

Fan Experience Management: Understanding the Similarities and Differences of Stadium Fans and Online Fans

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, the experiential aspect of consumption and its management have received an increased interest from both academics and practitioners (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Furthermore, Cova (1997, 2003), Cova and Cova (2002), inspired by Maffesoli (1988), have underlined the importance of socialization through consumption, as well as the notions of tribes and tribal marketing. In line with these concepts, new tribes, such as on-line communities, have emerged on the Internet and have proliferated at exponential rates (Cova and Pace, 2006). Among these on-line communities, we find those created around a passion, such as a sports team or sports in general. Indeed, along with music, cinema, religion and politics, sports have the potential to generate very strong feelings from its fans (Rein, Kotler and Shields, 2006, Richelieu and Boulaire, 2005). This is true in both its practice and fandom, in fact, since its beginnings, sports have given rise to different types of fan gatherings. In order to understand these gatherings, researchers referred to the concept of brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002, Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

To our knowledge, little or no researches have studied ways to reconcile the management of fans' experience with that of on-line communities of fans. This is the issue we tackle in our research.

To come up with new insight, we refer to the model developed by Holt (1995) and the typology he introduced to study the different types of fans' experiences at the stadium. The metaphors and the practices Holt identified are:

- 1) Consuming as Experience (accounting, evaluating, appreciating),
- 2) Consuming as Integration (assimilating, producing, personalizing),
- 3) Consuming as Play (communing, socializing), and
- 4) Consuming as Classification (through objects and actions).

Our research questions are as follows: Is it possible to identify similar means to collectively appropriate an on-line experience? What differences and nuances are required and why? What kind of conceptual model can we develop? What type of bridges can we erect between the management of the experience and the management of on-line communities?

In order to find answers to these questions, four on-line communities, created and managed by fans, are studied. The four on-line communities are those of Football Club

Barcelona (www.fc-barcelone.com), AC Milan (acmilan-online.com), Olympique de Marseille (www.om-passion.com) and Paris Saint-Germain (www.planetepsq.com). Our case study analysis enables us to underline the dual role of fan and member, as well as the dual character of the objects considered (passion and on-line community). The connections established between the appropriation strategies of the two objects and the two roles have enabled us to achieve the goal set out in this research study.

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