

An empirical model of sport fan consumption communities

Author: David Hedlund

Institution: St. John's University

E-mail: davidphedlund@gmail.com

Introduction & purpose

While marketers increasingly acknowledge the critical role of developing long-term strategies that enhance the value of the firm, collaborative and co-creation service and marketing activities are gaining importance. As firms shift their focus from creating value *for* consumers to creating value *with* consumers, collaboration between firms and consumers is increasing. At sporting events, the sport organization and its staff (e.g., managers, coaches and players) collaborate with event consumers to create the game experience. Sport consumers, however, rarely attend sporting events alone. Instead, sport consumers join and participate in networks of like-minded fans and engage in collaborative consumption activities. These activities include pre-, in-, and post-game behaviors and expressions of attachment, identification and involvement with the sporting event, sport organization, team and other consumers. While sport marketers recognize the importance of collaborative consumption, their understanding of the process is not yet well developed. As a result, the purpose of this research is to create and test a model of sport fan consumption community. The results of this research can be used to identify constructs and relationships important to the process of collaborative consumption in a sport setting.

Theoretical background

Sport fan consumption community research is based on distinct yet overlapping notions of consumer groups (cultures/subcultures of consumption, consumer tribes and brand community). In these groups, consumers are informed, connected, networked and empowered (Ramaswamy, 2008). As the dominant logic of marketing has changed from a goods-dominant (G-D) logic (goods are embedded with value) to a service-dominant (S-D) logic (firms create value with consumers), relationships based on the co-creation of value and value-in-use are cultivated between the firm and its consumers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). When sport organizations interact with fan groups at sporting events, value is co-created and experienced by those in attendance. Thus, the value of a sporting event is in large part determined by the interactions between the staff of the sport organization and the sport fan communities that consume the sporting event.

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (see Funk & James, 2001) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) provide theoretical frameworks used to create a saturated structural model containing thirty-one hypothesized relationships among nine constructs. The PCM is used as a framework to model the relationships among the antecedents and potential mediators, and the

TRA is used to model the relationships among the potential mediators and consequences in the hypothesized model.

Methodology, research design & data analysis

The methodology used in this research is based on Churchill's (1979) recommendations for developing and testing new marketing measures. First, the constructs representing the antecedents (knowledge and image), potential mediators (satisfaction, identification, loyalty and community membership), and consequences (attendance, merchandise purchase and word of mouth behavioral intentions) of sport fan consumption communities are identified and operationalized. Then, a pilot study ($n=113$) is conducted to determine reliable and valid operationalizations of the constructs. Finally, the main study ($n=627$) is undertaken to empirically test the relationships among constructs using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) procedures.

Results, discussion & implications/conclusions

The model fit indices suggest that the data has good fit to the hypothesized model. The results of the structural model indicate that seventeen of thirty-one hypothesized relationships are positive and significant ($p<.05$), and 45% to 68% of the variance in the seven endogenous constructs is explained. All thirteen of the relationships between the antecedents and the four potential mediators are positive and significant ($p<.05$). In terms of the three consequences, a sense of membership in the community had positive and significant relationships with attendance and word of mouth intentions, while satisfaction and loyalty both had positive and significant relationships with merchandise purchase intentions. Regardless of the label, sport fan consumption communities are playing an increasingly important role in sport marketing strategy. While sport organizations have traditionally focused on individual consumption behaviors, sport marketers are shifting their focus to allocating more resources toward strategies that develop, foster and support sport fan consumption communities. Sport marketers are also beginning to realize the long-term value in collaborating with sport fan consumption communities. If current trends continue, then engaging in strategies and tactics that facilitate stronger sport fan consumption communities may result in consumers that are more attached, identified and involved in attending events, purchasing merchandise and giving positive word of mouth recommendations to others.

References

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