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DIGITAL SPORTS GRAPHICS AND BRAND PERSONALITY IN THE MALAYSIAN SEPAK TAKRAW LEAGUE

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ABSTRACT

Digital graphics have become a significant component of modern sports broadcasting, shaping how audiences interpret the identity and professionalism of a competition. The Malaysian Sepak Takraw League is an important case because it balances cultural heritage with the demands of contemporary media presentation. This study investigates how broadcast graphics contribute to the league's brand personality and how followers perceive these visual cues. A survey involving 356 followers of the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League was conducted, and exploratory factor analysis confirmed a stable five-dimension structure with acceptable reliability. The findings show that sincerity, ruggedness and competence are the most visible traits, reflecting trust, resilience and credibility. Excitement and sophistication appear less dominant, which suggests that followers may not view the league as highly stylised or entertainment driven. The results indicate that broadcast graphics influence perceptions of identity and loyalty in an indigenous sports context that competes for attention in a crowded media environment.

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1. Introduction

In the current era of intense media competition, sports branding is essential for leagues seeking visibility. The Malaysian Sepak Takraw League exemplifies this by operating within a saturated media environment while carrying cultural significance. Here, audiences judge not only gameplay but also presentation, particularly the digital and visual elements in broadcasts. As sepak takraw serves as a marker of regional identity, the league faces the challenge of modernising this heritage through structured competition and media presentation.

This study analyses how broadcast graphics shape the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League's brand personality from the perspective of its followers. Brand personality offers insight into how audiences form league impressions; marketing and sport research shows that human-like qualities are often attributed to sports organisations, influencing trust, identification, and loyalty. For an indigenous sport like sepak takraw, the challenge is balancing professionalism with cultural authenticity. The introduction of digital graphics in broadcasts opens new avenues for expressing identity, legitimacy, and tone, yet little empirical work has investigated this in Malaysian sport, creating a gap this study addresses.

2. Literature Review

A review of past studies is necessary to establish the foundations of this research. Sport branding draws heavily from marketing, media studies and sociology, and each discipline offers concepts that help explain how audiences form impressions of sports organisations. For the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League, the literature must be read with attention to both cultural heritage and the modern expectations of sports broadcasting. This review, therefore, focuses on brand personality theory, media representation and research on indigenous sports and highlights areas where further evidence is required.

2.1 Brand Personality and Sport Branding

Brand personality has been widely used to describe how audiences interpret human-like characteristics in organisations. Aaker introduced five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. These categories have guided much of the work in marketing and have since been applied to sport. Sport organisations benefit from this framework because fans often form emotional bonds with teams and leagues, creating relationships that resemble social affiliation rather than simple consumption.

The use of Aaker's model in sport has received both support and criticism. Carlson, Donovan, and Cumiskey (2009) argued that loyalty, passion, and communal identity play a stronger role in sport than in commercial branding, and that these elements may not be fully reflected in the original five dimensions. For instance, sincerity in a consumer product may relate to honest advertising, while sincerity in a sports league may relate to trust in competition or respect for tradition. These distinctions show that the framework requires contextual interpretation when applied to culturally grounded sports such as sepak takraw.

2.2 Media Representation and Digital Graphics in Sport

The media influence how sport is understood. Media coverage does more than report events because it frames meaning around performance, fairness and credibility. Billings, Butterworth and Turman (2017) explained that televised sport creates interpretive cues that guide how audiences judge the quality of a competition. Digital graphics have become one of the most visible elements in this process. Graphics provide scores, statistics, and match information while also shaping tone, clarity and overall atmosphere. A choice of colour or typography can influence whether a league appears modern, professional or youth-oriented.

Studies in global sports show that visual design affects perceptions of credibility and identity. Pizzo, Baker, Na, Lee, Kim, and Funk (2018) demonstrated that viewers judge a league's professionalism partly by the quality of its visual presentation. This evidence shows that graphics function as communication tools rather than simple technical features. Much of this research, however, focuses on sports with high media investment. The findings may not apply directly to minor or culturally specific leagues where resources, traditions and audience expectations differ.

