Superstition, Voodoo Dolls, and Sport Fandom: Investigating Fan Behavior and Willingness to Display Aggression toward Rival Teams

Cody Havard, University of Memphis
Daniel Wann, Murray State University
Frederick Grieve, Western Kentucky University
Rhema Fuller, The University of Memphis

Marketing - Consumer Behavior (Other) virtual asynchronous
Poster Abstract 2020-190 Session: Poster Session III

Sport places teams, participants, and fans in situations in which they directly compete with other groups (e.g., opposing teams). Because group membership plays an important role in a person's life (Tajfel, 1981), a fan sometimes takes extreme measures to help their favorite teams and in-groups, such as superstitions and out-group derogation. For example, a fan may choose to perform a same task or wear the same clothing because they believe their actions will help their favorite team. Additionally, when group members are confronted with an opponent, they typically will find ways to ensure their group is compared favorably to the out-group (Turner, 1982). Sometimes in the pursuit of seeking positive group comparison, fans choose to derogate and show other forms of negativity toward fans of rival teams. Past research also suggests that a portion of fans are willing to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression or violence toward participants and supporters of rival teams (see Havard, 2019; Wann & Waddill, 2013).

The current study seeks to further investigate the likelihood of someone to display aggressive behavior toward a rival team and its supporters by using a task-oriented experiment. In particular, the current study will utilize the voodoo doll task (VDT) to examine the likelihood of fans to display aggressive behavior toward a rival group (DeWall et al., 2013). In other words, we will observe fan tendency to display aggression toward a doll they are told represents a rival participant or rival fan. In this way, the VDT will allow us to monitor fan tendency rather than self-reported likelihood of displaying aggression.

Method

Participants will be recruited from university psychology and sport management classes. They will first complete a quantitative instrument that will measure their identity with their favorite team (SSIS-R James, Delia, & Wann, 2019), level of superstition (Superstition Questionnaire SQ: Wilson et al., 2013), level of fan dysfunction (Dysfunctional Fan Scale DFS: Wakefield & Wann, 2006), and their existing perceptions and likely behaviors toward their rival team (Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale SRFPS: Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, & Schaffer, 2013; Glory Out of Reflected Failure GORF: Havard & Hutchinson, 2017; Schadenfreude: Dalakas & Levin, 2005). Participants will then be instructed that their actions to a doll will represent their anonymous actions toward a rival participant (which will help their favorite team competitively) or a rival fan (which will not help their team competitively). Tendencies of displaying aggression will be analyzed by identification, superstition, dysfunction, and rival perceptions and behaviors.

Discussion

Discussion will focus on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Special attention will be paid to finding and potential solutions practitioners can use to help ensure repeat consumption while alleviating negative behavior among fans that could damage a sport brand.