

SPILLOVER EFFECTS IN A TEAM-LEAGUE CONTEXT

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Abstract:

INTRODUCTION

This study uses the ingredient brand alliance framework in a sports context to investigate how the presence/absence of a team (ally brand) affects attitudes and behaviors toward the sports competition (host brand). Results from a quasi-experiment show that fan identification and regional attachment independently predict individuals' behavior, but not favorability of associations, toward a national soccer league contingent on the fact whether "their" team is part of the league or not. The findings help sponsors of sport competitions to evaluate sponsorship contracts in terms of reaching specific target segments. Researchers can learn from the findings if, how, and under which conditions a change in the composition of a sports tournament impacts on spectators' attitudes and behaviors toward the tournament.

INGREDIENT BRAND ALLIANCES, SPILLOVER EFFECTS, FAN IDENTIFICATION, AND REGIONAL ATTACHMENT

The present study draws from the ingredient brand alliance model and social identity theory to investigate effects of changes in team-league compositions on spectator behaviors and brand equity of the league brand. Simonin and Ruth (1998) describe a brand alliance as a short- or long-term association or combination of two or more individual brands, products or other proprietary assets. Teams in sports leagues are prototypical examples of an ingredient brand alliance where the team serves as the ally brand and the league as the host brand. In a national sports league context, these two components cannot be consumed independently, and the brand alliance affects consumers' brand attitudes of both individual brands, what Simonin and Ruth (1998) call "spillover effects."

Fan identification refers to a spectator's perceived connectedness with a team and experience of the team's failings and achievements as his or her own

(Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Existing research documents that fan identification drives attitudes and behaviors toward the team and related properties, such as the amount of money spent on team-licensed merchandise. Fan identification may, therefore, also influence perceptions and behaviors toward the league in which the team is competing. People's regional attachment is an important driver for the connection of individuals to soccer clubs. Bauer, Sauer and Schmitt (2005) also highlight the importance of regional identity when analyzing the relevance of a club to its region. In line with brand alliance literature we argue that the league's perception is shaped by the associations toward the involved teams. Therefore, we hypothesize that for spectators with high fan identification or regional attachment, the exclusion of their team from a league will generate negative spillover effects and unfavorable behavior toward the league.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

The quasi-experiment used a 2 (league list: team A present, team B present) x 3 (fan identification: fan team A, fan team B, neither) x 3 (regional attachment: region team A, region team B, neither) between-subjects design to test the propositions.

The Austrian main soccer league Bundesliga (host brand) and two teams (A,B) of the second league that, while the research was carried out, were promising candidates to advance to the Bundesliga next season (ally brands) served as the research context. Half of the respondents were randomly assigned to a list with team A (B) participating as a new member in next year's Bundesliga.

An online questionnaire used established scales (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Krishnan, 1996; Wann & Branscombe, 1993) to measure respondents' involvement with soccer, realism of the presented lists, fan identification, regional attachment, average favorability of all associations mentioned with the Bundesliga, and behavior toward the Bundesliga. The final sample consisted of 424 participants with at least medium soccer involvement (≥ 2). The study predicts two-way interaction effects of league list and fan identification as well as of league list and regional attachment. Therefore, group sizes are on average 70 respondents, sufficient to ensure robustness of the results.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Perceived realism for the two scenarios was high and not significantly different. A three-way ANOVA showed significant interaction effects (league list x fan identification, league list x regional attachment) on behavior toward the Bundesliga, but not on the favorability of mentioned associations. As proposed, consumers who felt a strong identification with an ally brand (team) or its region of origin indicated to follow the host brand (Bundesliga) less if their team was not part of it. Managers can use the findings to better understand (and promote or counteract) effects that arise from the composition of specific sports tournaments. While brand equity of the tournament does not appear to be affected by a change in a league's composition, behavior of fans of (not) participating teams clearly is.

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