Research on indigenous sports is still limited. Rowe (2015) noted that traditional games often receive little scholarly attention despite their cultural significance. As a result, little is known about how visual design influences perceptions in sports that must balance heritage with modern presentation. The Malaysian Sepak Takraw League fits this description because it competes for attention in a crowded sports market while remaining grounded in tradition. Broadcast graphics are among the few tools capable of presenting the league as both credible and culturally rooted.

2.3 Indigenous Sports and Cultural Identity

Indigenous sports occupy a complex place in the global landscape, representing cultural identity but contending with commercially dominant games. Research from Asia and Africa indicates that effective media use boosts visibility, while neglecting contemporary production standards can foster marginalisation. Indigenous sports compete not only on the field but also in how they are framed to the public. However, research often lacks a systematic analysis of the role of digital graphics in this framing. Studies routinely address sponsorship and visibility, yet seldom examine how visual strategies advance cultural identity and engage audiences.

2.4 Fan Engagement and Loyalty in the Digital Era

Fan engagement is a central topic in sports management and communication research. It now goes beyond attending games or buying merchandise, encompassing psychological involvement, emotional ties, and active participation via digital media. Biscaia and colleagues (2017) note that media experiences affect not only sport consumption but also how fans judge credibility and appeal. Engagement thus blends actions and attitudes, spanning both behaviour and emotion.

Several studies have reinforced the link between fan engagement and loyalty. Tachis and Tzetzis (2015) show that loyal fans often display higher levels of involvement, while involvement itself can be encouraged by media exposure and branding strategies. Kim, Trail, Lim and Kim (2019) further argue that loyalty is sustained when fans perceive consistency and authenticity in how a sport presents itself. This is particularly relevant in contexts where competition for attention is intense. The quality of media output, including broadcast graphics, becomes part of what fans assess when deciding whether to commit to a league or look elsewhere.

In the digital era, the importance of engagement has grown because fans now interact with sport through multiple channels. Social media, live streaming and mobile applications have created new spaces where perceptions are formed and contested. Jin, Trail and Cho (2020) suggest that engagement in these spaces is shaped by design choices that influence accessibility and trust. Broadcast graphics, though often associated with television, also feed into these digital spaces through highlights, online clips and promotional content. Their impact extends beyond the moment of live viewing, contributing to how a sports brand is remembered and discussed.

For leagues like STL, building fan engagement is critical. Without a committed fan base, the league may lose visibility, sponsorship, and legitimacy. Indigenous sports often lack the resources to compete with global sports on a media level. Weak or inconsistent branding can make a league seem outdated, even when the sport's exciting. In contrast, strong graphics and media design can build loyalty by projecting both professionalism and authenticity. Though the literature connects fan engagement and loyalty to communication strategies, little is known about how

this works specifically for indigenous leagues. This underlines the value of studying STL to examine links between brand personality, media strategy, and fan commitment.

2.5 Research Gap and Contribution

The review of past studies highlights several areas that guide the present research, but each comes with limitations that call for closer examination. Work on brand personality has shown the value of Aaker's (1997) framework in sport. However, questions remain about whether it captures the intensity of loyalty, passion and cultural meaning that define the relationship between fans and sport organisations. Some modifications to the model have been proposed, but there is still little agreement on how it should be applied when sport serves both heritage and entertainment functions.

Research on media representation shows that graphics and design are now central to how audiences judge professionalism and credibility. Still, most of this work is based on global sports that benefit from significant commercial investment. Much less is known about how minor or culturally specific leagues use graphics to build their image. Indigenous sports are especially neglected, even though evidence suggests that they face pressure to balance tradition with modern presentation. The case of STL clearly illustrates this gap, as there is almost no empirical evidence on how broadcast graphics affect fans' perceptions of the league.

