Sports Team Brand Commitment: Who Should Hop on the Bandwagon?

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Introduction

Brand Communities
- Brand community: a set of individuals who share a sense of value associated with a good or service provided by a given brand
- Commitment to a brand develops from customers’ sense of belonging when they feel their needs are met by a brand’s product
- The Consumer-Centric Model of the brand community shows the most important interactions of the focal customer with the brand in order to develop brand commitment

McAlexander et al. 2002

Figure 1 shows the conditions for fan identification (team/brand loyalty) development

- Value perception is the consumer-derived value of a product, which can stem from a consumer’s schema or the context of the product
  - Schema-dependent enhancement value is product value created by the consumer’s emotional/personal association with the brand
  - Context-dependent enhancement value is a situationally dependent value for product (like for high-status/luxury product consumption)
- Community integration refers to the degree to which a consumer is affiliated with the brand community in-group, or the team’s fan base

Focal Customer
Product
Brand
Customer
Marketer

Sports Teams
- Sports team brand communities provide individuals with extensive opportunities for social interaction through watch parties, attending games, engaging in sports-related conversation, etc.
- This creates a strong in-group community for the fans of a team
- Competition among same-market brands fosters brand loyalty
- The competitive nature of sports furthers fans’ feelings of support and loyalty for their team

"Sport differs from other sources of entertainment through evoking high levels of emotional attachment and identification"
Sutton et al. 1997

Fan Identification

Figure 1

- High or Low In-Group Affiliation
- Community Perception
- Value Perception
- Fan Identification

Key Word Searches: Brand commitment, bandwagon fans, loyal fans, product value, self-brand affiliation, luxury consumption, social identity, self-concept maintenance, in-groups, and social group identification

Methods
- I conducted a literature review of research articles and books for social psychology and marketing
- Key Word Searches: Brand commitment, bandwagon fans, loyal fans, product value, self-brand affiliation, luxury consumption, social identity, self-concept maintenance, in-groups, and social group identification

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Fan Identification

Bandwagon Fans
- Conspicuous consumption behavior is highly influenced by an interdependent self-concept and the power of conformity
- Context-dependent enhancement value for high-achieving sports teams, attracted by the team’s situational status
- Also attracted by team’s fan community and influence of conformity
- Low in-group affiliation and achievement-dependent satisfaction with team
- Lack of self-brand association and short-term commitment to team

Loyal Fans
- Long-term consumption behavior characteristics are self-brand association, high investment, and integration in fan community
- Schema-dependent enhancement value of product, derived from consumer’s emotional or personal affiliation with the team
- High in-group affiliation and use of “we” pronoun when describing team or community
- Commitment due to self-brand association, not dependent on team achievement

Conclusion

The value of following a high-achieving team in the short-run is mainly instrumental, while the value for a loyal fan of a high-achieving team is primarily intrinsic.

- In comparison to loyal fans’ intrinsic benefits, the instrumental benefits of being a bandwagon fan are...
  - Not as consistent
  - Fans low in identification are less likely to consider themselves in-group members since product value is context-dependent rather than intrinsic
  - Not as personal
  - Lack of self-brand identification, thus do not refer to sports team and fan community as “we”
  - Lessened personal benefits of self-esteem enhancement from “basking in reflected glory”
  - Not as strong
  - Band communities with high same-market competition (like sports teams) produce stronger self-brand associations for customers
  - This effect allows for frequent inter-group discrimination, which enhances self-esteem
  - Only applies when one has a high in-group affiliation

Implications

The investment of bandwagon fans during periods of high achievement can generate team revenue increases significantly larger than average. However, loyal fans are valuable to teams because they provide relatively stable revenue for the brand regardless of team achievement.

- The influence of conformity and a high instrumental value for a product encourages short-term investment in a brand
- If brands understand how consumers derive value from their products, they can market accordingly
- Future research could explore the implications of these conclusions for brand communities outside of the sports realm

Future Research Opportunities

- How can brands transform consumers’ instrumental value for their product into intrinsic value so that consumers develop brand loyalty and lengthen their investment in the brand?
- How can brands strengthen feelings of in-group and positive community attributes for a short-term customer to increase their brand commitment?
- How can same-market competition and its intrinsic benefits for a loyal consumer of a successful brand be applied to other markets?