

The Halo Effect in Sports

Prof. Dr. Gerd NUFER

Natalie ALESI

Reutlingen University
ESB Business School
Germany

Abstract

A halo effect can lead to significantly biased and distorted judgments in numerous situations and settings in daily life. However, its impact has barely been researched in the sporting environment, although it might help a great deal in understanding how sport fans think and behave. This paper provides an international literature review on the halo effect in different research fields. Built upon this state of the art, an empirical study based on two German soccer clubs, VfB Stuttgart and FC Bayern Munich, analyzes the presence of halo effects explained by social identity theory. The study shows that supporters rate aspects of the respective team, for example the president's competency, more favorable than common sport spectators, and this effect even increases with a higher level of team identification.

Keywords: halo effect, heuristic, cognitive bias, sports, sport management, sport marketing, soccer, football

Introduction

People make numerous judgments and decisions every day. These might be only small ones like deciding what to wear or which dish to choose, but also more relevant ones like what to study or which business strategy to follow. People usually take it for granted that their judgments and decisions are based on objective and logical thinking. The truth is, however, that human thinking is quite often unconsciously influenced by cognitive biases. Cognitive biases can be seen as errors in thinking that lead to distorted decisions and judgments (Kahneman, 2012). Given the huge amount of information available in our environment and the often restricted time to make a decision, it is impossible to thoroughly process and analyze each and every piece of information. Therefore, people tend to use mental shortcuts, heuristics, that help to make decisions easily and quickly (Tversky & Kahneman, 1975). While heuristics often lead to accurate and valid conclusions, they are also highly susceptible to cognitive biases. As such errors are prevalent in everyday life and can entail serious consequences it becomes obvious why research in this area is of great importance.

This paper focuses on the halo effect, which is a widespread and widely researched cognitive bias. The halo effect was first termed by Thorndike (1920) and occurs when a global impression or information about a salient characteristic influence how other traits are judged. The effect works in two directions, so that positive information results in more positively evaluated traits and similarly negative information leads to more negatively evaluated traits (Gräf & Unkelbach, 2016). Halo effects are particularly encouraged when the characteristics to judge are rather ambiguous or hard to observe, nevertheless they can also be strong enough to influence how well-known and easily observable attributes are rated (Landy & Sigall, 1974). Research on halo effects is conducted in various research fields, particularly in job or educational based settings where truthful and unbiased judgments are significant.

However, so far only little research has been conducted on halo effects in sports. Fans' emotional involvement in the sporting environment makes them often decide and act more irrationally as compared to less involved individuals (Smith & Steward, 2010). Given these distinctive features, it is interesting to examine how these characteristics interact with halo effects. While previous research suggests that halo effects lead to better evaluations of aspects that belong to a person's favorite team and to worse evaluations of aspects that belong to a rival team (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010), this paper will further examine whether such halo effects also occur within one team. That is, will victory or defeat of one's favorite team influence how other aspects of the team are evaluated?

To answer this question, an empirical study was conducted in professional soccer. Based on findings of previous research, the paper hypothesizes that if a fan's favorite sports club is successful, sporting and non-sporting aspects of the respective team are perceived and evaluated much better as compared to the evaluations that are made if the team is unsuccessful. It is further assumed that the level of team identification with the respective team will influence the strength of these halo effects. In order to provide an answer to the research questions, an online survey was conducted among fans of two German soccer clubs.

2 Literature Review

Based on international literature, existing knowledge about the effect and relevant concepts will be discussed and compared. Therefore, relevant studies in the main research areas of halo effects are reviewed.

2.1 Characterization of the Halo Effect

The halo effect influences how people judge events or other individuals and often results in an unjustified relation between usually unrelated traits. While already in 1907 Wells observed an effect where a first impression influenced the evaluation of other characteristics, Thorndike (1920) was the first to come up with the term halo effect (Schmitt, 1992). He observed the effect while investigating how army officers are evaluated. Thorndike noticed that the ratings of different and non-related traits of an officer were often highly correlated. Therefore, he concluded that these findings suggest an effect that makes raters biased by an overall impression of a person – the halo effect.

After these findings, numerous studies followed where first impressions were manipulated to see whether this manipulation really influences subsequent ratings. Most of these studies came to similar conclusions and thus further supported the existence of the halo effect. With studies, also many different definitions followed, however, most of them can be grouped into two main explanatory approaches.

Borman (1975) described the effect as the tendency to base the judgments of several characteristics of a person or object on a global blanket judgment, and also Nisbett & Wilson (1977) agreed that halo effects mainly stem from general impressions and global evaluations that influence how other characteristics are evaluated. Blaming a global impression for the erroneous judgments is the most pervasive explanation in literature. That is why Fiscaro & Lance (1990) consolidated these definitions in the "general impression model".

Other researchers however, found that halo effects not necessarily have to stem from global impressions but can also be triggered by a salient trait. In other words, the positivism or negativism of one attribute might spread out to other traits that consequently are perceived as similar. Asch (1946) argued that when forming an impression about another person, some information is more central than others. He showed that the information on whether a person is warm or cold is such an example and has the strength to influence the way less important traits are evaluated. As here the halo effect is triggered by a salient trait instead of a global impression, Fiscaro & Lance (1990) grouped these explanations in the "salient dimension model".

Now when processing and analyzing information, the global impression of the respective person or the information about a salient trait is used for subsequent judgments and thus represent a mental shortcut (heuristic). In the end, all definitions and explanations lead to the same result which is an erroneous judgment of distinct and often not related characteristics (Borz & Döring, 2009). Therefore, the halo effect is often also referred to as halo error or logical error (Boatwright et al., 2008).

2.2 Main Fields of Research on Halo Effects

Halo effects are of high relevance in both science and practice. Studies on the halo effect exist in various areas, however most studies can be found in educational-based settings and the business world.

2.2.1 Halo Effects in Social Psychology

Especially in areas where truthful and unbiased judgments and assessments are highly important, like in job or school related contexts, the influence of halo effects is pervasive and can entail serious consequences.

Goldman et al. (1983) examined how students rate a speaker based upon initial information about his or her personality. Before listening to a short presentation some of the students were given information about the speaker as either being warm or cold. In a subsequent rating where students assessed different traits of the speaker, such as self-confidence or presentation skills, significant halo effects were detected. That is, students in the "warm condition" evaluated the speaker much better than students who did not receive any initial information.

