

# “Say hello to Halo”: the halo effect in sports

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Gerd Nufer (Germany)

# "SAY HELLO TO HALO": THE HALO EFFECT IN SPORTS

## Abstract

In daily life, people tend to use mental shortcuts to simplify and speed up their decision-making processes. A halo effect exists if the impression created by a dominant attribute influences how other attributes of an object or subject are judged. It involves a cognitive bias that leads to distorted assessments. However, the halo effect has barely been researched in a sports-related context, although it can substantially contribute to understanding how sport fans think and behave. The objective of this paper is to answer the question that is of interest for both theory and practice of sports marketing: Is there a halo effect in sports? Does the sporting success or failure of a professional soccer team radiate or even outshine other sports-related and non-sports aspects and influence or distort how the club is perceived by its fans? Fans of six soccer clubs selected from the first German soccer league Bundesliga were interviewed. This paper presents the results of an empirical study based on a data set consisting of a total of 4,180 cases. The results of the analyses substantiate the distortion of the fans' perception with regard to a very diverse range of aspects that is triggered by the sporting success or failure of their favorite club.

## Keywords

halo effect, social psychology, sports, soccer, sports marketing, sports management, "Die Mannschaft"

## JEL Classification

M31, Z20, M10, C10

## INTRODUCTION

Known from social psychology, the halo effect is a cognitive distortion that consists of applying well known traits of a person to draw conclusions about the unknown traits or characteristics of that person. It occurs when a global impression or information about a salient attribute affects how other attributes are judged (Hickman & Lawrence, 2010; Gräf & Unkelbach, 2016). A positive distortion is generally referred to as a "halo of a saint effect", a negative one is known as the "pitchfork effect" (Kroeber-Riel & Weinberg, 2003).

The key research question of this paper is: Is there a halo effect in sports? Does the sporting success or failure of a soccer club outshine other sports-related aspects? Does the sporting success or failure distort how fans perceive the club in terms of non-sports aspects? An empirical study was conducted in order to answer this question. Fans of six soccer clubs selected from the German Bundesliga were interviewed.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the halo effect have been conducted in business and management in widely diverse research fields, particularly in human resources or in education-related settings, where objective and unbiased evaluations are of elementary importance (Burton et al., 2015; Gräf & Unkelbach, 2016). In contrast, the halo effect in a sports context

has been mentioned only marginally – and if so, then primarily with regard to individual athletes, in terms of the effects of their attractive appearance (Landy & Sigall, 1974; Schmitt, 1992). As far as the authors are aware, to date no studies exist that analyze the halo effect of the athletic success of sports teams on other sports and non-sports related aspects.

### 1.1. Characterization of the halo effect

The term “halo” comes from the Greek word “halos”. In astronomy, a halo is the designation for a ring of light that surrounds the sun or the moon (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2015). In literature, the terms “blooming effect” or “spill-over effect” are frequently used synonymously for the halo effect (von der Linde & Schustereit, 2010).

The halo effect follows a tendency to consistent assessment. People attempt to create a consistent and coordinated image of a person or an object that they perceive (Nawratil & Rabaioli-Fischer, 2010). Due to the halo effect explanations can be kept simple and coherent. The human brain seeks to inhibit inconsistencies, since they impede ease of thinking and clarity of feelings (Kahneman, 2013). A halo effect allows for distilling perceptions down to a uniform and harmonious image and avoiding cognitive dissonance (Rosenzweig, 2007). The point of departure for the halo effect may consist of easily accessible features such as appearance and physical attractiveness. A person’s clothing, a facial expression, hair color, status, extraordinary performance or behavior may also lead to distorted perception (Hartung, 2006).

The halo effect works in two directions: On one hand, positive information produces positive assessment of attributes, while similarly, negative information tends to result in rather negative judgment of attributes (Gräf & Unkelbach, 2016). Halo effects occur particularly when the characteristics to be assessed are fairly ambiguous or hard to ascertain, but may nevertheless be distinctive enough to have an impact on how clearly discernible characteristics are rated (Landy & Sigall, 1974).

### 1.2. Halo effects in business

If a company’s sales, profits and share prices are on the rise, observers quickly conclude that the company must have a visionary CEO with an astute strategy and highly motivated employees, is particularly customer-focused and fosters a beneficial corporate culture. If, on the other hand, the company reports declining sales and profits, one quickly draws the opposite conclusions – although the actual factors have remained unchanged. This means that based on the visible success or failure of a company, conclusions are drawn about its strategy, the work of its executives and employees and its corporate culture – without the benefit of further information. It becomes abundantly clear: not just people, but companies can also be the object of a halo effect (Rosenzweig, 2008; Balzer, 2015).