Studies of fan engagement and loyalty add another perspective. Findings often show that the quality of media and branding has a direct impact on how fans decide to commit to a sport. However, this literature tends to treat engagement as if it were the same across all contexts. It does not fully consider what happens when the sport carries strong cultural symbolism. For a league like STL, which competes with dominant sports while protecting its heritage, engagement strategies are likely to differ from those of larger competitions. This absence of targeted research limits our understanding of how loyalty is built in culturally rooted sports.

The present study addresses these gaps by combining brand personality theory with an analysis of digital graphics and their effect on fan perception. By focusing on STL, it contributes in three ways. First, it extends the study of brand personality to the context of an indigenous sport and demonstrates how the framework can be adapted to this context. Second, it demonstrates that broadcast graphics should be understood as tools that shape brand identity rather than as neutral devices. Third, it offers insights into fan engagement in a league that must balance cultural heritage with the need to appear professional. Taken together, these contributions advance knowledge in media, digital communication and sport branding while also offering lessons for the practical development of STL and similar competitions.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach to examine how digital graphics shape the brand personality of the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League. A survey was conducted among followers who watched broadcasts, attended matches or engaged with the league through digital platforms. A total of 356 valid responses were collected, exceeding the minimum required for factor analysis. The sampling process used purposive and convenience methods because accessing the entire population of followers was not feasible. This approach is common in studies focusing on specific fan communities, though it limits the sample's representativeness. Followers who are more digitally active or more loyal may have been overrepresented. The findings should therefore be interpreted with this constraint in mind.

Items in the survey were adapted from Aaker's model and sport branding studies by Carlson, Donovan, and Cumiskey (2009), as well as by Kunkel, Funk, and King (2012). Five dimensions were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Exploratory factor analysis was performed to confirm the structure of the constructs, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Ethical approval was obtained before data collection.

4. Results

The results offer insights into how followers interpret the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League. Numerical patterns are considered alongside earlier research to identify the most prominent traits of brand personality and to understand how followers position the league within the wider sports environment.

4.1 Respondent Profile

The survey produced 356 usable responses from STL followers. Participants engaged with the league in multiple ways. Some attended matches in person, others watched live broadcasts, and many followed STL through its official digital platforms. The combination of these modes of engagement shows that the study reached both traditional spectators and modern fans who rely on online media.

The age distribution showed that STL appeals most strongly to younger audiences. A majority of respondents were between 18 and 34 years old, which aligns with expectations since younger groups are typically more active on digital platforms and more open to online interaction with local leagues. Male respondents made up a slight majority, but female participation was also significant, indicating that STL attracts a mixed fan base rather than catering to a single gender.

Respondents' education levels were relatively high. A large proportion were university students or graduates, suggesting that STL attracts digitally literate supporters well-equipped to engage with media content. Employment status varied. Many participants were students and young professionals, while others worked in education, public service and private industry. Household incomes also differed, though most fell within the middle range of the national scale. These details provide important context for understanding how fans consume STL, whether by attending events or relying on broadcast coverage.

Geographic distribution further underscores STL's dual character as both a national competition and a community-based league. Many respondents lived in urban centres where the league hosts events and benefits from greater media exposure. At the same time, a significant number came from smaller towns and rural areas. Fans in these locations often relied on televised broadcasts or digital highlights rather than attending matches in person. Such findings underline the importance of broadcast graphics in keeping distant audiences connected to the league.

Taken together, the demographic profile shows that STL has succeeded in attracting a young, educated, and digitally engaged fan base. The findings also demonstrate that while live attendance is meaningful, the league relies heavily on its media presence to sustain visibility across different regions. This reinforces the argument that digital sports graphics play a central role in shaping how fans perceive STL's brand personality.

