Brand analysis in sports using repertory grid technique: Grasshopper Club Zurich as a case study

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Aim of abstract/paper – research question

The repertory grid technique is increasingly popular in marketing. The technique allows for deep insights and modern software illustrates these using attractive computer images. Yet, it has not been used in sport management so far. The aim of this research is to test the method for brand image of a professional football club and to analyse if valuable managerial implications can be derived.

Theoretical background

Disruptions caused by digital transformation make many traditional management processes obsolete and change the way how brand image is formed fundamentally. However, Erdem et. al (2015) emphasized that this makes fundamentals like cultivating one's brand image even more indispensable and new digital methods of measurement are needed. In sports, brand image holds a special significance as a brand-oriented management approach is seen as a way to stabilize financial success in times of weak competitive performance (Gladden and Funk 2001). Using repertory grid technique to measure brand image has seen rising interest in many industries but not in sports. The authors of this abstract cooperate with the Swiss football club Grasshopper Club Zurich (GCZ) to close this gap in sport management research.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The repertory grid technique is a cognitive mapping technique that attempts to depict how people think about phenomena in their world (Tan & Hunter, 2002). The technique is based on the personal construct theory of Kelly (1955) and is used to understand people's personal construct system. Kelly (1955) argues that people use personal constructs to understand and interpret events that occur around them and that these constructs are based on personal experiences. In this study all ten professional football Clubs of the Swiss Raiffeisen Super League are defined as the objects of thoughts, so-called "elements". The constructs are elicited by the triadic elicitation method. The software tool "sofistiq" collects the data directly and visualizes it for analysis. The software projects the constructs and elements onto a three dimensional, rotatable space and thus facilitates interpretation (Berger & Hari, 2012).

Sample

Two samples were taken to analyse the brand image of the GCZ from an internal and external perspective. Thereby, 33 in-depth computer-based interviews were carried out. The first sample compromised 16 employees from the board of administration, the sections finance and sports which also includes players and staff. The other sample contained 17 fans. To qualify for the research they were required to have visited at least one home match within the last 12 months. The two sample sizes are reasonable due to the intensive nature of the repertory grid technique. In practice of this technique a relatively small sample size is often used. A sample size of 15 to 25 within a population will frequently produce sufficient constructs (Tan & Hunter, 2002). Similar recommendations are made by other experts.

Results, discussion and implications

Results - This study not only described the image of GCZ but also identified the gaps between the clubs defined brand identity and the brand image of fans as well as employees. The results showed that the fans' and employees' perception deviate from the desirable brand identity and from each other. GCZ intended to be perceived as serious, responsible and connected to Zurich. Both stakeholders associated the connection to Zurich but did not identify the club as responsible. The employees perceived the club as serious, the fans did not. In comparison to its local competitor FC Zurich, very little difference was found in participations' perceptions. However, the findings gave the football club a clear view of the existing gaps. The authors of this paper advised actions to close the gaps and, thus, get a consistent and unique image based on the behavioural approach.

Discussion - The results of the study exhibited the repertory grid technique as an appropriate method to investigate brand image of a professional sports club. Thereby a software based procedure like sofistiq is a promising approach. Experts in sport management could conduct a similar research to examine the brand image of other clubs. This study provides a basis to discuss the management and analysis of brand image in sports industry.

Limitations - This study analysed the brand image of GCZ only for fans and employees. The results cannot be easily generalized to all Swiss football fans. Furthermore a quantitative survey would be useful to ensure significance to the population of GCZ fans.

References

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