In marketing in particular, the halo effect plays a significant role. “We sell lifestyle and give away motorcycles for that”, is one of the messages of motorcycle manufacturer Harley Davidson. This statement is underscored by the fact that in the U.S. the Harley logo constitutes the motif most frequently selected for tattoos (Belz, 1999). This example demonstrates the importance of a strong brand. Apparently, the Harley Davidson brand represents substantially more than merely its product, motorcycles (Meffert, Burmann & Kirchgeorg, 2008). It was discovered early on that the good reputation of a brand has an impact on the entire perception of product quality (“branded products effect”) (König, 1926). Above all, consumers base their expectations of superior quality on a brand name. After having formed a general opinion of quality, it then retroactively influences the perception and assessment of individual features (Häty, 2013).

Especially when launching new products, a company stands to benefit from the halo effect. The image of a well-established brand is transferred to a newly introduced product bearing the same brand name, thereby motivating consumers to make a purchase (Nufer, 2018).

The country-of-origin effect also constitutes a halo effect (Han, 1989). If consumers are unsure about key features of a product, knowing the origin of

the product can result in transferring the image of the country of origin to the product features unfamiliar to them. Subsequently, the image of the country of origin influences the assessment of product quality as well as attitude formation towards the product being evaluated (Häubl, 1995; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989).

In marketing communications, celebrities are frequently used as endorsers to enable a company or product to gain an advantage from a halo effect. The objective of such advertising activities is that, based on the positive statements about the product by the endorsing person, consumers will identify with the advertised brand so that a transfer of the popularity and image of the testimonial-giver to the product or the brand is achieved. The testimonial of the endorsing celebrity ensures objectivity and credibility. The aim is to transfer his or her good reputation or positive image (Meffert, Burmann, & Kirchgeorg, 2008; Nufer, 2018).

### 1.3. Halo effects in sports

Ströbel (2012) investigated the influencing factors of brand advertising in sports and their impact on the financial brand value of (soccer) club brands. Although the halo effect is mentioned here in the context of the brand concept, it is not explicitly connected with sport.

Preuss (2014) also dealt with the significance and types of brands in sports and mentioned a halo effect. As part of the 2004 Olympics in Athens, spectators were queried on the image of the Olympic soccer tournament and the image of the FIFA Soccer World Cup. The results indicated that with respect to many of the attributes, there were significant differences in how the two soccer tournaments were perceived. The attributes of the Olympic soccer tournament that were noted coincided to a great extent with the perception of the Olympic Games overall. The fact that the spectators were watching and assessing the soccer games as part of the Olympics apparently influenced their perception of the Olympic soccer tournament itself.

The halo effect has also been mentioned in sports when the reputation of individual ath-

letes is involved. One example is Jürgen Klopp, the former coach of Borussia Dortmund club (and current Coach of Liverpool F.C.). In the days when Borussia Dortmund was enjoying success, Klopp was considered easy-going, clever and was praised for the clear manner in which he had his team play soccer. Once things were not going so well for his team in terms of sporting performance in the Bundesliga season 2014/15, he was accused of not setting a clear course for his team, that the constantly changing tactical formations were a problem and the gradual abandonment of the successful system of past years represented the main reason for the crisis. Loch (2015) came to the conclusion that the differing assessments of one and the same person based merely on the criterion of athletic success as the only assessment standard could attain plausibility. However, no empirical evidence or detailed explanations were presented.

The fact that sporting success or failure constitutes a distinctive feature and can influence other areas of life is also clearly illustrated by a survey of domestic violence in England (Herrmann, 2012). According to this study, when the English national soccer team produces clear results – regardless of whether it involves winning or losing – the cases of domestic violence increase. Following the 1:4 defeat of the English team against Germany at the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup in South Africa, for example, the rate of domestic violence increased by 31.5% as compared to the same day in the previous year. The rate also went up when the English national team was victorious. In contrast, in the case of a draw, for instance the 1:1 against the USA, the increase was only 1.9%, and in a draw against Algeria only as little as 0.1%.

Hickman and Lawrence (2010) investigated consumer reactions to sports sponsors triggered by halo effects. Their study provides insights and explanations for the thinking and behavior of sports fans. A key finding was that sports fans who identify strongly with their team, tend to transfer their loyalty to their favorite sports club to its sponsors, which in turn results in positive attitudes towards the sponsor's brand.

What distinguishes sports fan from “normal” or average sports spectators is the personal significance that they assign to their favorite club. While “normal” spectators are interested primarily in the sporting competition, dedicated fans perceive their fandom as an integral part of their lives. They are much more emotionally involved and regularly think and talk about their club in their daily lives (Jones, 1997; Shank & Beasley, 1998; Spinrad, 1981). “BIRGing” and “CORFing” are phenomena that are characteristic of sports fans and in essence are attributable to halo effects (Nufer & Bühler, 2013): “BIRGing” (Basking in Reflected Glory) means that people attempt to demonstrate their relationship to those who are successful. In so doing, these people try to represent themselves as successful by publicly presenting a feature they share with the successful person or entity. What this means is that after a win by their team, they are likely to express themselves with “we won” (Cialdini et al., 1976). On the other hand, “CORFing” (Cutting Off Reflected Failure) means that in portraying themselves, people like to distance themselves from those who are unsuccessful. The reason for this is that people don’t want to be the subject of a negative image transfer. In other words, in the case of a defeat, they would tend to use phrasing such as “they lost”. It is typical of these phenomena that CORFing is observed less often among diehard fans, but rather more with fair-weather fans (Snyder et al., 1986).