Similarly, students in the "cold condition" evaluated the speaker much worse. As all students evaluated exactly the same speaker giving exactly the same presentation, these findings support the assumption that information about one characteristic can have the strength to essentially influence how other traits are evaluated.

A similar study was conducted by Keeley et al. (2013). They produced two videotaped lectures of a professor which students had to evaluate. Instead of giving initial information, here few behaviors of the professor were manipulated in one of the videos. As a logical consequence, the manipulated attributes should have been evaluated differently among the two videos, while everything else should have stayed the same. However, the study showed that the manipulation of only few attributes also had a significant influence on how other, unchanged attributes were evaluated. These findings suggest that again a halo effect emerged resulting in biased and distorted judgments. It seems like students generalized the manipulated items, built an overall opinion about the professor's characteristics and consequently judged other traits based on this impression.

Halo effects, of course, do not only influence how students evaluate a speaker or professor but also work the other way around. Malouff et al. (2013) showed how evaluations of a student's performance can be influenced by preceding performance appraisals. Professors and teaching assistants were listening to either a good or a bad student presentation and evaluated it accordingly. As participants subsequently assessed an unrelated essay of the student, exactly the same essay was evaluated much better when they listened to the good presentation before. Therefore, Malouff et al. (2013) concluded that a student who has performed well before may be rated as performing subsequently at a higher level than a student who has not performed so well in the past but who objectively shows the same performance. These findings suggest that, when feasible, it makes sense to keep students anonymous during grading.

Apart from halo effects stemming from initial information, previous performances or specific behaviors or traits, such effects can also be triggered by a person's attractiveness. An individual's physical appearance often is the first observable characteristic when meeting another person. Therefore, people initially tend to build first impressions and judge other individuals based on their looks. Several studies support the existence of the so-called attractiveness halo effect and show that good-looking individuals are often automatically described with a bunch of positive characteristics. Feingold (1992) supported previous findings by Eagly et al. (1991) showing that better-looking individuals are often perceived as more competent and sociable, while Sheppard et al. (2011) found that attractive people are often perceived as more intelligent as well. The list with studies that came to similar conclusion seems endless.

Landy & Sigall (1974) examined the influence of the attractiveness halo effect in the field of performance appraisal. In their study participants read either a badly or a well-written essay and subsequently assessed author and essay quality. Some participants additionally received a facial picture of the author prior the evaluation, either being an attractive or unattractive female. Analyzing the ratings revealed that the attractive author and the respective essays were evaluated much better than the less attractive author and related essays, suggesting a halo effect stemming from the author's level of attractiveness. These effects were particularly significant for the poorly written essay. As evaluations for these essays also showed a higher standard deviation, it seemed to be the more ambiguous stimulus. This again supports the earlier mentioned theory that halo effects often emerge when the traits and performances to judge are ambiguous or hard to evaluate.

Another very recent study was conducted by Palmer & Peterson (2016) who examined the attractiveness halo effect in a political setting. While previous studies already found that good-looking candidates are often perceived as more competent and thus are often elected by politically less engaged people (Ballew & Todorov, 2007), Palmer & Peterson examined whether this effect also influences social interactions. When people with only little knowledge about politics are forced to make a decision, they often search for more knowledgeable individuals to catch up on relevant political information. The study found that due to the halo effect, attractive individuals are often expected to be well-informed and have a better political knowledge. As a consequence, these people are often chosen to gather information or engage in political discussions. Thus, if a person mistakenly was taken for knowledgeable and credible, more poorly informed individuals engage in political elections what further might have an influence on important political outcomes (Palmer & Peterson, 2016).

2.2.2 Halo Effects in Management

Rosenzweig (2014) showed how halo effects can lead to erroneous judgments about business performance and wrong beliefs about the forces that drive company success or failure.

He argues that for a successful company in terms of sales and profits, people automatically infer that these great numbers stem from a good strategy, skilled leaders, motivated workers and the like. Similarly, after an unsuccessful business year with falling sales and only little profits, factors like a poor strategy or incompetent workers are automatically made responsible. This way of thinking is widespread in the business world and also used in some famous business literature. According to Rosenzweig the reason for these misinterpretations is the complex nature of internal factors like a company's strategy, its corporate culture or its style of management. These factors are usually hard to assess and thus individuals find it easier to base their judgments on obvious and easily accessible numbers like the company's financial performance.

Various studies support this theory. An experiment conducted by Staw (1975) showed exactly this way of thinking. In his experiment, students were assigned to different teams and conducted a brief group work. Following this, all teams received a short performance feedback by the professor. Although all teams performed similarly, some teams received a positive evaluation while the others were given a negative feedback. A subsequently completed questionnaire by each student showed that members of apparently well-performing groups described their team's effectiveness in a more positive light and gave much better ratings for questions such as the team's communication or motivation as compared to members that were part of a low performing group. Again, students' knowledge about the outcome significantly influenced their ratings of the entire group work.

Another example provide Meindl et al. (1985) who showed that a company leader was either described with positive or negative characteristics depending on the company's performance. Therefore, Rosenzweig (2004) also concluded, that exactly the same leader seems to be either described as visionary, charismatic and with strong communication skills or as hesitant, misguided and arrogant depending on whether the company's performance was assumed to be good or bad.

Given these findings, Rosenzweig (2014) heavily criticized many business books and articles where well-known researchers, professors and business leaders talk about the most important business principles and provide formulas for success. He argues that they often neglect the influence of halo effects and thus are responsible for the widespread misconception about the real drivers of company success. Many authors claim that their formulas are highly accurate and reliable and that following specific rules will lead to success. However, company performance is relative and is influenced by internal and external factors, thus each decision involves a certain amount of risk and even good decisions and well-developed strategies can turn out badly. Given these uncertainties, a formula for company success simply does not exist and the evaluation of internal factors solely based on company performance can be seen as a gross oversimplification (Felser, 2007). In order to overcome the halo effect induced by the overall company performance and to improve strategic decisions, it is essential to also improve one's power of critical thinking and to identify and counteract misperceptions. Rosenzweig (2014) concludes that executives should clearly understand the role of uncertainty in business and instead of automatically inferring good decisions from good performances they should rather focus on and analyze internal processes and decisions themselves.

