

A comparison of brand dimensions and brand loyalty from the viewpoints of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team

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Abstract:

The aim of this research is comparison of brand dimensions and brand loyalty from the viewpoints of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team. The research method is descriptive-correlative and it is a field study. The statistical population includes all spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team (N=3100) that 342 individuals were chosen as the sample. Data collection tools were Lin's (2007) brand dimensions and Gladden and Funk's (2002) brand loyalty questionnaires. Research findings showed that there is no difference between brand dimensions between spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team. Also result showed that there is a meaningful difference between loyalty to brand from perspective of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team spectators. According to the research results it is

suggested to managers of both team that identifying factors can affect brand loyalty in spectators.

Key words: Brand Dimensions, Brand Loyalty, Spectators, Volleyball Team, Golestan Province.

Introduction

In the present era, sport as an economic sector either from a practical or spectacular perspective plays a pivotal role in production and consumption of sports goods and services and economic development and is considered as one of the most profitable industries in 21st century (Brown and Nagel, 2002). Given the development of sport and its industrialization, managers of this field generally have changed their approach toward customers. Today, all efforts of sports organizations and clubs are customer-oriented (Di Xie, 2005). Talking about the importance of customers, Robinson (2006) argues that like non-sports organization, sports organizations should change their attitudes toward customers and adopt various methods of attracting and retaining their customers in order to be successful. Today professional clubs across the world utilize various funding methods including sponsors, promotion of commercial goods, player transfer, selling sports goods and services, and ticket sales among which match day revenue is of great importance (Theodorakis, 2004). As noted, one of the most important sources of revenue is sports spectators. Hansen and Gauthier (1992) stated that the most significant factor in boosting professional sport is to increase spectators. In addition to buying tickets and generating direct revenues for professional clubs and leagues, spectators also play an important indirect role in making money through sponsorship, sale of television broadcasting right, and subsidiary services. Their attendance also makes sports events attractive which are

one of the most important aspects of sport (Hansen & Gautheir, 1992).

Various studies have investigated psychological factors of spectators' intentions to attend sports events. They have shown that different factors affect spectators' perceptions. They are usually more interested in successful clubs than unsuccessful ones (Mc Mullin & Gilmore, 2003). In today's sports industry, fans often spend for symbolic aspects the most important of which is the brand of each club (Lin, 2007). Brand is the major process of profitability and is thought of as basis of present economies. During recession and crisis, these are the powerful brands which by building customer trust; face the least slumps and problems (Keller, 1993). Different definitions are given for brand. Kotler and Armstrong (1993) think of brand as the body of a name, term, sign, symbol, design or the combination of these which creates against competitors a distinct identity for goods or services of a seller or group of sellers. Keller (2003) argues that a brand can be defined as a personal impression of a brand stored in customer's memory. Given the role of brand in determining customer behaviors, many researchers believe that brand can lead to customer loyalty. Brand and loyalty are those expressions commonly used in today's sport. Lager (2010) believes that fan loyalty is similar to customer loyalty to non-sports brands. Loyalty is considered in most studies in sport industry as fans' sense of identity with the team (Gilaninia & Mosavian, 2008) because sense of identity is an important element in explaining fans' behaviors since it leads to being recognized with the team, accompanying it and psychological relationship with the team (Richardson, 2004). In sport industry, each sports team can be considered as a brand and its fans as customers; therefore marketing managers can benefit from brand-related strategies. Brand trust, consumer satisfaction, and high quality services for spectators and fans are useful strategies for marketing managers (Wann & Schrader, 2000). Despite the customers of