## 2. METHOD

The intent in the following empirical analysis is to ascertain whether the sporting success or failure of a professional soccer team radiates or even outshines other sports-related and non-sports related aspects and influences or distorts how they are perceived by their fans. The empirical study seeks to determine whether or not a halo effect exists in soccer.

### 2.1. Research hypotheses

To ensure a structured approach to the empirical analysis, three hypotheses were formulated. They relate to both sports-related and non-sports aspects and to the subjective sense of happiness of soccer fans. The system used in choosing these hy-

potheses was applied on the basis of the following considerations: A spillover effect from the sporting success of the favorite team to sports-related or club-internal aspects would most probably be understandable and is to be expected. By comparison, it is considerably less likely for the sports performance to potentially rub off on non-sports aspects in the private life of a fan. The presumption that even fans’ subjective sense of happiness depends on the sporting success of the team they support is the most audacious of these propositions. The overall aim of this approach is to find out into which areas the sporting success or failure of a soccer team extends in its impact on its fans.

The first hypothesis pertains to sports-related or internal club factors. Is the perception of the work of the management and other sports-related aspects distorted by the sports performance of the team?

*H1: If a club enjoys sporting success (endures failure), then fans perceive the management of the club in a positive (negative) light.*

The management of the team is representative for sports-related aspects. It includes all decision-makers (from executive management/supervisory board of the club to managers/coaches all the way to the marketing department/representatives) and decisions (club policies, headlines, jerseys) within a soccer club.

The second hypothesis pertains to non-sports related and private factors of the fans. The study examines whether the perception of these aspects is affected by the sports performance of the fan’s favorite team.

*H2: If a club is successful (not successful), the fans perceive non-sports related aspects in their lives as positive (negative).*

The idea is to determine whether the success or failure of the club enjoying a fan’s support has an impact on essential aspects in the private life of that fan, which are not directly related to the sport. The non-sports related aspects are put into practice in terms of profession and/or work, relationships/family/friends, health, confidence in society down to the assessment of the work of the federal government.

The third and final hypothesis refers to the general sense of happiness experienced by fans. The object is to examine whether a fan's subjective feeling of happiness undergoes any change on account of the performance of his or her favorite team.

*H3: The sporting success (failure) of the favorite club influences the subjective feeling of happiness experienced by a fan.*

A (tentative) confirmation of this hypothesis would underscore the extent and the relevance for fans of the sporting success or failure of their favorite team. Conversely, a rejection of this hypothesis would point up the limits of sports with regard to their effects on the fans.

## 2.2. Research design

As part of the empirical study, fans of six soccer clubs selected from the first German soccer league Bundesliga were interviewed: FC Bayern Munich, Borussia Mönchengladbach, Eintracht Frankfurt, 1. FC Cologne, VfB Stuttgart and Hamburg SV. The interviews were conducted in three stages: shortly before the start of the 2015/16 season (in August 2015), after the conclusion of the first half of the season (in December 2015) and immediately following the end of the season (in May 2016). In addition, a control group of persons not interested in soccer was included in each stage. Professional specialist provider Norstat Deutschland (Germany) was charged with the data collection. The data were collected by means of the Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique.

The survey was addressed to German-speaking soccer fans aged 14 years and up, residing in Germany (people not interested in soccer acted as the control group). The complete data set consisting of experimental and control groups included a total of 4,180 cases. The test subjects were given the opportunity to participate in all three stages. The prerequisite to be included in the experimental group was for persons to perceive themselves as fans of one of the six clubs being studied. Furthermore, only responses of test subjects who indicated great or very great interest in soccer were considered (collected on a Likert scale with five grading increments).

The average age of the persons interviewed was nearly 50 years ( $x = 49.89$  years). The breakdown by gender of study participants was 65 percent of men and 35 percent of women. In the course of and at the close of the 2015/16 season, the six Bundesliga clubs observed were situated in a diverse range of areas on the national league charts.

The data collected were analyzed with the support of IBM SPSS 23 and Microsoft Excel 2013. The test subjects' subjective evaluation of the current sporting success of their favorite teams (also collected on a Likert scale with five grading increments) is the focal point of the analyses described below.

The intent of the first step was to examine whether the assessment of predetermined (sports and non-sports related) aspects is dependent upon the perceived sporting success. Chi<sup>2</sup> independence tests were used for this purpose. In the second step, the test subjects were subdivided into two groups for each aspect to be analyzed: the first group consists of test subjects who assess their clubs as very successful or successful. The second group consists of test subjects who perceive their clubs as unsuccessful or not at all successful in terms of sporting performance. Unilateral T-tests were used to determine whether there are significant differences in the mean values of both groups.

