Sport Brand Equity and its Consequences: The Moderating Role of Fan Club Membership

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Introduction

The idea of managing a team as a brand has become a dominant paradigm in the sport marketplace due to its importance to generate long-term benefits (Ross, 2006). Sport teams have the potential to build brand equity by capitalizing on the relationship shared with fans (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). Based on this idea, several studies have focused on measuring sport brand equity (e.g. Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Marôco, 2013; Ross, Russell, & Bang, 2008), and it is widely accepted that brand perceptions influence consumer satisfaction (Beccarini & Ferrand, 2006) and behavioral intentions (Yoshida & Gordon, 2012). However, little is known about the role of moderator variables on the relationship between brand equity, satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Nowadays, sport teams often have a fanbase consisting of both paid members and casual customers (McDonald & Stravos, 2007). While paid members have a paramount role due to their emotional attachment and regular consumption (McDonald & Shaw, 2005), casual customers’ consumption behaviors tend to be more unstable and easily affected by other leisure activities. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to examine the moderating role of fan club membership in the relationship between brand equity, satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Method

The study sample consisted of fans from the top Portuguese soccer league, and data were collected through an online survey placed on the sports website “A Bola”. With the support of the website manager, a banner was activated inviting visitors to access a survey link about their favorite team. The IP address was recorded and further access from these IP addresses was denied to avoid redundant participants. The survey was available online for five non-consecutive days with a total of 3652 visitors responding. After data screening, 2287 surveys were deemed usable for data analysis. The 33-item scale proposed by Biscaia et al. (2013) was used to assess brand equity, and all items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, to 7= Strongly Agree). This scale includes the constructs of brand mark, concessions, social interaction, commitment, team history, organizational attributes, team success, head coach, management, stadium, and internalization. Satisfaction was assessed using the 3-item scale proposed by Vilares and Coelho (2005), and these items were also scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Not Satisfied at All, to 7= Extremely Satisfied). The behavioral intentions measure included three items adapted from Yoshida and James (2010), and these items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Not Likely at All, to 7= Extremely Likely). Data were analyzed with AMOS 21.0. A two-step maximum likelihood structural equation model (SEM) was conducted to examine the relationships among the constructs in both fan club members and non-members. In addition, a multi-group SEM analysis was conducted to examine the moderator effect of fan club membership.

Results

The results of the measurement model for both fan club members [$\chi^2$(624)=2058.68 (p<.001), TLI=.94, CFI=.95, GFI=.89, RMSEA=.05] and non-members [$\chi^2$(624)=2539.99 (p<.001), TLI=.95, CFI=.96, GFI=.91, RMSEA=.05] showed an acceptable fit to the data. The composite reliability values were above the cut-off point of .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009) for both groups, while the AVE values were all greater than .50 providing evidence of convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also accepted in both groups given that the AVE value for each construct was greater than the squared correlation between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Similarly, the assessment of the structural model indicated an acceptable fit for both the fan club members [$\chi^2$(624)=2058.68 (p<.001), TLI=.94, CFI=.95, GFI=.89, RMSEA=.05] and the non-members [$\chi^2$(624)=2539.99 (p<.001), TLI=.95, CFI=.96, GFI=.91, RMSEA=.05]. The analysis of the path coefficients for fan
club members indicates that only team success ($\beta=0.60$, $p<0.01$), head coach ($\beta=0.20$, $p<0.01$), management ($\beta=0.19$, $p<0.01$), and stadium ($\beta=0.08$, $p<0.01$) have a significant positive effect on satisfaction, while social interaction ($\beta=0.21$, $p<0.01$), organizational attributes ($\beta=0.19$, $p<0.01$), and internalization ($\beta=0.35$, $p<0.01$) were significant positive predictors of behavioral intentions. Regarding non-members, organizational attributes ($\beta=0.10$, $p<0.01$), team success ($\beta=0.67$, $p<0.01$), head coach ($\beta=0.16$, $p<0.01$) and management ($\beta=0.16$, $p<0.01$) have a positive effect on satisfaction, while concessions ($\beta=0.06$, $p<0.01$), social interaction ($\beta=0.13$, $p<0.01$), internalization ($\beta=0.44$, $p<0.01$), as well as satisfaction ($\beta=0.36$, $p<0.01$) were significant positive predictors of behavioral intentions. Complementarily, the multi-group SEM analysis revealed that both the unconstrained $[\chi^2(1248)=4598.79 (p<0.001)$, TLI=.95, CFI=.95, GFI=.90, RMSEA=.03], and the constrained model $[\chi^2(1297)=4696.83 (p<0.001)$, TLI=.95, CFI=.95, GFI=.90, RMSEA=.03] showed an acceptable fit to the data. The $\chi^2$ statistic revealed these models were significantly different $[\chi^2\text{dif}(49)=98.04, p<0.001]$. The Z tests for structural differences between parameters indicated that only the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions differ significantly among the two groups, with the effect being higher for non-members ($Z=3.64, p<0.01$).

Discussion and implications

The findings are consistent with the idea that sport brand equity is important to enhance satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Biscaia et al., 2013). The dimension of team success was the strongest predictor of satisfaction in both groups highlighting the role of product-related attributes of the sport brand to ensure fan’s positive evaluations of the events (Ross, 2006). In turn, internalization was the strongest predictor of behavioral intentions for both groups. Inoue and Kent (2012) refer that internalization occurs when the sport consumer perceives a higher level of value congruence with the team. Thus, team managers should try to establish a reciprocal relationship with fans in order to ensure they feel valued and keep supporting the team over the season (Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005). For example, by offering free tickets to frequent spectators to bring friends to the match, or exhibiting photos of the spectators on the clubs’ website, organizations can create a higher level of value congruence between the person and the sport team. Finally, the strength of the link between brand equity dimensions with both satisfaction and behavioral intentions was not significantly different among fan club members and non-members. Still, the relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions was significantly stronger for non-members. This may suggest that the behavioral intentions of non-members are influenced in a large extent by satisfaction derived from the games, which is mainly driven by their perceptions of team success. In turn, the role of satisfaction on behavioral intentions among fan club members may be suppressed by other aspects related with the consumption episodes such as the emotions experienced at the stadium (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Marôco, & Ross, 2012), the functional quality of the stadium (Yoshida & James, 2010), and/or the social significance attributed to this group affiliation (Heere & James, 2007). These findings should be considered by sport managers when designing marketing strategies, and provide numerous opportunities to continue advancing our knowledge of how to manage sport brand equity.