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An Examination of How Much Product Extensions Play A Role In Fandom

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Abstract

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if product extensions played a role in fandom so sport organizations could see what extensions they could use to gain more fans, generate revenue, and enhance their relationships with their fans. This research was important because sport organizations could use the product extensions that play a role in fandom to enhance their relationships with their fans. It was known that the development of fandom, product extensions, and the growth of sport programming along with the plethora of options for fans to use have been examined and researched individually. The method to draw conclusions were made by the testing results of a likert scale survey that was created of a list of product extensions asking the participants what extensions make the sport fan more of a fan of their favorite team.

The survey was on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey was administered through twitter and emailed to a list of individuals at a private Division III university who are involved in sport. It was found that product extensions did not play a huge role in fandom. It was also found that out of the list of product extension variables team merchandise, gameday tv programming, and team specific social media accounts played the biggest role in fandom. It was important to do this research because there were many product extensions that played no role in fandom and some that played a great deal. Sport organizations were able to use the product extensions that played a role in fandom consistently and kept them updated while getting rid of and not spending as much time and money on the ones that did not play a role in fandom.

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Executive Summary

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The survey was on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey was administered through twitter and emailed to a list of individuals at a private Division III university who are involved in sport. It was found that product extensions did not play a huge role in fandom. It was also found that out of the list of product extension variables team merchandise, gameday tv programming, and team specific social media accounts played the biggest role in fandom. It was important to do this research because there were many product extensions that played no role in fandom and some that played a great deal. Sport organizations were able to use the product extensions that played a role in fandom consistently and kept them updated while getting rid of and not spending as much time and money on the ones that did not play a role in fandom.

Introduction

The development of fandom, product extensions, and the growth of sport programming along with the plethora of options for fans to use have been examined and researched individually. Fandom development has many different stages and steps that fans progress

through to become sport fans. The Psychological Continuum Model, highlighted the stages becoming a fan. This model included the awareness stage, attraction stage, attachment stage, and ended with the allegiance stage.

Product extensions were defined as a unique product or service linked to a parent brand, that could be a professional sports team, to generate revenue and enhance emotional attachment with the consumer and the team in Apostolopoulou study in 2012. Many different types of extensions were evaluated and information has been conducted from professional sports teams on how they felt about the use of product extensions (Walsh & Lee, 2012). Fans of all types of sport was the setting of this study. Fans of all types of sport have expressed their fandom by being engaged in parties before game nights, purchased the teams merchandise, they have participated in community events, and attended autograph signings.

The objective of this research was to study how the use of product extensions by a sport organization can play a role in fandom. The lack of research was in the connection of how much fans utilized or need product extensions to stay a fan of their certain team. Through further research of how much extensions or variables play a role in fandom, this research helped identify what is most helpful for organizations to use during their nights of competition. This research is important because it is a way for sport organizations to know what they could do to increase fandom and increase their connections with fans. There was also an opportunity to figure out how to bring more fans to the stadium through this research. The leaders and workers within sport organizations such as the general managers, director of operations, director of marketing, the players and coaches, and sport fans are those who cared about this research.

This research attempted to answer how much product extensions play a role in the fandom of teams. Through exploration of how individuals progressed to become sports fans and

characteristics of where the fan is positioned in the process could be identified. Results of this study informed organizations about how much they helped to build fandom. The research question was:

How much do product extensions play a role in fandom?

The aim of this research was to determine how much product extensions play a role in fandom to help sport organizations know how much each product extension helped in building sport fandom.