Of the total of 4,180 queried test subjects, the following analysis includes only test subjects from the experimental group who provided an evaluation on the current sporting success of their favorite team. This results in a (maximum) sample size of  $n = 3,178$ . Table 1 shows the composition of the sample according to the national league clubs that were studied. A relatively evenly distributed image emerges among the fans who were included.

Around half of the interviewees stated that they estimated the current sporting performance of their team as very successful or successful. This is countered by over 20 percent of fans who designated the performance of their favorite team at the respective time of the survey as unsuccessful or not at all successful (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Composition of the sample

Sample	Borussia Mönchen-gladbach	Eintracht Frankfurt	FC Bayern Munich	1. FC Cologne	Hamburg SV	VfB Stuttgart	Total
Sample absolute	565	444	644	465	617	443	3,178
Sample relative	17.8%	14.0%	20.3%	14.6%	19.4%	13.9%	100%

**Table 2.** Assessment of sporting performance

Sample	Assessment of sporting performance of a favorite team					Total
	Very successful	Successful	Indifferent	Not successful	Not successful at all	
Sample absolute	581	1,067	892	418	220	3,178
Sample relative	18.3%	33.6%	28.1%	13.2%	6.9%	100%

Obviously, the assessment of sporting success is subjective and possibly even marked by the publicly announced goals of the individual club. So one may assume that some Bayern Munich fans probably speak of sporting failure if their club wins only one of the three most important titles (German championship, German Cup and European Champions League). On the other hand, fans of a team potentially heading towards relegation perceive just the maintenance of league status (avoiding relegation) as a successful sporting achievement.

league in relegation. By landing in 17th place, VfB Stuttgart descended directly to the second ranking national league.

### 3.1. Examination of sports-related aspects

The primary intent of the following is to analyze whether sporting success influences the perception of sports-related aspects of the club. By way of example, Table 3 combines the assessment of sporting success with satisfaction with the design of the jerseys.

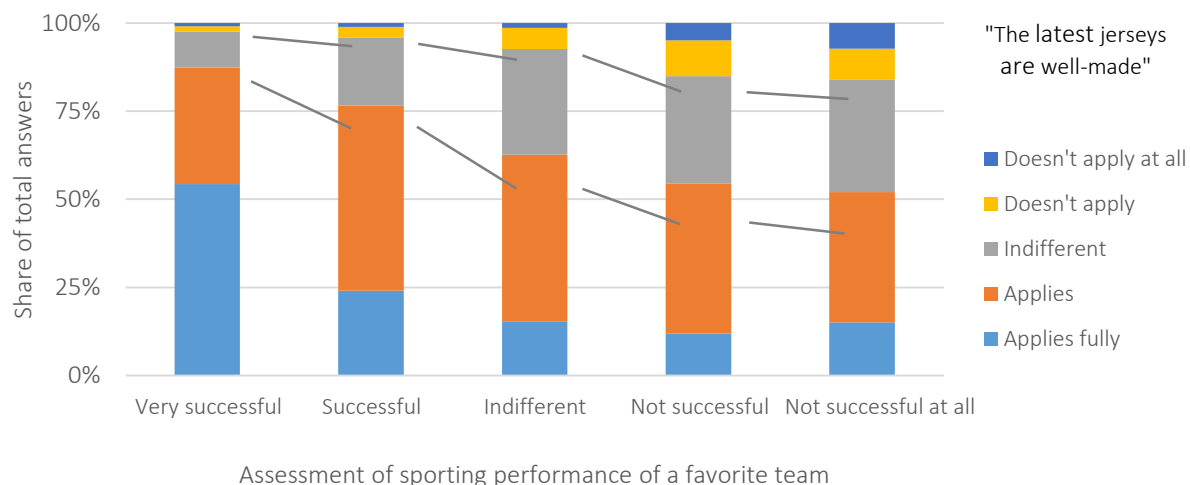
## 3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the 2015/16 season, FC Bayern Munich won the German championship, the German Cup and reached the semifinals of the European Champions League. Borussia Mönchengladbach attained fourth place in the national league. 1. FC Cologne and Hamburg SV ranked ninth and tenth, respectively. Eintracht Frankfurt finished the season in 16th place and only secured its place in the

The cross-tabulation shows that almost 40 percent of the fans who view their club as very successful in terms of sports performance also define the design of the jerseys as superbly successful. Less than 1 percent of the interviewees consider their club very successful but consider the jersey design extremely unsuccessful. A reverse pattern is discernible when one observes the test subjects who deem the sporting performance as not at all successful. Figure 1 visualizes the results of the cross-tabulation.