2.2.3 Halo Effects in Marketing

In modern society, people continuously care more about a fit and healthy lifestyle and trends like detox or veganism continue to rise. This development can also be seen in consumer behavior as an ever increasing number of people shop for healthy food (Trivedi, 2011). However, researchers found that people often mistakenly perceive products as healthy. This error is referred to as the "health halo effect" (Chandon & Wansink, 2007). Health halos occur when consumers form biased impressions of a product (e.g., healthy) from limited information that may not always be objectively correct (Burton et al., 2015). These halo effects mostly stem from claims, symbols or tags that are attached on product packaging, shelf tags or advertisements. Claims like "no trans fat" or "low in calories" often cause consumers to automatically associate other healthy characteristics with the respective product without having information that might support these assumptions. Chandon & Wansink (2007) brought up a good example demonstrating this effect. They showed that people significantly underestimated the calorie content of their food, when it came from an apparently healthy fast food restaurant (e.g. Subway). Similarly, Schuldt et al. (2012) found that most consumers automatically assume that as organic labeled chips have significantly fewer calories than comparable products without such labels. In both cases people came to wrong conclusions based on the health halo effect and inferred favorable evaluations for attributes they have no or only limited information about.

While previous studies mostly focused on the health halo effect in general, Sundar & Kardes (2015) also drew a connection to actual consumption. They found that health halos not only influence how products are perceived, but also have an essential influence on actual consumption rates.

Hence, even products that are mistakenly perceived as better and healthier are bought more often. While this is great for respective marketers and product manufacturers, the effect can also be malicious for consumers. Especially for people that suffer from obesity or other diseases where a right nutrition is essential, these effects can lead to risky conclusions such as the assumption that they can eat more or need to do less exercise because they consume healthier food (Sundar & Kardes, 2015).

Halo effects do not only occur when people judge how healthful a specific product is, but also more generally when information about specific product attributes is missing or difficult to judge. Therefore, when people make purchasing decisions without having sufficient information about the respective product attributes or contents, halo effects often occur and influence product judgments and finally the decision which one to buy. While literature mostly focuses on errors stemming from this heuristic, Boatwright et al. (2008) brought up a good rationale for a positive influence of halo effects. They argue that the occurrence of halo effects in buying decisions minimizes the estimation risk and thus maximizes a person's utility. A consumer's utility can be defined as the total satisfaction he or she receives by consuming a specific product. The consumer will be satisfied the most, when buying a product for which all attributes show the desired characteristics. However, people never have complete information about each characteristic and thus need to estimate unknown attributes. Boatwright et al. therefore argue that, contrary to general literature, using the halo effect is a good way to reduce estimation risks. That is, treating unrelated attributes as if they were related when information is missing results in better estimates than evaluating each attribute independently. Therefore, the researchers conclude that using the halo effect might not always be a non-optimal behavior but in contrast a quite good rational in buying decisions.

2.2.4 Halo Effects in Sports

Halo effects in sports are a so far only little researched topic. While some studies are conducted in a sporting environment, the main focus mostly lies on other areas like marketing or business in general. Nevertheless, given the special characteristics often put down to sport fans, the halo effect is an interesting topic to research in such settings.

The general concepts of halo effects may also be transferred to sports. That is, judging traits or capabilities of an athlete based on a global impression, physical appearance or other special characteristic. This phenomenon is also discussed in a podcast from Sports Illustrated where executive director Jon Wertheim and psychology professor Sam Sommers talk about halo effects (Wertheim and Sommers, 2015). Sommers suggested that global impressions of famous athletes often stem from social media. A NFL quarterback, for example, might be assumed to be a nice guy when he is often related to his family in media. That is, people tend to like him as a person and refer these feelings to his ability as a quarterback. Similarly, good-looking athletes might be perceived as better performers because of their looks. While no explicit studies in such settings exist, previous findings about halo effects and how other people are perceived and judged support these assumptions.

A study conducted by Hickman & Lawrence (2010) examined positive and negative consequences of sponsorship based on halo effects. Although the main focus does not lie on sports, the study offers good insights and explanations on how sport fans reason and behave and thus is worth being reviewed. Corporate sponsorship of a sports team is a popular marketing tool as it increases brand recognition and improves a company's image. In addition, especially sport fans with a high degree of team identification often transfer the loyalty for their favorite sports club to its sponsor, resulting in positive brand attitudes and the engagement in commercial activities. However, while Hickman & Lawrence agree on the positive effects sponsoring can imply for a company as found by previous studies, they criticize that no one ever thought the other way around, arguing that sponsorship not only attracts loyal fans of the respective sports club, but at the same time also might repel loyal fans of the rival sports club. That is why the researchers wanted to examine the existence of potentially negative halo effects as well. The study named this effect the "pitchfork effect". Hickman & Lawrence found that for the favorite team's sponsor, the brand and related purchasing intentions were evaluated much better as compared to the rival team's sponsor and vice versa. However, while an increased degree of team identification strengthened the positive attitude for the own team's sponsor, it did not significantly influence the perception of the rival's sponsor. To explain this halo and pitchfork effects, Hickman & Lawrence made use of the social identity theory, first explained by Tajfel & Turner (1986). According to this theory, people define themselves and others in terms of group memberships. These groups can either be personal identities based on specific personality traits such as being intelligent or being honest but can also be social identities that determine a person's membership within a social category such as nationality, political affiliation or team identification with a specific sports team.

These groups are either groups of belonging, so called in-groups, where the person itself is part of, or groups of not belonging which are denominated as out-groups. This grouping facilitates an easier evaluation of other individuals and their behaviors and attitudes within these groups. Through corporate sponsorship of a person's favorite team, the company shows a connection to the same social category. As a result, positive evaluations about other members of the group spill over to the sponsor brand as well. Similarly, sponsoring a rival's team and thus belonging to the rival's social category (out-group) leads to a worse perception of the brand. Thus, halo effects cause overall impressions of a social group to spill over to other evaluations as soon as the person or object in question is seen as belonging to the respective group. For judgments made within an in-group, these effects become even stronger the more an individual identifies him- or herself with this group (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010).

Similar to the above reviewed study, extensive literature examining the psychology of sport fans makes use of the social identity theory to explain behaviors and attitudes within these groups. Fandom is often seen as an escape from everyday life and sport fans particularly enjoy the communal spirit among other fans as well as the emotions and the rush of adrenalin coming with it (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). What differentiates sport fans from common sport spectators is the personal importance fans assign to the respective sport. While common spectators are usually only involved during the sport is actively observed, sport fans are continuously involved and their fandom is seen as an inherent part of their daily life. That is, they are also emotionally involved to a much greater extend and think and talk about their team on a regular basis (Spinrad, 1981; Jones, 1997; Shank & Beasley, 1998). Apart from above mentioned reasons for being a sport fan, motivation often stems from the desire to be part of a successful environment. Therefore, social identity theory often goes hand in hand with the concepts of "BIRGing" and "CORFing", which describe another interesting feature of sport fans. BIRGing stands for "basking in reflected glory" and explains how sport fans publicly relate themselves to successful others in order to also position themselves as successful. In contrast, especially fans with lower team identification tend to distance themselves from others as soon as they are unsuccessful. This behavior is called CORFing which stands for "cutting of reflective failure" (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010).