Background

The development of fandom

In the development of fandom, the challenge for sport marketers and researchers was to identify key elements of the decision making process that influences behaviors based on the research of Funk in 2008. One of these key elements in Funk's research was the motivation process that pushed and pulled an individual toward specific pathways to satisfy needs of individuals and receive benefits. Key elements were simplified in a decision making sequence that illustrated how external and internal force and shape the sport consumer behavior (Funk, 2008). This decision making model happened in three major phases, inputs, internal processing, and outputs (Funk, 2008). In the study research by Funk, inputs were made up of a number of external forces, which influenced the evaluation of the sport object in the second phase. These inputs included sociological influences and marketing activities. Internal processing of inputs through internal forces was the second phase in Funk's research in 2008. According to Funk, the internal forces included thinking processes such as motivation, personality, perception and memory. These shaped the evaluation of the sport consumption experience and influenced the output phase. The output phase was the last phase of the sport consumer decision-making model. This phase represented psychological and behavioral outcomes (Funk, 2008). The psychological

outcomes indicated the level of attitude formation whereas the behavioral outcomes represented the frequency and complexity of behavior of the individuals (Funk, 2008). These phases all had a part in how sport consumers decided to purchase sport products or use services (Funk, 2008).

The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) was a framework that was used to organize prior literature from various academic disciplines applied to consumer behavior to explain sport and even consumer behavior (Funk, 2008). The PCM model suggested that watching, playing, and engaging in continuous sport consumption activities progressed along four general hierarchical stages (Funk, 2008). These stages identified included awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance (Funk, 2008). The PCM framework provided a systematic and detailed explanation accounting for the how and why in a sport consumer behavior (Funk, 2008).

The stages within the PCM, showed how the internal processing of external and internal inputs changed overtime as the consumer became more involved with a sport product (Funk, 2008). Inside the awareness stage, there was minimal thinking effort toward a sport object and behavior in this stage was simplistic. In the awareness stage of the PCM, a sport consumer first became aware of the sport object and explored it. The awareness stage included behavior that was non-existent to unplanned to random and it corresponded to limited knowledge prior too experiences with related consumption activities. (Funk, 2008). The first stage of the PCM model, awareness, created knowledge and realization that a sport object existed. A consumer used a sport example by saying “I know about surfing” (Funk, 2008).

The next stage, the attraction stage created outcomes of seeking opportunity that satisfied needs and received benefits, while it also engaged in consumption behavior that was related to sport and events. Examples used in this stage include “I like surfing” or “I like Chelsea FC” (Funk, 2008).

The attachment stage followed the attraction stage where the internal collective meaning of the sport object or experience was created. Here occurred benefits of the sport object for the individual and the sport object internalized taking on a collective emotional, functional, and symbolic meaning. The examples that were used included “I am a surfer” or “I am a Chelsea fan” (Funk, 2008).

As this process continued to evolve, the internal meaning became more durable in terms of persistence and resistance and also had a greater impact relating to activities and behavior (Funk, 2008). When the sport consumer was in this position, the allegiance stage occurred where examples included “I live to surf or “I live for Chelsea FC” (Funk, 2008) because of the connection and interaction that grew between the individual and the sport product.

In the attraction process of the PCM the thinking process started to evaluate the sport object in terms of benefits and needs. The process introduced an emotional element to the connection. Psychological engagement became more active and behavioral engagement increased in complexity. This behavioral engagement happened through learning and evaluation. It started when an individual started to participate and watched sports while interpreting the experience and assigning value and meaning to actions (Funk, 2008). As an individual wanted to play more of the sport to learn the rules and etiquette and play better while enjoying the environment they were being surrounded with, the attraction occurred.

Inside the attachment process, the thinking and feeling evaluation became more complex and created a deeper, meaningful connection. The individual was then on the level of being able to say “I am a golfer” according Funk. Here the individual committed to watching full games, reading articles, and paying more attention to what was happening within the sport. The attitude formation began to strengthen and feelings and beliefs became consistent. The attitude is formed

that aligns the sport object with important, personally relevant and centrally aligning values and self-concept (Funk, 2008). Behaviors in this stage fluctuated because of traits and values that someone already has, but they conformed to expectancies (Funk, 2008). At this stage for example, individuals started buying clothes for that specific sport, wearing the clothes to work and non-work related activities. They also followed tournaments or championships of the sport, and or joined a club of that specific sport.