**Table 3.** Cross-tabulation of assessment of sporting performance and satisfaction with the design of the jerseys

Cross-tabulation		Assessment of sporting performance of a favorite team					Σ
		Very successful	Successful	Indifferent	Not successful	Not successful at all	
“The latest jerseys are well-made”	Applies fully	309	254	132	48	33	776
	Applies	188	556	410	172	81	1,407
	Indifferent	58	205	259	123	70	715
	Doesn't apply	9	31	52	41	19	152
	Doesn't apply at all	5	12	12	20	16	65
	Σ	569	1,058	865	404	219	3,115



**Figure 1.** Visualization of correlation of assessing sporting performance and satisfaction with the design of the jerseys

Analogous analyses were conducted to evaluate the dependence or non-dependence of other sports-related aspects on sporting success. Table 4 contains the outcomes of the individual tests.

According to the Chi<sup>2</sup> independence tests conducted for all investigated aspects, the assessment of the sports-related facets of the favorite club is dependent upon the perception of sporting success. In order to analyze these findings in greater depth, additional unilateral *T*-tests were used. For this purpose, the test subjects were subdivided into two groups: the first group consisted of those whose responses were “enjoys great sporting success” and “enjoys sporting success”. The second group consisted of the responses “does not achieve sporting success” and “does not achieve any sporting success at all”. The mean values of the responses with respect to the researched sports-related aspects of both groups formed the basis for the

*T*-tests. The mean values of the responses (from “1 = is absolutely true” to “5 = is not true at all”) were calculated and compiled for both groups. The mean value for those survey subjects who assessed their favorite club as at least having sporting success is at 1.90 for the example covering satisfaction with the design of the jerseys. The survey subjects in group 2 responded with an average value of 2.55. As Table 5 indicates, all *T*-tests performed point to significant differences for all sports-related aspects investigated.

For the selected sports-related aspects, the analyses conducted show both dependence upon sporting success as well as a significant difference in the mean values of the group observed. Hypothesis 1 can therefore be provisionally validated. Thus, one can proceed on the presumption of the existence of the halo effect, i.e. as perceived by the fans, sporting success outshines sports-related facets.

**Table 4.** Results of Chi<sup>2</sup>-tests concerning sports-related aspects

Sports-related aspects	Chi <sup>2</sup> -test
The top management/the president of my favorite club is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,097) = 1,672.13; p < .005$
The board of directors is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 2,994) = 1,837.50; p < .005$
The coach is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,121) = 1,170.32; p < .005$
The marketing department is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,037) = 1,581.75; p < .005$
The latest jerseys are well-made	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,115) = 492.20; p < .005$
The club policy makes sense	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,090) = 1,926.49; p < .005$
The sports director is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,123) = 1,955.21; p < .005$
The club makes positive headlines	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,154) = 2,252.55; p < .005$
All club representatives pull together	$\chi^2_{emp.} (16; 3,083) = 1,672.74; p < .005$

**Table 5.** Results of *T*-tests concerning sports-related aspects

Sports-related aspects	<i>T</i> -tests
The top management/the president of my favorite club is doing a good job	Means (1.74; 3.51); $p < .005$
The board of directors is doing a good job	Means (1.81; 3.69); $p < .005$
The coach is doing a good job	Means (1.54; 2.88); $p < .005$
The marketing department is doing a good job	Means (1.71; 3.25); $p < .005$
The latest jerseys are well-made	Means (1.90; 2.55); $p < .005$
The club policy makes sense	Means (1.70; 3.61); $p < .005$
The sports director is doing a good job	Means (1.64; 3.55); $p < .005$
The club makes positive headlines	Means (1.71; 3.85); $p < .005$
All club representatives pull together	Means (1.74; 3.59); $p < .005$

### 3.2. Examination of non-sports aspects

Does the sporting success go beyond that and also distort the perception of non-sports aspects? Using examples, Table 6 combines the assessments of sporting success with satisfaction with the job being done by the German federal government.

The cross-tabulation shows that nearly 40 percent of the fans who view their club's sporting performance as very successful, think the statement that the federal government is doing a good job is totally correct or just correct. Only around 15 percent of the respondents view their club as very successful and simultaneously consider the job done by the federal government as not good at all.

A reverse pattern is discernible in the observation of the study subjects who assess the sporting performance as unsuccessful. Figure 2 visualizes the results of this cross-tabulation.

To evaluate the dependence or non-dependence of further non-sports aspects on sporting success, the same procedure was used as in the analyses of the sports-related aspects. Table 7 summarizes the outcomes of the  $\chi^2$  independence tests and the *T*-tests.