Given these distinct features of sport fans, it becomes obvious why they might not behave the way one would actually expect. Nufer (2016) argued that most fundamental principles in general marketing cannot be used and need to be thoroughly adapted when applied in a sporting environment. Sport fans are far away from common consumer, as particularly at sporting events they are a significant factor influencing atmosphere and consequently the overall quality of the event. That is why he also referred to sport fans as "co-creator of value" and "dual producers" (as being producer and consumer at the same time) (Nufer, 2016). He further stated that given the high involvement of passion and emotions in sports and fans' high level of loyalty, their consumer behavior is quite irrational.

3 Empirical Study

The following empirical study analyzes whether sports fans' emotions and their high level of involvement, their behaviors, decisions and judgment underlie irrational cognitive processes as long as they are made in a sporting environment. Therefore, it is interesting to research how these features interact with cognitive biases such as the halo effect. Do their irrational behaviors make them more susceptible to halo effects? Or does exactly this irrationality prevent them from being influenced? While the previous reviewed study about corporate sponsorship already showed a halo effect when judging in-group and out-group's sponsor, halo effects within one social category have not been examined so far. Therefore, the following study will try to give a deeper insight into this field of research.

3.1 Hypotheses

The halo effect has been examined in various areas but only rarely in the sporting environment. Given the distinctive features of sport fans, the question comes up whether such halo effects also emerge among soccer fans. As success and failure are important attributes in the sporting environment, the study hypothesized that this factor is strong enough to influence how other traits are rated.

Hypothesis 1:

If a fan's favorite sports team is successful, he or she will rate other aspects within this environment better, and vice versa an unsuccessful team will trigger worse evaluations of these aspects.

Team identification is another important factor when examining how sport fans think and behave. A study about sponsoring (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010) showed that fans with a higher level of team identification also assigned better ratings to the team's sponsor as compared to less identified fans. This sound like a logical consequence, as especially high identified fans often transfer ratings of their team and corresponding items to themselves. Therefore, this study assumes that also in this setting a higher level of team identification will result in overall better ratings. However, it is further argued that due to the high involvement of passion and emotions in sports and often entailed irrationality, particularly high identified fans might be more susceptible to halo effects.

Hypothesis 2:

The influence of halo effects on ratings increases with a higher level of team identification.

Another interesting questioning is to which extend team success or failure also influence fans' judgments and behaviors outside the sporting environment and in daily life. Shank & Beasley (1998) argued that highly identified sport fans tend to think and talk more often about their favorite sports club and thus their passion and emotions for sports are more likely to be carried over to daily life. The study further suggests that team success and failure have a higher influence on the mood of highly identified fans, which in turn also influences judgments in everyday life. This suggestion builds upon findings of several researchers (Clare & Huntsinger, 2007) who showed that a person's affective state is often reflected in their judgments.

Hypothesis 3:

The higher the level of team identification, the higher is the influence of team success or failure on a fan's affective state.

Based on the social identity theory and social categorization, the study on sponsorship (Hickman&Lawrence, 2010) suggested that halo effects lead to better evaluations of aspects that belong to a person's own social category. As it is assumed that such halo effects also occur in other settings, the study hypothesizes that overall ratings of fans should be higher than ratings made by the control group.

Hypothesis 4:

Sport fans generally rate aspects of their favorite sports team better as compared to common sport spectators.

3.2 Methodology

Data were collected from soccer fans of the two German sports clubs FC Bayern Munich and VfB Stuttgart playing in premier and second league respectively in the season 2016/17. General sport spectators who were familiar with both teams served as control group. This context was selected as in the reach of the questionnaire most sport enthusiasts favor one of these teams in the south of Germany. Moreover, two different teams were chosen to increase the number of people participating in the survey and to further avoid team-specific results that cannot be carried over to other teams or settings.

The survey was created and shared with the online tool Sosci survey among German soccer fans. To reach as many potential test persons as possible, the questionnaire was distributed in social networks such as Facebook and further shared in local sports clubs in December 2016. As the survey took no more than three minutes, sufficient people could be animated to participate and complete the online questionnaire.

In total, 256 questionnaires were collected. However, as 40 incomplete surveys had to be excluded, N = 216 usable questionnaires were taken for analysis. This sample consists of 104 VfB fans (48%), 77 FCB fans (36%) and 35 common sport spectators (16%). With 81%, male participation dominated significantly. Most respondents (62%) were between 20 and 29 years old, while 19% were between 10 and 19 years and the other 19% were distributed between 30 and 59 years of age (14% = 30 – 39 years; 2% = 40 – 49 years; 3% = 50-59). Common sport spectators served as control group. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was performed to determine whether gender and age was equally distributed among those groups. The results showed that there were no significant difference in distribution of gender ($\chi^2(4, N=216) = 0.69, p > 0.05$) and age ($\chi^2(16, N=215) = 11.29, p > 0.05$) among groups.

3.3 Research Design

In the introductory part, participants were told about the topic and reasons for the questionnaire and their anonymity was ensured. The first question then divided respondents into fans of the VfB, fans of the FCB or the control group.

Participants that were identified as fans subsequently answered four questions to determine their level of team identification, defining for example how much importance is put on being a fan and the like. These questions were adapted from Wann & Branscombe (1993) who defined the "Sport Spectator Identification Scale".

For these, and also for following questions, the survey used modified versions of five-point Likert-type scales that have been verified for validity and reliability before by other researchers (Rohrman, 1978).

Following the evaluations for team identification, sport fans were divided into four experimental groups. VfB fans were randomly distributed into equally sized groups of "VfB Success" or "VfB Failure" and similarly, FCB fans were distributed among "FCB Success" and "FCB Failure" conditions. Each group read a short paragraph recalling either successful or unsuccessful games of their favorite sports team. Subsequently, they rated sporting and non-sporting aspects such as the competency of the coach or liking of the team's jerseys to assess whether the initial information influenced their judgments. To further determine whether feelings from a team's success or failure are also carried over to everyday life, respondents additionally stated to which degree the team's performance influences their mood. Directly asking for daily life aspects such as "how much do you like your work" was seen as inappropriate as too many other variables might influence these judgments. Based on previous research suggesting an influence of a person's mood on their judgments (Clare & Huntsinger, 2007), the study chose the mood variable to answer this question.