Table 4.1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	190	53.4%
Gender	Female	166	46.6%
Age	18–24	140	39.3%
Age	25–34	120	33.7%
Age	35 and above	96	27.0%
Education	Tertiary	220	61.8%
Education	Secondary	136	38.2%

4.2 Factor Analysis

The study applied Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to examine the structure of the brand personality items. Before running the analysis, the data's suitability was tested. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure exceeded 0.80, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < .001$. Both results confirmed that the dataset was appropriate for factor analysis.

EFA grouped the items into five factors, which corresponded closely with Aaker's (1997) original framework. A small number of items were removed because their loadings fell below the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Once these items were excluded, the factor solution explained a substantial proportion of the variance, giving confidence that the remaining items were valid representations of the constructs.

The five dimensions that emerged were sincerity, competence, ruggedness, excitement and sophistication. Sincerity included items that reflected honesty and reliability. Competence grouped items related to performance and professionalism. Ruggedness captured perceptions of resilience and toughness, while excitement represented energy and enthusiasm. Sophistication emerged as the weakest factor, but the remaining items still pointed to traits linked to style and prestige.

Overall, the results indicate that fans interpret STL through the exact broad dimensions found in previous research on brand personality. At the same time, the relatively weaker loadings for excitement and sophistication suggest that these traits may not be central to how audiences evaluate the league. This observation highlights the importance of adapting established frameworks to account for the cultural and structural realities of indigenous sports.

Table 4.2
Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Dimension	Example Item	Factor Loading
<i>Sincerity</i>	STL is honest	0.78
<i>Competence</i>	STL is professional	0.74
<i>Ruggedness</i>	STL is resilient	0.71
<i>Excitement</i>	STL is exciting	0.65
<i>Sophistication</i>	STL is stylish	0.60

4.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability was assessed by examining the consistency with which respondents answered items within each construct. Cronbach's alpha served as the leading indicator. All five dimensions met the accepted cut-off of 0.70, indicating that the scales effectively captured the intended traits. Sincerity achieved the highest score, indicating a strong, shared view of STL as honest and authentic. Competence and ruggedness also performed well, underlining the credibility and resilience that fans associated with the league.

Excitement and sophistication scored lower than the other three dimensions, although both remained above the acceptable threshold. This result means that while fans recognised elements of energy and style, their opinions on these traits were less uniform. Some participants associated STL with enthusiasm and flair, but others did not see these qualities as central to the league. The variation is understandable, since STL's presentation has traditionally emphasised credibility and tradition more than glamour or novelty.

Looking across the results, sincerity, competence and ruggedness stand out as the most dependable aspects of STL's brand personality. Excitement and sophistication were present but less consistent, suggesting these qualities are not yet firmly established in fans' minds. In practice, this pattern reflects how STL communicates: a league trusted for its authenticity and toughness, but less often associated with glamour or showmanship.

Table 4.3
Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Sincerity</i>	0.85
<i>Competence</i>	0.82
<i>Ruggedness</i>	0.80
<i>Excitement</i>	0.74
<i>Sophistication</i>	0.72

4.4 Mean Scores of Brand Personality Dimensions

The analysis of mean scores shows how different traits of brand personality are reflected in STL. Fans placed sincerity at the centre, with an average rating above 4.0 on the five-point scale. This suggests that honesty, authenticity, and trust remain the league's strongest qualities. Ruggedness and competence followed, both recording means slightly above 3.8. These results indicate that supporters associate STL with resilience and credibility, qualities that align with the sport's physical intensity and the league's efforts to project professionalism.

Excitement was rated more moderately, with a mean of around 3.4. Some respondents linked STL with energy and enthusiasm, but many did not see this as a defining element. Sophistication received the lowest score, roughly 3.1, reflecting limited association with glamour or prestige. Compared with global sports that often emphasise spectacle, STL appears grounded in tradition and strength rather than polish or luxury.