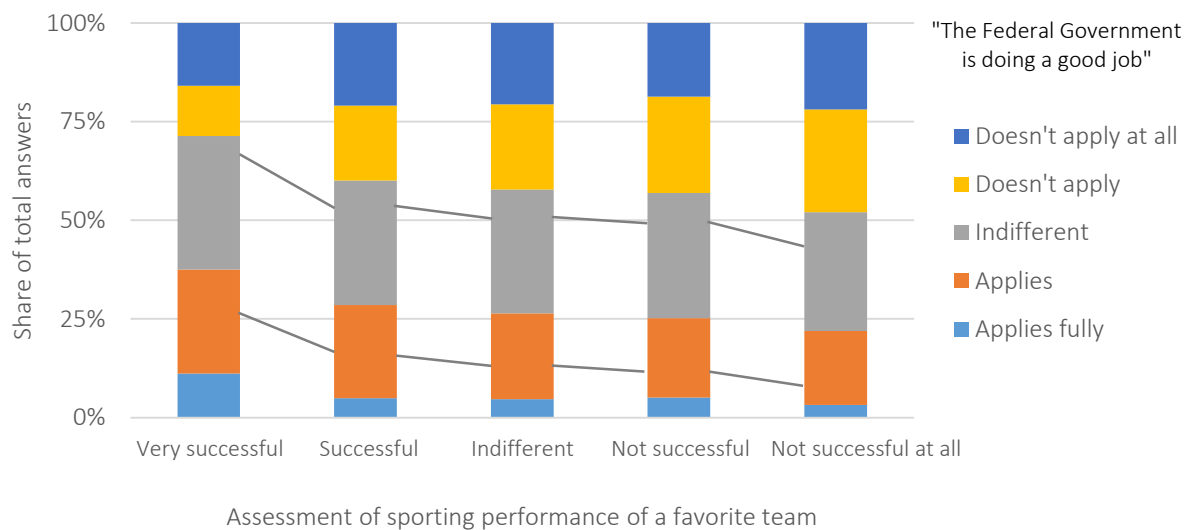
The findings of all analyses performed – both those of the  $\chi^2$  independence tests as well as the *T*-tests – show up as unambiguous for all non-sports aspects: dependencies between the variables exist. In addition, the mean values that have

**Table 6.** Cross-tabulation of assessment of sporting performance and satisfaction with the job of the Federal Government

Cross-tabulation		Assessment of sporting performance of a favorite team					$\Sigma$
		Very successful	Successful	Indifferent	Not successful	Not successful at all	
“The Federal Government is doing a good job”	Applies fully	64	52	41	21	7	185
	Applies	151	248	191	83	41	714
	Indifferent	194	332	276	131	66	999
	Doesn't apply	73	200	189	101	57	620
	Doesn't apply at all	91	220	181	77	48	617
	$\Sigma$	573	1,052	878	413	219	3,135

**Table 7.** Results of  $\chi^2$ -tests and *T*-tests concerning non-sports aspects

Non-sports aspects	$\chi^2$ -tests	<i>T</i> -tests
The Federal Government is doing a good job	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,135) = 72.92; p < .005$	Means (3.16; 3.36); $p < .005$
I like my current working/study situation	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 2,935) = 64.68; p < .005$	Means (2.23; 2.44); $p < .005$
My job/school is fun	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 2,919) = 80.60; p < .005$	Means (2.18; 2.45); $p < .005$
My relationship/marriage works well	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 2,899) = 58.14; p < .005$	Means (1.81; 3.69); $p < .005$
I'm satisfied with my private situation	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,155) = 100.78; p < .005$	Means (1.95; 2.13); $p < .005$
I hit it off with my friends	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,152) = 127.97; p < .005$	Means (1.67; 1.85); $p < .005$
Overall, my health is good	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,163) = 61.89; p < .005$	Means (2.45; 2.86); $p < .005$
I have trust in society	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,155) = 101.59; p < .005$	Means (2.77; 2.97); $p < .005$



**Figure 2.** Visualization of correlation of assessing sporting performance and satisfaction with the job of the Federal Government

been compared with one another are substantially different. Thus, Hypothesis 2 can also be provisionally validated. The existence of a halo effect radiating from sporting success onto non-sports aspects can therefore be verified.

### 3.3. Examination of the subjective feeling of happiness

The final analysis examines whether the sporting success of soccer fans' favorite club has an influence on their overall feelings of happiness. Table 8 combines the assessments of sporting success with the subjective sense of happiness.

The cross-tabulation indicates that almost 80 percent of the fans who perceive their club's sporting performance as very successful are very happy or happy. Less than 2 percent of the respondents view their club as very successful and are at the same

time very unhappy. A reverse pattern becomes apparent if one observes the test subjects who assess the sporting performance as unsuccessful (failure). Figure 3 visualizes these results.