Following the attachment stage, the allegiance stage, the attitude of the individual involved with the sport object was highly formed. The attitude had the capacity to resist change over time. And it also influenced information processing and guiding behavior. At this stage, the most enhanced level of psychological engagement was evaluated by a high degree of prior experience and knowledge. An example of a statement made by an individual at this stage was be “I live to golf” according to Funk’s research in 2008. Progression through the stages of the PCM was an understanding of how a person’s involvement with a sport product progressively developed (Funk, 2008).

Product Extensions

A product or brand extension are a unique product or service linked to a parent brand, that could be a professional sports team, to generate revenue and enhance emotional attachment with the consumer and the team according to Apostolopoulou research in 2012. Apostolopoulou stated that product and brand extensions can help an organization strengthen its brand image, broaden its customer base, and contribute to its long-term viability. Extensions have grown the opportunity to go in a different direction and to build brand equity (Apostolopoulou, 2012). The product that relates to the family brand increased the probability of the consumers acceptance but the producers remembered that the use of a brand name alone doesn’t always guarantee the

success of an extension (Apostolopoulou, 2012). Apostolopoulou 2012, also explained that when a franchise created product extensions, the product enhanced the connection of a fan with the team, highlighted the unique characteristics of the extension, helped to strengthen the organization's brand image and name. Creating extensions worked out best if the product is knowingly connected to the brand the producers of the extension are supporting according to Apostolopoulou 2012. An example of a successful extension was the creation of a European Football Club TV Network that helped to build its brand. Apostolopoulou explained that a brand or product extension can be non-sport related but to also be of high quality to become a successful product.

Patrick Walsh and Seungbum Lee (2012), discovered a decision making model for band extensions in professional sports. This Team Brand Extension Decision Making Model provided a solid foundation for determining success because of the different tests and decisions made during the model process (Walsh & Lee, 2012). Through Walsh and Lee's research, the elements of this model were an evaluation of team brand equity and identifications, the concept and strategy development, concept testing, and extension launch. In post launch there were two options to evaluate, the continual testing, or if the product fails, discussing alternative branding strategies (Walsh & Lee, 2012). The model process provided a starting point to develop the extension. In evaluating the brand extension step, the success of the brand was linked to the strength of the brand that introduced the actual extension so there needed to be an analysis of their team brand equity (Walsh & Lee, 2012). In the next step of the model, concept and strategy development, in the first stage it was confirmed that there was a strong brand and there was a loyal fan base, the team should create a marketing plan that guided the development and implementation of the extension (Walsh & Lee, 2012). It was important in this stage for the team

to determine its goals and objectives that developed the extensions concept (Walsh & Lee, 2012). The next step in the decision making model was concept testing. Market testing was to be conducted to understand the extension's potential for success in the market (Walsh & Lee, 2012).

In the concept testing step, qualitative and quantitative research were conducted so they could understand the consumer demand for the extension, the price a customer was willing to pay for it, how much they were willing to buy, and also where they would like to purchase the product. Another factor that was taken into consideration was what effect the extension had on team brand equity and attitudinal loyalty towards the team (Walsh & Lee, 2012). In this step, consumers were exposed to the brand extension. This was so they could provide feedback on the extension on things such as packaging, design, and functionality (Walsh & Lee, 2012). If the team made it to the extension launch step, the team implemented its marketing plan, and introduced the extension to the marketplace. It introduced utilizing the distribution, pricing, and targeted promotional activities that were developed in the concept and strategy development step (Walsh & Lee, 2012).

In the last step, the post-launch, more testing was done to examine items such as profit or loss, consumer satisfaction, and how the extension impacted their team brand equity and identification levels (Walsh & Lee, 2012). This Team Brand Extension Decision Making Model provided a solid foundation for determining success because of the different tests and decisions made during the model process (Walsh & Lee, 2012).

Manchester United Club created a brand champagne and beer for themselves and also created a club-based, pay-per-view television service (Chadwick & Clowes, 1998). It was also established that extensions enhanced product awareness between consumer and distributors that opened new distributors and channels. The teams extension needed to be consistent to the

original feature that it extended from otherwise it would overestimate the strength of the brand name (Chadwick & Clowes, 1998). The extent of the extensions needed to be linked to a long-term strategy to make sure that there were benefits for the overall brand (Chadwick & Clowes, 1998).