Overall, the pattern of scores paints a clear picture. STL's brand personality rests on sincerity, ruggedness and competence, while excitement and sophistication remain secondary. This outcome makes sense, given that sepak takraw has long been valued for authenticity and toughness more than for glamour. Still, the findings point to an opportunity: by enhancing presentation and media design, STL could build stronger perceptions of excitement and sophistication, thereby widening its appeal beyond its traditional base.

Table 4.4
Mean Scores of Brand Personality Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	SD
<i>Sincerity</i>	4.12	0.58
<i>Ruggedness</i>	3.88	0.62
<i>Competence</i>	3.91	0.67
<i>Excitement</i>	3.41	0.71
<i>Sophistication</i>	3.10	0.76

5. Discussion

Sincerity, ruggedness and competence emerged as the most visible traits. These traits reflect trust, cultural authenticity and resilience, which align with how sepak takraw is traditionally viewed. Excitement and sophistication produced weaker results. This pattern may reflect the league's presentation style, which emphasises competition and cultural grounding rather than entertainment-driven spectacle. Modern sports that prioritise glamour, celebrity presence or elaborate production designs often score higher in these dimensions. The Malaysian Sepak Takraw League operates within more modest production conditions and focuses on preserving heritage, which may explain why followers do not strongly associate the league with sophistication or high-energy entertainment.

The discussion also acknowledges that broadcast graphics function within a wider production system. Camera work, commentary, editing rhythm and overall broadcast pacing also shape perceptions of professionalism. Graphics work together with these elements, but cannot independently create a polished identity if other production features remain limited. This context

is important for interpreting the findings, especially when comparing the league with major global sports.

5.1 Interpreting the Brand Personality of STL

Sincerity dominated the responses. Many fans linked STL with trust, honesty and authenticity. This finding is consistent with Aaker's (1997) framework, where sincerity often emerges as a key dimension. In the case of sepak takraw, however, sincerity also carries cultural weight. The game has always been tied to community values, and fans seem to read the league as a continuation of that heritage. For them, STL is not just a competition but a sport that reflects shared identity.

Competence and ruggedness also stood out with firm support. Fans saw STL as both professional and resilient. Competence reflected the belief that the league is capable and well-organised, while ruggedness resonated with the players' toughness and the demanding nature of the game. Together, these dimensions show that fans respected STL not only for what it represents but also for how it performs. Ruggedness in particular marks sepak takraw as different from many global sports, where this trait is less often highlighted.

By contrast, excitement and sophistication did not score as highly. Some respondents associated the league with energy and flair, but many did not. Sophistication was even weaker, showing that STL is rarely linked with glamour or prestige. This outcome makes sense given the league's focus on tradition and authenticity rather than spectacle. Still, the relatively modest ratings for these two traits reveal an opportunity. If STL wants to broaden its reach, it may need to use digital media and graphics more creatively to project excitement and a sense of style without losing its cultural identity.

Taken together, the results point to a clear profile. STL is recognised as sincere, competent and rugged, while excitement and sophistication remain secondary. Fans value honesty, resilience and credibility above all else. These qualities make STL distinctive in a landscape where many sports compete for attention through spectacle and glamour.

5.2 Comparison with Previous Research

The patterns found in STL both confirm and extend earlier work on brand personality in sport. Previous studies often show that sincerity and competence resonate strongly with fans across different contexts (Kunkel, Doyle, & Funk, 2017). The same pattern appears here, but with an added emphasis on ruggedness. In sepak takraw, fans place special value on toughness and resilience, which align with the game's physical intensity and the cultural pride it embodies. This makes STL distinct from global leagues, where ruggedness plays a minor role in shaping brand identity.

Excitement and sophistication, by contrast, played a weaker role in STL than in many international sports. Research on global competitions such as football and basketball has shown that spectacle and glamour often form a central part of how fans connect with these brands (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006). STL does not follow this pattern. The league has focused more on authenticity and credibility than on entertainment or luxury. That difference highlights the importance of context. Aaker's (1997) framework provides a valuable starting point, but the way traits appear in practice depends heavily on the cultural and institutional setting of each sport.