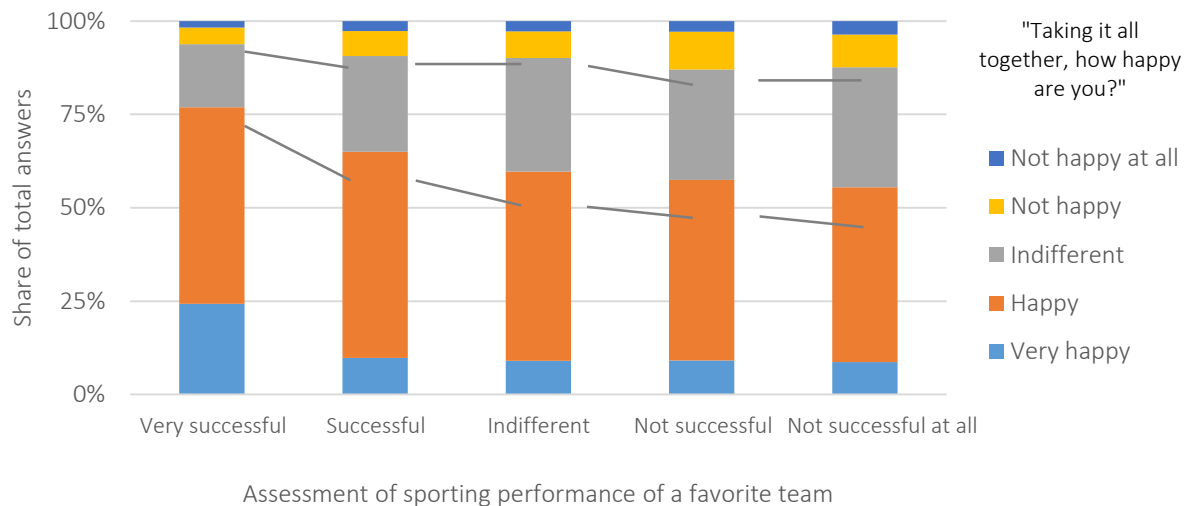
The results of the Chi<sup>2</sup> independence tests and *T*-tests that are based on this can be found in Table 9.

There is an interdependence of both variables. It demonstrates that the assessment of one's own individual happiness is affected by perceived sporting success. The *T*-test determines a significant difference in the mean values of the groups studied. Thereby, Hypothesis 3 can also be provisionally validated.

Table 10 shows the assessment of sporting success differentiated by the selected teams. Unfortunately, a further investigation of the subjective sense of

**Table 8.** Cross-tabulation of assessment of sporting performance and assessment of individual happiness

Cross-tabulation		Assessment of sporting performance of a favorite team					Σ
		Very successful	Successful	Indifferent	Not successful	Not successful at all	
Assessment of individual happiness	Very happy	141	104	80	38	19	382
	Happy	306	587	451	201	102	1,647
	Indifferent	98	272	271	123	70	834
	Not happy	26	71	63	42	19	221
	Not happy at all	10	29	25	12	8	84
	Σ	581	1,063	890	416	218	3,168



**Figure 3.** Visualization of correlation of assessing sporting performance and assessing individual happiness

**Table 9.** Result of Chi<sup>2</sup>-tests and the T-tests concerning the assessment of individual happiness

Happiness	Chi <sup>2</sup> -test	T-test
Assessment of individual happiness	$\chi^2_{\text{emp}} (16; 3,168) = 138.21; p < .005$	Means (2.27; 2.50); $p < .005$

happiness of the fans differentiated by these individual clubs is not feasible. A valid assessment by means of Chi<sup>2</sup> independence tests requires various prerequisites (Bühl, 2016; Fantapié Altobelli, 2017), which are unfortunately not met in the present data set. This is due in particular to the fact that the team fans assess the sporting performance of their respective team in a very uniform manner.

Overall, during the survey period, the majority of fans of FC Bayern Munich and those of Borussia Mönchengladbach perceived their teams as very successful or successful. Fans of Hamburg SV, 1. FC Cologne and those of Eintracht Frankfurt were primarily undecided in their assessment of sport-

ing success. Cross-seasonally, supporters of the subsequently relegated VfB Stuttgart team tended towards an assessment of sporting performance as unsuccessful.

These evaluations represent a very good reflection of the rankings of the teams in the charts during the season or at the respective research times. Moreover, it becomes apparent that fans with great or very great interest in soccer assess the sporting performance of their teams in a very similar manner. This tendency is clearly identifiable for each of the six clubs, and there are only very few outliers who do not fall in line with the supposed majority opinion.

**Table 10.** Assessment of sporting performance differentiated by teams

Team	Assessment of sporting performance of a favorite team					Total
	Very successful	Successful	Indifferent	Not successful	Not successful at all	
Borussia Mönchen-gladbach	144	343	72	4	2	565
Eintracht Frankfurt	12	89	167	128	48	444
FC Bayern Munich	336	266	37	3	2	644
1. FC Cologne	60	227	165	11	2	465
Hamburg SV	23	89	308	167	30	617
VfB Stuttgart	6	53	143	105	136	443

## 4. DISCUSSION

The results of the analyses substantiate the distortion of the fans' perception with regard to a very diverse range of aspects that is triggered by the sporting success or failure of their favorite clubs. If their team enjoys sporting success, both sports-related and non-sports related aspects are perceived as positive. When their teams perform well, this even causes fans to be happier overall. On the other hand, if their own team is not successful, this results in a negative assessment of other aspects.