An event that occurred with the Miami Dolphins that connected food and the sports world was an example of a product extension. The Dolphin's CCO gave fans a chance to drive a modern sport car inside the stadium (Sunnucks, 2018). The Dolphins teamed with a sports car manufacturer and a local celebrity chef for a culinary and sponsor focused event at the Hard Rock Stadium for an event (Sunnucks, 2018). They wanted to focus on delivering a can't-buy experience.

Product extensions or services were within the facility. Teams and venues found unique ways to be integrated in its history into its construction and renovations. Organizations wanted this to be a key part of the fan experience. For example, the Arizona Diamondbacks collected and displayed 550 baseballs that were signed by players, coaches, and executives as a part of a new exhibit at Chase Field (Sunnucks, 2018). The goal for these teams were to make stronger connections with fans and build brand affinity (Sunnucks, 2018). Another extension was a digital and high tech display that focused on the Celtics and the Bruins at their 8,000 square foot food area (Sunnucks, 2018). Lastly, the Kansas City Chiefs built their own 26,000-square-foot extension. The Hall of Honor formed exhibits on the history of the AFL that the Chiefs played in before merging into the NFL in 1970. The Hall of Honor was built in 2010 (Sunnucks, 2018).

Competition for fans

The growth of sport programming, the plethora of options available, and competition to gain and keep fans have an impact on how a fan connect to a team or franchise. There have been

many ways that fans can get ahold of their sport team and also be able to connect with them more because of extensions and other ways the fans made contact with the team. One way the Buffalo Sabers decided to gain more fans and to connect to their existing fans was to hold one of their mid-season games in Rochester, New York (Oklobzija, 2003).

Tom Golisano, who was the owner of the Buffalo Sabers at the time until 2011, believed that Rochester, New York was crucial for the survival of the Sabers (Oklobzija, 2003). The Sabers wanted to take after the Buffalo Bills and try to become a part of the marketplace in Rochester. They wanted to increase their fans by increasing the awareness and interest of themselves in Rochester (Oklobzija, 2003). So they followed the blueprint of the Bills by having a mid season game. Changing the game location to Rochester, reached well beyond the regular demographics for the Buffalo Sabers which increased their awareness (Oklobzija, 2003). The Buffalo Sabers separated themselves from other teams and gained more exposure to themselves. The team wanted to increase the marketing and awareness of the team by creating this event in Rochester. The Sabers did not have nearly as much seats to fill in Rochester and also did not even gain any of the concession revenue, but when discussing with the Rochester Americans President, he believed that this was a project of a short term loss for a long term gain (Oklobzija, 2003).

The Dust Devils, QuickSILvers, Vipers, Posse, Sting, and the Flash are all minor league teams that entered into Las Vegas in the summer of 1994 and all of them were competing for one main thing, fans (Havas, 1994). The Stars, a Triple-A farm team, separated themselves from the other teams by making sure their games were a place to bring family (Havas, 1994). The International Hockey team in Vegas believed that sports can bring a community together, so they tried to keep the players as heroes for the young people they wanted at their games (Havas, 1994).

The Flash, a rollerblading hockey team believed it was important to promote through community events where they attracted young families and teenagers to their games (Havas, 1994). At Flash games, promotions of theirs to keep fans coming included a cheerleading squad, giveaways, and bungee jumpers who started the show followed by daredevil bike riders at half time (Havas, 1994). This was a way this team separated itself from other teams in the area to attract more fans. At these games of rollerblade hockey, the organization also made it a rule that if a player gets in a fight they would be thrown out and find which was the goal to keep families coming as fans (Havas, 1994).

Sport sites looked for positions of the web because of its important revenue generation in terms of the growth of sport programming (Murphy and Church, 2000). The passion of the sport fans kept them coming to revisit the sport sites to get news and opinions on their favorite teams (Murphy and Church, 2000). These sites were appealing to advertisers because of the demographic of typical users (Murphy and Church, 2000). For example, Carlsberg which is the official beer of the the 2000 Euro football tournament, created a special website that is part of the brands involvement with the event (Murphy and Church, 2000).

