Sport Consumption Communities: An Application of the Psychological Continuum Model

David P. Hedlund, The Florida State University

Abstract 2012-284

Saturday, May 26, 2012

20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Salon A)

Over the last four decades, marketing practitioners and researchers examined the consumption processes of consumer groups. Boorstin (1973) first labeled consumer groups as “consumption communities”. In the 1980s and 1990s, various types of consumption communities were identified, such as experiential consumption groups (Arnould & Price, 1993; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Holt, 1995), tribal consumption groups (Maffesoli, 1996), and subcultures of consumption (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). During the last decade, marketing and consumer behavior researchers have expanded consumption community research to include brand communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), cultures of consumption (Kozinets, 2001), consumer tribes (Cova & Cova, 2002), and brand cults (Belk & Tumbat, 2005).

Recently, sport marketing researchers applied several types of consumption communities to sport consumers, including tribal consumption groups (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008; Moutinho, Dionisio, & Leal, 2007) and brand communities (Devasagayam & Buff, 2008; Hedlund, 2010; Heere, Walker, Yoshida, Ko, Jordan, & James, 2011). In general, the research results were promising, in that, sport consumption communities were identified. The overall results, however, have not illustrated how sport consumption communities function. This research is intended to provide a starting point for future sport consumption community research by identifying and examining relationships among several team- and community-based constructs of interest. This research utilizes the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) as a framework to model and test the relationships among the antecedent of “knowledge” of the team, the mediating variables of “satisfaction” with the team and “identification” with the team, and the outcome variables of a “sense of membership” in the team’s fan community and “loyalty” to the team.

Funk and James (2001, 2006) created the PCM as a framework for understanding an individual’s psychological connection to a sport object. As the name suggests, the PCM works on a vertical continuum with four “floors” that describe the “motives relating to the sport object and the evaluative processes by which a person internalizes features of the social situation” (Funk & James, 2001, p. 121). The first floor denotes awareness of the sport object. In this research, awareness is conceptualized and measured by a consumer’s knowledge of the sport team. The second floor denotes attraction to the sport object. Attraction is conceptualized and measured by a consumer’s satisfaction with the sport team. The third floor denotes attachment to the sport object. Attachment is conceptualized and measured by a consumer’s identification with the sport team. The fourth floor denotes allegiance toward the sport object. Allegiance is conceptualized and measured by a consumer’s feelings of membership with the sport team’s fan community and the individual’s loyalty toward the sport team (e.g., loyal members).

The testing of the hypothesized model was conducted based on Churchill’s (1979) guidelines for creating marketing measures. In summary, a three-step ad hoc content analysis of approximately eighty items was conducted by five experts. A pilot study (n=113) was conducted with twenty-eight items. After an examination of the reliability and internal consistency of the items, the main study (n=627) was conducted with thirty-two items. The main study sample was randomly split into two samples (n1=314, n2=313). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the measurement model with the first sample data. The CFA resulted in the removal of sixteen items and the retention of sixteen items. The fit indices for the final measurement model for the first sample data showed good fit to the data ($χ^2$ value = 113.517, df = 94, $χ^2$/df ratio = 1.208, p-value = N.S., CFI = 0.995, TLI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.026, SRMR = 0.029). The item structure of the final measurement model was then applied to the second sample data, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the model. The SEM results also showed good fit to the data ($χ^2$ value = 145.391, df = 94, $χ^2$/df ratio = 1.547, p-value < .001, CFI = 0.986, TLI = 0.982, RMSEA = 0.042, SRMR = 0.029). Nine relationships between constructs were examined in the structural model. The results of all of the paths were positive and significant as follows: knowledge-satisfaction ($γ$ = 0.448, p < 0.001), knowledge-identification ($γ$ = 0.523, p < 0.001), knowledge-membership ($γ$ = 0.328, p < 0.001), knowledge-loyalty ($γ$ = 0.331, p < 0.001), satisfaction-identification ($γ$ = 0.666, p < 0.001), satisfaction-membership ($β$ = 0.354, p < 0.001), satisfaction-loyalty ($β$ = 0.383, p < 0.001), identification-membership ($β$ = 0.149, p < 0.001), identification-loyalty ($β$ = 0.253, p < 0.001).
In addition, a bootstrapping analysis (Draws = 1000) was also used to examine the indirect, direct and total effects. The bootstrapping results indicated that all seven indirect (mediated) effects were positive and significant (p < .001). In addition, the R^2 values for the four endogenous variables indicated that a medium to large amount of the variance (29.8%-66.1%) was explained.

The results of this research provide empirical support for the PCM, because all of the relationships are positive and significant. It should also be noted that the results suggest that a consumer does not have to move through each successive floor in order to reach feelings of membership in the team’s fan community and/or team loyalty. A consumer can, for example, skip floors and move directly from awareness to membership/loyalty. As a result, sport marketers who want to create loyal members of the team/community should allocate resources toward creating programs that make consumers aware, attracted, and attached to the sport team and other fans of the team. The creation and utilization of sport consumption communities is one strategy that sport marketers and sport organizations can use to facilitate these outcomes.

Specific to consumption community research, the results suggest that sport organizations can use consumption communities to create loyal members. For example, current members of a sport consumption community can indoctrinate new fans with knowledge of the team. Based on gaining knowledge and having experiences with the sport team and other consumption community members, the new fans begin to feel satisfied with the team. After experiencing feelings of satisfaction with the team and the consumption community, fans begin to feel that the team is “their” team and feelings of identification result. Finally, as fans feel that they are identified with the team and other consumption community members, these feelings result in the fan becoming a member of the consumption community and feeling loyal to the team. While this example represents an individual that moved through all four floors of the PCM, a more abridged process is possible.

In this research, the PCM was used to model and test the relationships among the antecedent of “knowledge” of the team, the mediating variables of “satisfaction” with the team and “identification” with the team, and the outcome variables of a “sense of membership” in the team’s fan community and “loyalty” to the team. The empirical evidence indicates that the relationships among these five variables are both positive and significant. These findings suggest that consumption communities based around sport teams can be utilized to move an individual through the four floors identified in the PCM. In future research, more detail should be paid to specific types of activities or marketing promotions that can be used to move an individual from one floor to a higher floor.