Sport Branding and Consumers’ Purchase Patterns: A Scoping Study

Na Young Ahn, Texas A&M University
Bo Yin, Texas A&M University
Sarah M. Brown, Texas A&M University
George B. Cunningham (Advisor), Texas A&M University
Natasha Brison (Advisor), Texas A&M University
Gregg Bennett (Advisor), Texas A&M University

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Branding is a strategic process of marketing activities that shape symbolic meanings to products, services, or companies (Kotler & Keller, 2015). Branding facilitates positive associations of brands in consumers’ minds and builds a strong relationship between brands and consumer (Keller, 2003), which ultimately influences consumers’ decision-making (Aaker, 1996). As a result, branding has burgeoned as an important academic (Aaker, 1991; Fournier, 1998; Keller, 1993) and practical (Schmidt, 1999) interest since the early 1990s.

Building from this base, researchers have advanced the understanding of branding in the sport context. A number of sport marketing researchers have examined how sport entities differentiate their brand (e.g., Gladden et al., 1998; Ross et al., 2006; Underwood et al., 2001; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). In recent years, some researchers have extended brand-related topics to athlete branding and its impact (Arai et al., 2014; Walsh & Williams, 2017).

Purpose and Research Questions

Despite the considerable research efforts over the past 30 years, researchers have not engaged in systematic analysis of the extant literature (see Hardy et al., 2012, for a historical analysis). Thus, the purpose of the study was to conduct a systematic review of the branding literature in sport. In doing so, we identify common research themes, theoretical frameworks, and methodological considerations. Such analyses offer a state of the research in the area, helps identify gaps, and offers a potential roadmap for moving forward. To achieve these ends, as suggested by Arksey and O’Malley (2005), we formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the underlying theories addressed in the sport branding literature?
RQ2: What are the characteristics of research methods used to evaluate the effect of branding on consumers’ purchasing behavior?
RQ3: What do we know about the brand-related antecedents and their effect on consumers’ purchasing behavior?

Method

We employed the scoping study approach since a comprehensive literature review allows for rigorous and transparent mapping of the topic in a research domain (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). To identify the relevant articles, we implemented the initial search by using a combination of the following keywords, sport*, brand*, and purchas*, from three electronic databases: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, and SPORTDiscus. We focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, published in English, between 1990 and 2017. Of the identified articles (n = 43,487), 293 articles were eligible for the study inclusion, but the final number reduced to 219 after removing duplicates. Analysis is on-going.

Findings and Contributions

The scoping synthesis is beneficial in assessing the range and volume of research in a topic area (Booth et al., 2016). Given that most researchers utilized frameworks of Aaker’s (1991) brand equity or Keller’s (1993) brand knowledge, the scoping study provides an integrated look of how these frameworks have been applied into the sport management domain. Further, findings summarize the effect of branding in consumers’ purchase patterns and provide suggestions for the advancement of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, different methodological approaches, and gaps in the sport branding literature.