Lindemans which sponsors the British Olympic team is a wine brand that was an example of exposure of sport and their sponsors. They used the website to build awareness and to raise money for the Team GB (Murphy and Church, 2000). The English Premier League games gained broadcasting rights which put internet rights on the agenda for the first time. Showing highlights of the games on the website was able to gain exposure of the teams and the league to its fans (Murphy and Church, 2000). Broadband was another way of programming growth that benefit minority sports greatly because it was able to reach the global market (Murphy and Church, 2000). The growth of the internet and sport competition on the internet grew into an innumerable

amount of sites and news offerings around the world. Murphy and Church referred to it as a perfect medium for average sports fan that is passionate about one team or sport and can be interested in big events (Murphy and Church, 2000).

In conclusion, product extensions were defined as unique product or services linked to a parent brand, that could be a professional sports team, to generate revenue and enhance emotional attachment with the consumer and the team according to Apostolopoulou 2012. To research how these extensions play a role in a sport fans fandom, it was important to know how fandom develops and what stage a fan is in, in the PCM. The ways in which teams compete for their fans helped identifying how much product extensions played a role in fandom because of the different ways teams have separated themselves from their competitions to keep and gain fans.

Method

Results of this study was to inform organizations about how much they helped to build fandom.

How much do product extensions play a role in fandom?

The aim of this research was to determine how much product extensions play a role in fandom to help sport organizations know how much each product extension helped in building sport fandom. A sample of sports fans was desired. The sample was intended to include fans that have already invested their own time and money into a team. A variety of ages, genders, locations, level of fan identity, and types of sport fandom were desired.

To access the sample of the desired participants, administered through Twitter, an invitation message that included popular sports hashtags was used to identify potential participants. Key informant technique was used to select participants. The hashtags used were #NBA, #NBATwitter, #NFL, #footballtwitter, #NHL #NHL19, #MLB, #baseball, #NHLFirsts,

#MLS, #MLSpring19 #SportsFans, #Collegesports, #ACC, #SEC, and #PAC12. One the twitter accounts, it was advised to retweet a tweet with the survey link after completing the survey. Accessing the sample of the desired participants was also administered through a survey given out a list of individuals at a private university involved in sports. The demographics first measured categorically from the participants were location, levels of fandom, and sex. From these categorical variables, mean and standard deviation, and percentage were reported. Age and product extension variables that were measured continuously.

The product extensions were team museum, mascot, non-game day TV programming, team merchandise, community events, halftime performances, gameday autograph signings, in-stadium exhibits, game day giveaways, gameday TV programming, non gameday radio programming, game day radio programming, team specific podcast, team specific social media accounts, team pep band, and cheerleaders. These variables were measured with a likert scale response and were continuous. For example, “How much do game day TV programming make you more of a fan of your favorite team? 1) None at all to 5) A great deal”. The grand mean of all product extension variables were reported. An Anova was used to determine the differences between average ratings of product extensions variables with respect to sport. A multiple regression was used to determine how product extension variables predicted levels of fandom.

Results

There were 42 participants in the survey. The original alpha was .05 and the Bonferroni-adjusted alpha was .025. An ANOVA test was used to determine the differences between average ratings of product extensions variables with respect to sport. There was a statistically significant difference of team museums with respect to the type of sport fan, $F(1,37)=6.061$, $p<.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of mascots with respect to the type of

sport fan $F(1,38)=1.181$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of non game day TV programming with respect to type of sport fan $F(1,38)=1.071$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of team merchandise with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,36)=1.957$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of community events with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=.734$, $p>.05$.