The control group only evaluated sporting and non-sporting aspects for both teams without getting initial information about their performance. Their evaluations can later be compared to fans' ratings to test whether a halo effect as described by (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010) can also be verified in this setting.

In the last step, all respondents were asked to state their gender and age.

3.4 Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2013 and SPSS 20.0.

Hypothesis 1 predicted halo effects in evaluations of sporting and non-sporting aspects based on initial information about team success or failure. Firstly, means and standard deviations for each question were calculated and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare evaluations on all aspects in success and failure groups. The results are consolidated in Table 1. For ratings of the VfB coach's competency, for example, there was no significant difference for evaluations made by the success ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.76$) and the failure ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.66$) group; $t(102) = -0.48$, $p = 0.63$. Similar results were obtained for all compared ratings on coach competency, president competency, liking of jerseys and liking of stadium. That is, all p-values stayed above a significance level of 0.05 and thus no significant differences were found.

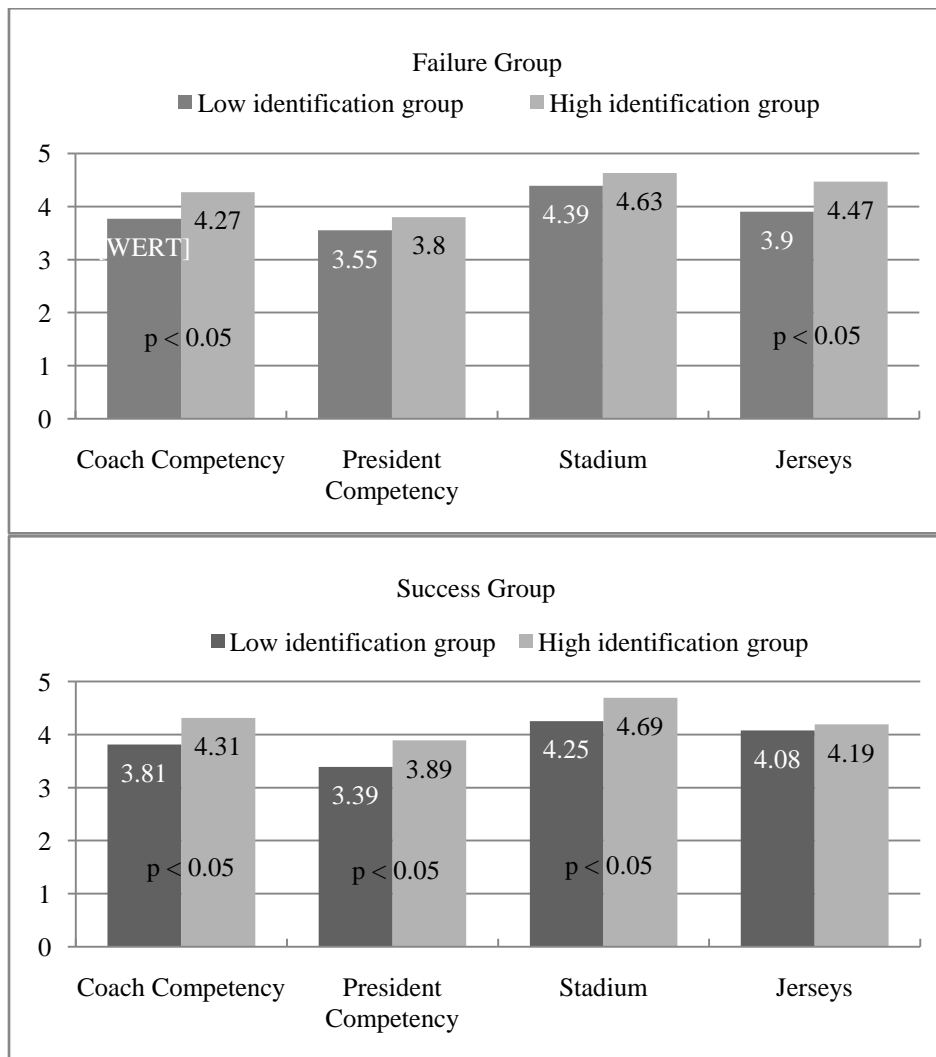
Table 1: Means and t-tests comparing success and failure groups

	Experimental Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Test for Equality of Means		
					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
VfB Coach Competency	VfB Success	51	4.22	0.757	-0.484	102	0.630
	VfB Failure	53	4.28	0.662			
VfB President Competency	VfB Success	51	3.10	0.700	-1.115	102	0.267
	VfB Failure	53	3.26	0.812			
VfB Stadium	VfB Success	51	4.45	0.702	-0.435	102	0.664
	VfB Failure	53	4.51	0.669			
VfB Jerseys	VfB Success	51	4.18	0.817	-0.079	102	0.937
	VfB Failure	53	4.19	0.761			
FCB Coach Competency	FCB Success	39	3.97	0.843	0.671	75	0.504
	FCB Failure	38	3.84	0.886			
FCB President Competency	FCB Success	39	4.46	0.854	0.585	75	0.561
	FCB Failure	38	4.34	0.938			
FCB Stadium	FCB Success	39	4.59	0.637	-0.107	75	0.915
	FCB Failure	38	4.61	0.638			
FCB Jerseys	FCB Success	39	4.10	0.680	-1.833	75	0.071
	FCB Failure	38	4.39	0.718			

As for this study, differences in evaluations among success and failure groups are of interest rather than sports club specific evaluations, success groups and failure groups of both sport teams were consolidated for further analyses.