Clubs should be aware of the existence of the halo effect with their most loyal fans. It is in the interest of the clubs to have fans that are both loyal and well-disposed to them. The study has shown that fans have a relatively uniform opinion when assessing sporting performance. They are very good at judging the sporting performance of their teams and are validated by other fans arriving at the same assessment. In the case of failure, this awareness of supposedly being right or having the right opinion could develop into mood-killing discontent with the team. An open and honest relationship between the club or its management and fan groups could prevent such a situation from occurring.

Given this situation, it is advisable that clubs include awareness of their current sporting performance in the management of their communications with their fans. Skillfully implemented, this could allow for optimizing target numbers: At a time when a team is enjoying sporting success, running an advertising campaign that encourages membership in the club would be the most promising approach. A similar approach applies for promoting merchandising items. It can be assumed that when a team's sporting performance is successful, the sale of merchandising items would be a sure-fire success. If merchandising sales do not meet expectations because of failing sporting performance, this should just as well be countered by targeted promotional campaigns.

In the event that a team is not very successful over an extended period of time, the wrong communications could conceivably drive a wedge between the team and its fans, the phenomenon known as "the twelfth player". This could result in turmoil in

the club, which more often than not leads to increased external pressure on the club management and ultimately culminates in the dismissal of a coach. Appropriate communication with its own fans, however, may also result in a club being invigorated by the external support of fans, which fosters solidarity and team spirit in times of crisis ("no sudden irrational acts"). Ideally, keeping the reality of the halo effect in mind and consistently channeling its activities accordingly could even have an impact on the future sporting success of a club.

The often cited strong bond that exists between fans and their team (Daumann & Römmelt, 2015; Nufer & Bühler, 2013) can be verified by the halo effect. Ultimately, both the club and its fans wish for nothing more than the sporting success of the team. However, the motives behind this yearning are different: the goal of a club is sporting success that guarantees its long-term profitability. The existence of the halo effect shows that soccer fans also want the sporting performance of their favorite club to be successful because it affects their private lives and their individual sense of happiness.

## 5. CRITICAL APPRAISAL AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study included only those test persons who indicated very great or great interest in soccer. It can be assumed that the occurrence of a halo effect depends upon how involved the fans are with soccer. "Fans" who show less involvement (if they can actually be described as fans at all) are more reserved in how they view the sporting activity and their capacity for emotional involvement and to be carried away by the game is generally limited. Sporting success or failure presumably has less influence or none at all on their perception of other sports-related or non-sports aspects.

Additionally, the exact time when individual test persons submitted their responses mattered. It may be assumed that an interview immediately following a game is far more emotional in nature than an interview with an interval of several days from the last game of the favored team. The methodology working with online data collection

comes with the disadvantage that the exact time of the response submission cannot be influenced.

The study pertains to fans of six soccer clubs selected from the Bundesliga. The sample consists

exclusively of German-speaking test persons residing in Germany. Therefore, one should proceed with caution in applying the insights gained to other types of sports or in generalizing for other countries.

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## TOPICAL REFERENCE AND CONCLUSION

In 2015, the German Soccer Association (DFB) was searching for a symbolic name for the national team, which should be perceived as a brand for the DFB team by both German fans and the international media. As far as the DFB was concerned, the term “Die Mannschaft” (“The Team”) was a perfect fit for the incumbent world champions at that time. In subsequent years “Die Mannschaft” was picked up and activated by DFB sponsors. Yet, despite ongoing and constant citing of the brand name, the term simply would not make its way into everyday use among the fans (Borgböhmer, 2018; Rentz, 2018).

Especially following the fiasco of the German team at the 2018 FIFA Soccer World Cup in Russia, where the team was eliminated in the preliminary round, the concept of “Die Mannschaft” was increasingly criticized by many fans (and meanwhile has also been subjected to scrutiny by the DFB itself). The term is interpreted as appearing artificial and the DFB is being blamed for merely having grabbed and copied ideas developed by other countries (e.g., “Seleção”, “Azzurri” or “Les Bleus”) (Rentz, 2018; Borgböhmer, 2018).

In the opinion of the authors, the concept “Die Mannschaft” is primarily representative of the alleged excessive commercialization of the DFB in recent years – accompanied by inflated ticket prices, the exclusion of fans from practice sessions, late kickoff times at friendlies, etc. The original idea is probably not as bad as its current image, but it must now serve as a quasi-scapegoat for many other things that have gone awry at the DFB in recent years. This means that a halo effect may be observed here as well: When a team wins the World Cup, fans tend to tolerate a great deal of what happens off the field, because the sporting success outshines everything else. But if the performance of that team at the next World Cup is so pathetic that they are eliminated in the preliminary round (which has never happened before), it’s literally the last straw for the fans. Their critique of previously existing issues gets loud(er).

While the “pitchfork effect” concerning the “Die Mannschaft” brand merely represents the authors’ assumption based on plausibility considerations, in the context of the present empirical study, a halo effect emanating from the sporting success of selected national league clubs acting on the perception of sports-related aspects, non-sports aspects and the subjective feeling of happiness on the part of the fans can be verified at a statistically significant level.

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