There was no statistically significant difference of halftime performances with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=.006$, $p>.05$. There was statistically significant difference of game day autograph signings with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,37)=5.527$, $p<.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of Instadium exhibits with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,37)=.367$, $p>.05$. There was no statically significant difference of game day giveaways with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,37)=1.107$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of game day TV programming with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=.013$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of non gameday radio programming with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=2.776$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of gameday radio programming with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=.469$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of team specific podcasts with respect to the type of fan $F(1,38)=.493$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of team specific social media accounts with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=1.134$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of team pep bands with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=1.142$, $p>.05$. There was no statistically significant difference of cheerleaders with respect to the type of sport fan $F(1,38)=1.038$, $p>.05$.

A multiple regression was produced to determine how product extension variables predicted levels of fandom. The product extensions did not significantly predict fan identity

$F(16, 20) = .634, p > .05$. The grand mean reported for all product extensions was 2.519 (SD = .77999).

Discussion

The sample was representative of the population. A narrow distribution of ages was not represented. There was a mixture ages and sexes that answered the survey, from multiple states, a plethora of sports were measured who were fans of their favorite teams. 24 males answered the survey, 16 females answered, and 1 person preferred not to respond to their sex. 40 people in eight states answered the survey. College baseball, college basketball, college football, college soccer, professional football, professional basketball, professional baseball, professional soccer, and professional ice hockey were selected as favorite sports played of the participants. The majority of sport fan's favorite sport was professional football. The sample was limited by a sport fan who thought the link to the survey was a scam when clicked on so the sport fan scrolled past the survey on their twitter account. The sample was also limited by not being able to control if a non sport fan took the survey.

It was important to listen to what the participants had to say because it was known that from the list of the product extensions measured, ten of them were extensions that did not play a role in fandom of the participants favorite teams. It was important to know that team merchandise, game-day TV programming, and team specific social media accounts play a role in fandom because sport organizations could see that these were product extensions that played a role in the sport fans fandom. The ultimate answer to was inconclusive. This was because most of the product extensions did not play a role in fandom at all. There were few that had a moderate amount of a role. It was found in the survey that team merchandise, game day tv

programming, and team specific social media accounts are product extensions that play a big role in fandom.

It was stated that the attachment stage of the development of fandom was where benefits of the sport object for the individual occurred and where the sport object took an emotional, functional and symbolic meaning (Funk, 2008). The research showed that the mean of sports fans in the sample were in the attachment stage of the PCM model. Here, the sports fans identified with the statement “I am a fan of this team”. In Apostolopoulou’s research in 2012, it is stated that product extensions have grown the opportunity to go in a different direction and to build brand equity. This was shown through the new research when the product extensions that played a big role in fandom were three extensions that were in different categories clothing, television programming, and social media accounts. Apostolopoulou also explained that the product generate revenue and enhance an emotional attachment with the consumer (Apostolopoulou, 2012). This was shown through the research because team merchandise was bought to collect revenue from the sport team. Apostolopoulou also stated in 2012 that creating extensions worked best if the product is knowingly connected to the brand the producers of the extension are supporting. This is shown because the social media accounts were team specific as well as the merchandise, and gameday tv programming was also connected to the team or brand itself.

The limitations in the study were that sports fans were not answering the survey on qualtrics when the survey was open. Another limitation was not having control of if non sport fans were taking the survey and giving information that was not relevant to the outcome of the study. Reaching out to a sport fan whos email account was dead so they could not take the survey was also a limitation. Another limitation was that sports fans not wanting to take the

survey about product extensions and fandom. The delimitations were posting the survey on twitter, sending the survey out to sports fans in the private Division III college, the hashtags used to get sport fans attention because they did not represent every single sport listed in the survey, and not posting for individual fans of each sport listed in the survey.

The conclusion was that team merchandise, team specific social media accounts, and gameday television programming play the biggest role in fandom. This was important for moving forward. Recommendations moving forward were that sport teams and organizations can use these three product extensions in the need of increasing revenue, connecting with their fans, and increasing the emotional attachment with their fans. The sport organizations were recommended to use the team specific social media to get in touch with fans. Moving forward the sport organizations were recommended to use gameday television to increase their fans and views by fans. Next, for people who care about this research, it was recommended to go further to find more product extension to find what more teams and sport organizations could use to see what other extensions play a role in fandom.

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