The scores for the four questions on team identification were averaged, resulting in one variable that represents a fan’s level of team identification. Overall, VfB and FCB fans scored rather high on this dimension (M = 3.72, SD = 0.95). To test whether the level of team identification influenced ratings as predicted in hypothesis 2, success and failure groups were further divided based on respondents’ level of team identification. That is, participants with a lower level of team identification (M = 1 to M = 3.5) were put together and similarly, participants with a higher level of team identification (M = 3.6 to M = 5) were grouped. Splitting the groups at a level of M = 3.5 was chosen by the researcher as it represents the point at which scores for team identification switch from a moderate level of identification (M = 3) to a high level of identification (M = 4). For each group, means and standard deviations again were calculated and independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare evaluations on sporting and non-sporting aspects in the high identification and the low identification group. A comparison of the means showed that in success and failure groups, respondents with a higher level of team identification rated aspects better than people with a lower level of team identification. These differences were particularly significant for success group’s ratings on coach, president and stadium, and failure group’s ratings on coach and jerseys, all showing p-values below the 0.05 significance level. Success group’s ratings of coaches’ competency, for example, showed a significant difference in the evaluations made by the high identified (M = 4.31, SD = 0.70) and the low identified (M = 3.81, SD = 0.86) group; $t(88) = -3.10$, $p = 0.003$ (see Figure 1).

Figure1: Comparison of means between high and low identification groups



To detect possible halo effects dependent on team identification (hypothesis 3), further t-tests were conducted to compare evaluations of the high and low identification group in the success and failure conditions.

However, none of the differences detected could be deemed as significant as all p-values stayed above the significance level of 0.05 (see Table 2). Evaluations made by the high identification group on coaches' competency, for example, showed no significant difference between the success ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.70$) and the failure ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.76$) group; $t(112) = 0.35$, $p = 0.73$.

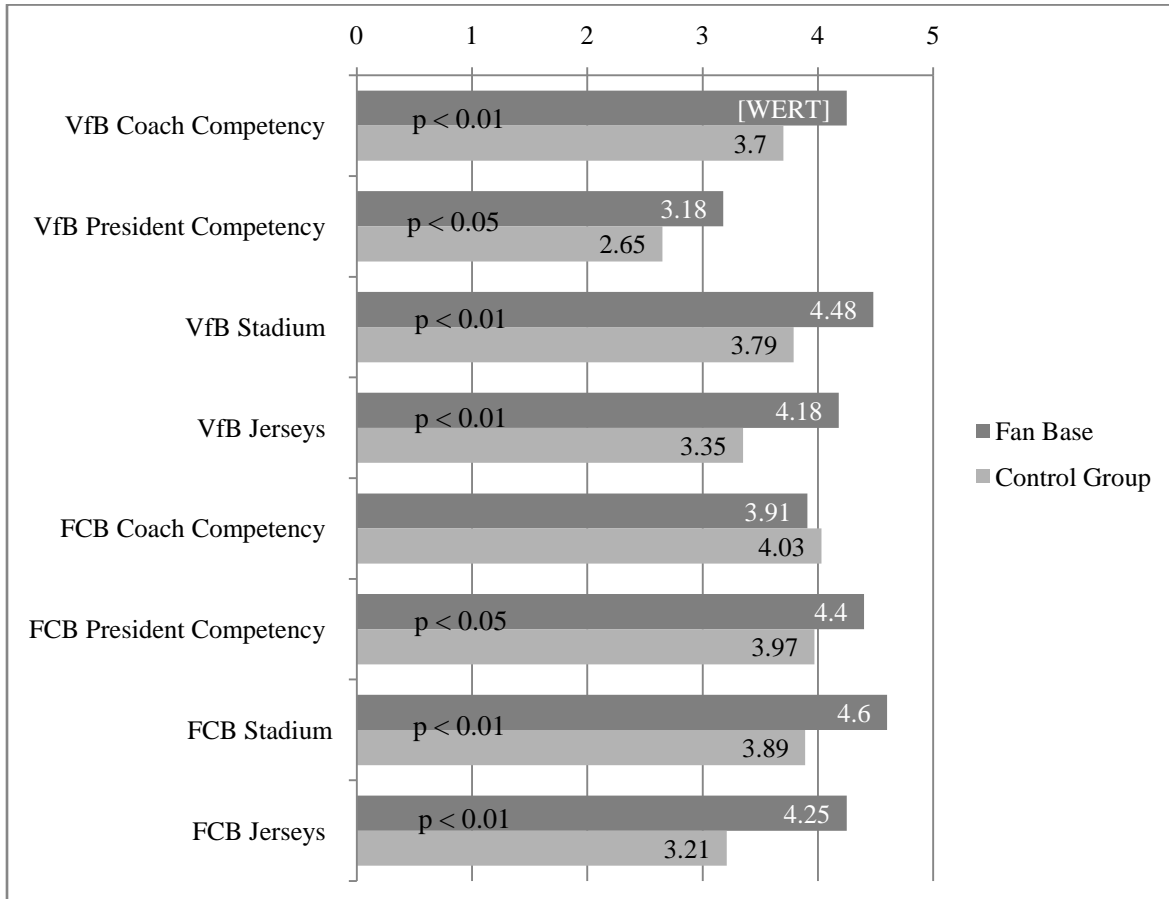
Table 2: Means and t-tests comparing aspects in high and low identification groups

		Experimental Groups	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	t-Test for Equality of Means		
						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Low team identification	Coach Competency	Success Group	36	3.81	0.856	0.157	65	0.876
		Failure Group	31	3.77	0.762			
	President Competency	Success Group	36	3.39	0.964	-	65	0.508
		Failure Group	31	3.55	0.995			
	Stadium	Success Group	36	4.25	0.732	-	65	0.429
		Failure Group	31	4.39	0.667			
	Jerseys	Success Group	36	4.08	0.806	0.879	65	0.383
		Failure Group	31	3.90	0.870			
High team identification	Coach Competency	Success Group	54	4.31	0.696	0.353	112	0.725
		Failure Group	60	4.27	0.756			
	President Competency	Success Group	54	3.89	1.022	0.464	112	0.644
		Failure Group	60	3.80	1.022			
	Stadium	Success Group	54	4.69	0.577	0.454	112	0.651
		Failure Group	60	4.63	0.637			
	Jerseys	Success Group	54	4.19	0.729	-	112	0.089
		Failure Group	60	4.47	0.596			

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the level of team identification and the influence on a person's mood caused by success or failure. There was a moderate positive correlation between the two variables $r = 0.508$, $n = 181$, $p < 0.01$. Furthermore, a t-test was conducted to compare evaluations of mood influences in success and failure groups. There was significant difference in the evaluations made by the success ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.97$) and the failure ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.86$) group; $t(102) = 4.43$, $p < 0.01$. These results suggest that success has a higher impact on a fan's mood than failure does.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that ratings made by fans would be higher than control group's evaluations. Comparing the means showed that almost all aspects are rated better by fans than by common sport spectators (see Figure 2). Again, t-tests were conducted to thoroughly compare these evaluations of sporting and non-sporting aspects in experimental groups and control group. Differences were significant for almost every aspect, except the ratings on FCB coach's competency. For the VfB coach's competency, for example, there was a significant difference in the evaluations made by fans ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.71$) and control group ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.85$); $t(135) = -3.73$, $p < 0.01$ (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Comparison of means between fan base and control group



4 Discussion of the Results

So far only little research on halo effects has been conducted in the sporting environment. Moreover, former studies mostly focused on halo effects that can be explained by social identity theory (Tajfel&Turner, 1986) and apply for differences in evaluations based on membership of either an in-group or an out-group. Hypothesis 4 also supports these previous findings and showed that sport fans mostly evaluate sporting and non-sporting aspects of their favorite sports club better than common sport spectators that do not belong to the same social category. That is, through the halo effect the overall positive feelings for one’s group of belonging as such, spreads to each and every aspect of the same group.