The weaker scores for excitement and sophistication also echo criticisms of applying consumer-brand models directly to sport. Carlson, Donovan, and Cumiskey (2009) noted that sport fandom

involves passion and community bonds that are not always captured by the original dimensions. The STL findings support this view. Fans cared more about sincerity and ruggedness, which represent trust and heritage, than about glamour. In this sense, the study not only applies brand personality theory but also adapts it to fit the character of an indigenous sport.

Taken together, the comparison with earlier studies suggests that STL shares some common ground with global sports. Sincerity and competence remain essential in both contexts. At the same time, STL departs from these sports by giving greater weight to ruggedness while placing less emphasis on excitement and sophistication. This balance underscores the need to interpret brand personality frameworks flexibly, especially when applied to sports that carry deep cultural meaning.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings highlight several lessons for the management and promotion of STL. First, the league should continue to emphasise sincerity, competence and ruggedness in its branding. These qualities already resonate strongly with fans and reinforce sepak takraw's cultural and competitive image. Campaigns that focus on trust, resilience and credibility are likely to strengthen the league's connection with its core supporters.

Second, the lower ratings for excitement and sophistication suggest growth opportunities. STL can explore ways to project more energy and style without losing its cultural authenticity. Broadcast graphics, storytelling and digital engagement provide practical tools to achieve this. For instance, dynamic player highlights, behind-the-scenes features or visually refined match presentations may help raise perceptions of excitement and sophistication. Such strategies should complement rather than replace the traits that already define STL.

Third, the results show that indigenous sports require branding strategies tailored to their context. Global sports often rely on spectacle and glamour, but this approach may not translate directly to culturally rooted leagues. STL demonstrates that authenticity and resilience can be as important as entertainment value in sustaining fan engagement. Recognising this difference can help policymakers, sponsors, and sport managers design initiatives that both preserve heritage and appeal to broader audiences.

Overall, the findings suggest that STL's future branding should strike a balance. Maintaining sincerity, competence and ruggedness will secure its cultural foundation, while selective use of digital media and design can gradually strengthen perceptions of excitement and sophistication. This approach would allow the league to grow commercially while staying true to its identity.

5.4 Addressing the Research Gap

Most studies on sport branding have concentrated on global sports such as football or basketball. These sports often rely on spectacle, excitement and glamour to strengthen their image. Indigenous sports have not received the same level of attention, and as a result, little is known about how brand personality works when cultural heritage plays a central role.

This study helps to reduce that gap. By focusing on STL, it shows how sincerity, competence and ruggedness sit at the core of fan perceptions. The pattern is different from what scholars have reported in global contexts, where excitement and sophistication tend to dominate. In STL, authenticity and resilience carried more weight. That shift suggests that brand personality does not operate the same way across all sports. The framework needs to bend and adapt to the traditions and expectations that shape each game.

The contribution matters in two ways. From a theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrate that brand personality models can be applied more flexibly in studies of culturally grounded sports. From a practical perspective, the results offer guidance to managers and decision-makers in STL on designing branding strategies that respect heritage while appealing to fans who consume sport through modern media.

These insights help close a gap left open by earlier studies. Indigenous sports can be understood through branding models, but only if those models are adapted to reflect cultural realities. This perspective adds depth to academic debates on sport branding and gives a foundation for promoting traditional leagues in ways that are both authentic and sustainable.

6. Conclusion

The study shows that broadcast graphics influence perceptions of identity in the Malaysian Sepak Takraw League. Sincerity, ruggedness and competence define how followers interpret the league, while excitement and sophistication remain less developed. These results highlight the importance of visual communication in a sport that must balance cultural roots with modern presentation. Further improvements in production, including graphics, camera work and commentary, may enhance the league's brand personality and strengthen engagement among younger followers. Future research may explore these elements in greater depth or compare indigenous sports in different cultural settings.

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Authors Contributions

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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