. However, unlike its

football counterpart, which receives considerable attention across the United Kingdom and the world, the BBL has struggled to increase its audiences.<sup>69</sup> The application of a CSV model may facilitate the BBL franchise's investments in attendance by spreading knowledge of basketball and promoting basketball-related activities at the grassroots level. The franchise can provide free basketball training programs to children at all levels, which would differ from youth football academies that focus on selecting and cultivating future elite players. The basketball program would be less competitive and aim to promote enjoyment and wellness by cultivating children's taste for playing basketball. The program would be more inclusive, with no evaluation required for admission. Parents could register their children for trainings one week in advance. To foster loyalty, the franchise could periodically assign professionally renowned players to coach and interact with the children. The basketball training would not only enrich children's choice of sport but also influence their sport preferences. Children's involvement in basketball may then drive their parents' decisions to watch basketball games to support their children's hobby and sport development.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, these children may engage in basketball more deeply and become basketball fans.

## Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that should be noted when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the study proposed a framework suggesting the outcomes of CSV as health improvement through sport participation and revenue growth, but it examined the mileage participants ran in a week and their intention to buy Nike's product as indirect measures of those social and economic outcomes. Although these two measures are often used as proxies for actual behaviours,<sup>26,70</sup> they are not always equivalent to actual health improvements and consumption. For example, while a purchase intention represents the extent to which an individual is willing to buy a product or brand,<sup>71</sup> previous research has identified certain constraints – such as household income, time and product accessibility – that may impede consumers from translating their intentions into related behaviours.<sup>72</sup> Hence, further research is necessary to conduct more direct measures of the social and economic outcomes of CSV.

Secondly, this study did not control for the exercise levels among runners, such as the differences between beginners and advanced runners, because of a limited sample size. Although a beginner may run fewer miles per week than an elite runner, both types of runners could devote the same amount of effort to running, and their levels of involvement are similar.<sup>67</sup> Hence, their levels of health and life satisfaction might be the same. As such, simply measuring the mileage an individual runs in a week may not perfectly represent the association between sport participation and health. To improve upon this measurement limitation, it is important to consider people's attitudes toward health and sport in future studies.

Finally, the framework may have limited generalisability because it examined the specific case of the NRCSH; this issue could be resolved by testing the framework in other sport contexts where CSV is implemented. For example, Nike's global NRC program has also been implemented in other countries such as the UK, the US and Japan (NRC, n. d.). The framework proposed in this study can be assessed within these NRC programs and then expanded to other similar CSV programs, such as that of the National Football League,<sup>8</sup> which uses sport as a vehicle to pursue shared value in markets.

## Conclusion

Overall, building on self-concept theory, the present study proposed a framework to explain how sport organizations can create shared value in their business practices. Specifically, using NRCSH, a CSV program ran by Nike, as a specific case, this study empirically examined relationships between sport consumers' perceptions of employees' autonomy support (ie, sincere interest and praising), sport self-concept, and subsequent behavioral responses of purchase intention and sport participation. The results contributed to the CSV literature by demonstrating how sport organizations can create shared value through their business and hence extended the application of CSV in the context sport.

## Ethics Approval and Informed Consent

This study involved human respondents who were aged 18 and over during data collection. The investigation was approved by the IRB at the University of Minnesota. All respondents were informed that their responses would be used for academic publications and signed the consent form.

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