This study, however, further complements existing research by examining halo effects within one social category and thus eliminates effects coming from differences among in-groups and out-groups. Hypothesis 1 predicted that team success or failure would influence how other aspects in the team’s environment are evaluated. The data, however, could not support this hypothesis. No matter if victories or defeats of the favorite team were recalled, the ratings on other aspects were not influenced significantly by this information.

The level of team identification is another important factor in the sporting environment (Wann & Grieve, 2005) and can also influence fans’ behaviors and judgments. However, an allocation of respondents into high and low identification groups and respective analyses could neither reveal any halo effects. Thus, based on the absence of the effects, hypotheses 2 and 3 finally cannot be answered. However, a general analysis of the differences in ratings of high and low identification groups showed that fans with a higher level of team identification tend to give better ratings as compared to less identified fans. This also supports findings by Hickman & Lawrence (2010) who showed that higher team identification led to better ratings for the respective team’s sponsor.

To assess whether team success or failure also haloes daily life aspects outside the social category, the influence on a person’s affective state was examined.

The positive relationship between team identification and a person's mood suggests that the higher the level of team identification, the more will peoples' affective states be influenced by team success or failure. Given that prior research further suggests that a person's affective state has an influence on how people judge, let it be about life satisfaction or other aspects in daily life (Clore & Huntsinger, 2007; Schwarz & Clore, 1983), it can be concluded that team success and failure can at least indirectly have an influence on other judgments.

5 Conclusion, Limitations and Outlook

The study showed that sport fans generally rate aspects that are related to their favorite team better than people that are not part of this social category. This effect even strengthened with a higher level of team identification. As these findings support results of previous research (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010), it can generally be assumed that there is a halo effect in sports. This halo effect, however, only occurs when judgments are made among different social categories as explained by the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, as soon as judgments are made within only one social category, these halo effects are eliminated. The study failed to find evidence for halo effects that occur within one social category. Collected data suggest that there are no in-group halo effects stemming from team success or failure.

However, the absence of halo effects in the study could also be attributed to flaws in methodology or study design. First of all, the effectiveness of the initial information about a team's success or failure needs to be questioned. The short paragraph carrying information about prior soccer games might have failed to effectively recall a feeling of success or failure in respondents' minds. Recalled games are only few out of many and thus are not decisive for the whole term. That means, fans might rather focus on their overall impression about the team's performance based on the entire term and thus might be unaffected by the information the study provides. Furthermore, the point in time of survey completion might also have affected evaluations. As further games of the team took place in between the recalled games and the time of the survey, respondents might find it easier to recall more recent games, again being unaffected by the information given in the study. Furthermore, as the survey was conducted online, it could not be observed whether participants really paid attention to the information given and read them thoughtfully or if they just skimmed through them real quickly. Therefore, it can be argued that an improvement of the survey and the elimination of potential error sources might reveal possible halo effects in the given setting.

This study further questioned to which degree a team's success or failure also haloes judgments in everyday life. To answer this question, the study drew a connection to a person's mood. Based on previous research on the connection between a person's affective state and judgments made, the study suggested that team success and failure indirectly influence people's judgments. However, this would also mean that even observed ratings of sporting and non-sporting aspects have been influenced indirectly. But as no differences in these ratings were found and also the reliability of prior research is ambiguous, it is questionable whether these influences are really significant. Moreover, it is not clearly evident to which degree, if at all, these findings can be ascribed to the halo effect or rather to other explanations in behavioral science.

To detect possible halo effects stemming from a team's success or failure, it is essential that further research studies ensure that respondents really recall a feeling of success and failure before answering the questions. A survey conducted at two different points in time, for example, might avoid some previously mentioned flaws that made initial information ineffective. That is, the study could either be conducted once after the preliminaries and again after the second half of the season or alternatively among two different terms. Hence, the study could recall whole periods instead of single games what might better match peoples' overall impression of team performance. Furthermore, a video instead of a text might be a good alternative to recall the right emotions. In addition, an appropriate measure for the direct influence of success and failure on everyday judgments needs to be found to eliminate the ambiguous influence from mood to judgments. Conducting the study twice with exactly the same participant, for example, might enable researchers to directly ask for everyday judgments that can be compared afterwards. In case any halo effects can be observed in this setting, researchers need to be cautious when interpreting the differences of ratings for sporting aspects. As actions of the coach or the president, for example, indirectly have a real influence on team failure or success (e.g. through decisions about team lineups or player transfers), differences in these aspects cannot be fully ascribed to the halo effect. Hence, it might be helpful to integrate more non-sporting aspects in ratings.

Particularly in sport management and sport marketing, knowledge about how fans think, react and behave is essential to come up with appropriate and effective strategies. However, given the distinctive features of sport fans and their often entailed irrationality, it is hard to forecast how they react and how new strategies work out. Therefore, further research on halo effects in the sporting environment might help a great deal in better understanding the real nature of sport fans.

Dr. Gerd Nufer is Professor of Business Administration specializing in Marketing and Sport Management at ESB Business School, Reutlingen University, Germany. Furthermore, he is Director of the German Institute for Sport Marketing. His teaching, research and consulting specializations are Sport Marketing, Event Management, Marketing Communications, and International Market Research. He has won awards for both his research and teaching.

