

Gamification Through Fantasy Sports — Empirical Findings In The Context Of Professional Sport Leagues

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Aim of the research

In order to increase interaction and develop deep relationships with their fans, sport league brands use gamification applications, like fantasy sports (FS). Dwyer and Drayer (2010) define FS as an “ancillary sport service, heavily associated with real-world sport statistics. Fantasy sports participation is primarily an online activity that is completely customizable, interactive and involves nearly every major professional sport (...)”. FS is a tool to foster interactive engagement patterns between the league brand and its fans. As the impact of gamification on gaining and retaining fans seems to be a rather unexplored topic in sport marketing literature the study focuses on empirically testing the effects of FS participation on sport fans’ attitudinal parameters towards league brands in the US and Canada.

Theoretical background

Technological developments have contributed to new forms of engaging customers by motivating people to proceed various individually and collectively beneficial behaviours. A popular evolution in this area is gamification, which we thereby define as a process of engaging customers to participate in playful experiences in non-game contexts. This field has raised interest as it enhances the level of interaction by integrating hedonic elements to customer engagement.

In marketing literature, the customer-firm-interaction is considered in various contexts and influenced by cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011). The special context reflected upon in this study is sport fans’ hedonic experience driven behaviours reflected in the concept of customer engagement behaviour (CEB). CEB is conceptualized beyond customers’ attitudinal drivers. It includes behavioural aspects focused on a customer-firm-relationship (van Doorn et al., 2010). Adapted on the given platform context of FS, CEB contains sport fans’ motivational patterns to engage in league brand-related gamification applications. Sport fans are intrinsically motivated in voluntarily engaging in a process of exchange on a FS platform. By that, they interact with the sport league brand and a much broader network of diverse actors.

For the purpose of this study the constructs consumption capital, attitudinal loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM) are chosen in order to evaluate the effects of gamification through FS towards professional sport league brands.

Methodology

The empirical study combines descriptive with experimental research in a between-subject design, where respondents are posteriorly allocated by indication whether or not they participate in league-related FS. From there the assessment of the different constructs consumption capital, loyalty and WOM as dependent variables are measured via a standardized online questionnaire using 7-point likert scales for measuring sport fans attitudes towards sport leagues. A standardized online questionnaire is used to gather data from sport fans in North America. During the survey period a total of 189 responses are recorded. After adjusting data, a valid total of N = 122 is deducted and used for analyses.

For testing the formulated hypotheses, a one-factor ANOVA with an in-between group design is performed for parameters consumption capital, attitudinal loyalty and WOM in order to evaluate the influence of gamification on sport league brands through FS.

Results and discussion

The comparison of construct means for variables consumption capital, attitudinal loyalty and WOM between engaging players (N = 57) and non-engaging players (N = 65) of FS show significant differences in favour of users of gamification applications hosted by the sport leagues. This implies that sport fans who engage in a FS-league have a higher knowledge about the sport and the league, which refers to consumption capital. Furthermore, they have a higher attitudinal loyalty and spread more positive WOM. Thereby sport fans’ engagement behaviour via interactive experiences between actors on the platform FS is evident (Brodie et al., 2011).

Through gamification in the form of FS the experienced emotional and gameful engagement behaviour lead to positive brand related outcomes, including loyalty and development of deep and long-lasting re-

relationships (Harwood & Garry, 2015). Being highly engaged, customers enhance their satisfaction, commitment and trust with the brand, which consequently leads to the gaining of new and the retaining of existing customers (Hollebeek, 2011).

The study serves as an impulse to identify forms of CEB in a sport context and gives implications to which extend gamification can expand the multidimensional fan-league relationship.

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