

Relational Outcomes of Transactional and Non-Transactional Engagement for Sport Teams

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Aim

Consumer engagement (CE) represents a heavily used practical concept in sport to describe a range of activities and actions as well as interrelations between sport organisations and consumers. However, there remains limited evidence of how to empirically measure or structure the full breadth of components posited to comprise engagement, or assess their impact on relational outcomes. Given the many benefits posited to flow from effective CE for organisations (Brodie, et al., 2011), CE has emerged as a central dimension in sport marketing (Karg & Lock, 2014), with practitioners leveraging engagement by embracing physical and virtual activities to influence consumer-brand relationships. Given limited work to date – in particular combining and testing multiple types of CE - this study seeks to extend the dimensions of CE that have been explored within the sport context, and test direct relationships of transactional and non-transactional of CE constructs on relational outcomes.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

While traditional representations of CE were largely one-dimensional (typically behavioural), multi-dimensional conceptualisations are now most common. CE is defined as individual customer's "state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011, p.790). In operationalising CE, empirical research has developed some specific brand and fan engagement constructs posited to explain engagement in consumer exchanges. For example, Hollebeek et al. (2014) developed a three-construct consumer brand engagement scale (cognitive processing, affection and activation) to reflect consumer's positively valenced activity during consumer/brand interactions. Specific to sport fans, Yoshida et al (2014) presented diverse dimensions of both a transactional (games attended, watched via media and merchandise purchase) and non-transactional (managerial cooperation, pro-social behaviour, performance tolerance) nature. Modelled outcomes have included self-brand connection and brand usage intent (Hollebeek et al., 2014) as well as purchase intention and loyalty intention (Yoshida et al, 2014). The current study sought to extend single-dimensional studies by combining six attitudinal (non-transactional) constructs as well as transactional engagement behaviours to test the interaction of CE constructs and their direct impact on relational outcomes.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Data was collected using an online-administered quantitative survey of 471 season ticket holders (STHs) of a professional football team. STHs were chosen as highly engaged consumers that demonstrate variant levels of commitment, different tiers of purchase, modes of consumption and behaviours. The dataset was refined to include only STHs from in the geographic region for the team, therefore delimiting the sample to avoid inclusion of consumers who would not have had equal opportunities to engage fully in transactional behaviours (i.e. attend games). The survey tool included nine forms of CE including three dimensions of brand user engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014), three dimensions of (sport) fan engagement (Yoshida et al., 2014) and three self-reported single item transactional engagement measures (live games, media games and merchandise spend). Two constructs representing the relational outcomes - self brand connection and loyalty - were also collected,

based on past work. All attitudinal scales were collected on seven point scales in line with prior use. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling using MPlus was undertaken to test the measurement structure of constructs and relationships between variables.

Results and Discussion

Measurement and structural model were constructed to assess the structure of constructs and assess relationships proposed between transactional and non-transactional engagement and relational outcomes. Models showed acceptable fit with item factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted all exceeding recommended cut-offs. Path analysis did not show any direct, significant relationships between transactional engagement and relational outcomes. Of the non-transactional engagement constructs, five (pro-social behaviour, performance tolerance, cognitive processing, affection and activation) had direct, significant impacts on both measured relational outcomes. Only managerial co-operation did not show a positive relationship.

Conclusion and Implications

In seeking to describe the antecedents of CE in sport, results of the study suggest non-transactional engagement is the critical component to generate elevated levels of self-brand connection and loyalty with a team. The lack of impact of transactional activities suggest undertaking behaviours alone are not being enough to stimulate relational outcomes. To enhance relationships with consumers, teams therefore need to ensure that consumers are not only attending and watching games, but undertaking co-creative activities, actions to encourage learning and cognition, and ensure that transactional engagement is leading to relational outcomes. The contribution includes extending the constructs used to measure engagement in sport, and testing multiple dimensions of engagement. Further work to extend, define and contrast both physical and virtual engagement activities and outcomes are recommended. Despite being limited to a single case, the critical role of non-transactional engagement suggests future opportunities to explore specific activities including brand related behaviours that stimulate non-transactional engagement specifically, as well as testing how non-transactional engagement may mediate or moderate relationships between transactional engagement and relational outcomes.

References

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