References

- Asch, S. E. (1946). Forming impressions of personality. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 41(3), 258-290.
- Ballem, C. C. & Todorov, A. (2007). Predicting political elections from rapid and unreflective face judgments. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104(46), 17948-17953.
- Boatwright, P., Kalra, A. & Zhang, W. (2008). Should Consumers Use the Halo to Form Product Evaluations?, *Management Science*, 54(1), 217-223.
- Borman, W. C. (1975). Effects of instructions to avoid halo error on reliability and validity of performance evaluation ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(5), 556-560.
- Bortz, J. & Döring, N. (2009). *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation in den Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften* (4th ed.). Berlin: Springer.
- Burton, S., Cook, L. A., Howlett, E. & Newman, C. L. (2015). Broken halos and shattered horns: overcoming the biasing effects of prior expectations through objective information disclosure. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(2), 240-256.
- Chandon, P. & Wansink, B. (2007). The biasing health halos of fast-food restaurant health claims: lower calorie estimates and higher side-dish consumption intentions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(3), 301-314.
- Clore, G. L. & Huntsinger, J. R. (2007). How emotions inform judgment and regulate thought. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11(9), 393-399.
- Eagly, A. H., Ashmore, R. D., Makhijani, M. G. & Longo, L. C. (1991). What is beautiful is good, but...: A meta-analytic review of research on the physical attractiveness stereotype. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(1), 109-128.
- Feingold, A. (1992). Good-Looking People Are Not What We Think. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111(2), 304-341.
- Felser, G. (2007). *Werbe- und Konsumentenpsychologie* (3rd ed.). Berlin: Springer.
- Fisicaro, S. A. & Lance, C. E. (1990). Implications of three causal models for the measurement of halo error. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 14(4), 419-429.
- Goldman, M., Cowles, M. D. & Florez, C. A. (1983). The halo effect of an initial impression upon speaker and audience. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 120(2), 197-201.
- Gräf, M. & Unkelbach, C. (2016). Halo Effects in Trait Assessment Depend on Information Valence Why Being Honest Makes You Industrious, but Lying Does Not Make You Lazy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 42 (3), 290-310.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Hickman, T. M. & Lawrence, K. E. (2010). The halo effect of goodwill sponsorship versus the pitchfork effect of supporting the enemy. *Journal of Sponsorship*, 3(3), 265-276.
- Jones, I. (1997). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods in sports fan research. *The Qualitative Report*, 3(4), 1-8.
- Kahneman, D. (2012). *Schnelles Denken, langsames Denken*. München: Siedler.
- Keeley, J. W., English, T., Irons, J. & Henslee, A. M. (2013). Investigating halo and ceiling effects in student evaluations of instruction. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 73 (3), 440-457.
- Landy, D. & Sigall, H. (1974). Beauty is talent: Task evaluation as a function of the performer's physical attractiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 29(3), 299-304.
- Malouff, J. M., Emmerton, A. J. & Schutte, N. S. (2013). The risk of a halo bias as a reason to keep students anonymous during grading. *Teaching of Psychology*, 40 (3), 233-237.

- Meindl, J. R., Ehrlich, S. B. & Dukerich, J. M. (1985). The romance of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30 (1), 78-102.
- Nisbett, R. E. & Wilson, T. D. (1977). The halo effect: Evidence for unconscious alteration of judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35(4), 250-256.
- Nufer, G. (2016): Besonderheiten von Sportkonsumenten aus Marketing-Sicht. *Nachspielzeit – Die Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Instituts für Sportmarketing*, 2016 – 1.
- Palmer, C. L. & Peterson, R. D. (2016). Halo Effects and the Attractiveness Premium in Perceptions of Political Expertise. *American Politics Research*, 44(2), 353-382.
- Reysen, S. & Branscombe, N. R. (2010). Fanship and fandom: Comparisons between sport and non-sport fans. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 33(2), 176-193.
- Rohrmann, B. (1978). Empirische Studien zur Entwicklung von Antwortskalen für die sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung. *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie*, 9(3), 222-245.
- Rosenzweig, P. M. (2004). What do we think happened at ABB? Pitfalls in research about firm performance. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 5(4), 267-281.
- Rosenzweig, P. M. (2014). *The halo effect:... and the eight other business delusions that deceive managers*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Schmitt, M. (1992). Schönheit und Talent Untersuchungen zum Verschwinden des Halo-Effekts. *Zeitschrift für experimentelle und angewandte Psychologie*, 39 (3), S. 475-492.
- Schuldt, J. P., Muller, D. & Schwarz, N. (2012). The "fair trade" effect health halos from social ethics claims. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(5), 581-589.
- Schwarz, N. & Clore, G. L. (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(3), 513-523.
- Shank, M. & Beasley, F. (1998). Fan or fanatic: Refining a measure of sport involvement. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 21(4), 435-443.
- Sheppard, L. D., Goffin, R. D., Lewis, R. J. & Olson, J. (2011). The effect of target attractiveness and rating method on the accuracy of trait ratings. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 10 (1), 24-33.
- Smith, A. C. & Stewart, B. (2010). The special features of sport: A critical revisit. *Sport Management Review*, 13(1), 1-13.
- Spinrad, W.(1981). The function of spectator sports. In W. Spinrad, G. R. F. Lüschen, G. H. Sage & L. Sfeir (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Science of Sport* (pp. 355-365). Champaign: Stipes.
- Staw, B. M. (1975). Attribution of the "causes" of performance: A general alternative interpretation of cross-sectional research on organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 13(3), 414-432.
- Sundar, A. & Kardes, F. R. (2015). The role of perceived variability and the health halo effect in nutritional inference and consumption. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(5), 512-521.
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Thorndike, E. L. (1920). Intelligence and its uses. *Harper's Magazine*. 140, 227-235.
- Trivedi, M. (2011). Regional and categorical patterns in consumer behavior: revealing trends. *Journal of Retailing*, 87(1), 18-30.
- Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1975). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. In D. Wendt & C. Vlek (Eds.), *Utility, Probability, and Human Decision Making*(pp. 141-162). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Wann, D. L. & Branscombe, N. R. (1993). Sports fans: Measuring degree of identification with their team. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24 (1), 1-17.
- Wann, D. L. & Grieve, F. G. (2005). Biased evaluations of in-group and out-group spectator behavior at sporting events: The importance of team identification and threats to social identity. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 145(5), 531-546.
- Wells, F. L. (1907). A statistical study of literary merit. *Archives of Psychology*, 1(7), 1-30.
- Wertheim, J. & Sommers, S. (2015). Brain on Sports Podcast: How the halo effect plays a role in sports, *Sports Illustrated*, audio podcast, 21 December 2015. Online available:<http://www.si.com/more-sports/2015/12/21/brain-on-sports-podcast-halo-effect-sports> (12 February 2018).