other industries who usually have less loyalty to low quality brands, fans of professional sports clubs show intensive loyalty to their teams, even when the team does not perform well (Mc Mullin & Gilmore, 2003). Brand has been investigated from different perspectives in sport industry. By examining brand loyalty among the fans of Chicago Cubs baseball team, Bristow and Sebastian (2001) found that the number of die-hard fans who watched or listened to the Cubs matches since childhood was higher than other fans. These researchers argued that die-hard fans are often more loyal that support and remain loyal to their team despite being eliminated or bad results. Chaudhuri and Halbrook (2001) showed that the more the fans' trust in sports brands, the higher their loyalty to those brands. Fink et al (2003) found that fans' loyalty to their teams is one of the most important causes of spectators' attendance at sports events. They also showed that fans' loyalty to their teams varies in terms of gender. Lin (2007) examined the factors influencing loyalty to brands of sports teams of US baseball National League. His findings showed that brand dimension (brand attributes, brand benefit, and brand attitude) were one of the most important factors affecting brand loyalty from the viewpoints of sports fans. They also showed a significant difference between brand dimension and brand loyalty from the fans' viewpoints. In their study "brand image and fan loyalty in professional sports teams' Bauer et al (2008) state that image dimension of brand association is related to brand loyalty and is an essential factor in successfully gaining fans' loyalty to teams' brands. Sajadi et al (2011) examined the influential factors on fans' loyalty to three Iranian football clubs namely Persepolis, Esteghlal, and Teraktor-sazi. Result showed that coaching, management, and symbol had positive effects on loyalty and that these factors could make profit for these clubs.

If sports teams have a proper understanding of influential factors on their fans' loyalty, they will be able to benefit more from their satisfied loyal fans because meeting

spectators' expectation will lead to their loyalty. In this regard, brand dimensions can play a significant role in loyalty of spectators. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to compare brand dimension and brand loyalty from the viewpoints of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team.

Methodology

In terms of its goal, the present research is an applied study and in terms of data collection, it is a field study survey. The population consisted of all spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team in 2015. Previous year data indicated that the number of these two teams' spectators was not constant in each match; therefore the exact number of spectators was recorded when they played home in three matches and the population was the average number of spectators. This was 2500 for Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and 600 for Gorgan Municipality basketball team making a total of 3100. The sample included 340 subject using Cochran table. Given the unequal number of the teams' spectators, subjects were selected through stratified random sampling. Data collection tools were Lin's (2007) brand dimensions and Gladden and Funk's (2002) brand loyalty questionnaires. The former has 45 items and measures brand attributes, brand benefits, and brand attitude. The latter is a five-point Likert scale (very little to very much) questionnaire with four items. Five professors of sport management verified questionnaires' content validity. In order to check their reliability, a pilot study was performed (30 subjects completed the questionnaires) and reliability coefficients were calculated using Cronbach's alpha for brand dimensions ($\alpha=0.87$) and brand loyalty ($\alpha=0.82$) which indicated instruments' stability. Demographic information was also gathered by questionnaires about age and how long they had

been a fan of their favorite teams. Questionnaires were distributed among the spectators of these two teams in a home match and were gathered the same day. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) was employed to organize, summarize, classify, and describe the data. To test the normal distribution of data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was implemented and independent t-test was used to compare brand dimensions and brand loyalty from the viewpoints of the fans. All the hypotheses were analyzed at the $P \leq 0.05$ significance level using SPSS 16.

Results

The results showed that mean of participants' age was 18.7 years. 85.0 percent of the subjects had Diploma and lower degrees and mean of participants' support experience of their teams was 2.7 years.

Table 1 Comparison brand attitudes in spectators of volleyball and basketball team

Variable	Team	Number of Spectators	Mean	S. D.	df	Sig.
Brand Attitudes	Volleyball team	274	4.22	0.55	338	0.088
	Basketball team	66	4.21	0.66		

As shown in Table 1, there is no difference between Brand Attitudes from perspective of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team.

Table 2 Comparison brand attributes in spectators of volleyball and basketball team

Variable	Team	Number of Spectators	Mean	S. D.	df	Sig.
Brand Attributes	Volleyball team	274	4.10	0.42	338	0.207
	Basketball team	66	4.11	0.47		

By considering significant level, it can be stated that there is no difference between Brand Attributes from perspective of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team.

Table 3 Comparison brand benefits in spectators of volleyball and basketball team

Variable	Team	Number of Spectators	Mean	S. D.	df	Sig.
Brand Benefits	Volleyball team	274	4.14	0.54	338	0.342
	Basketball team	66	4.18	0.56		

As shown in Table 3, there is no difference between Brand Benefits from perspective of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team.

Table 4 Comparison brand loyalty in spectators of volleyball and basketball team

Variable	Team	Number of Spectators	Mean	S. D.	df	Sig.
Brand Loyalty	Volleyball team	274	4.53	0.53	338	0.004
	Basketball team	66	3.83	0.59		

Result of research showed that amount of Brand Loyalty from perspective of spectators of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team is different.

Discussion and Conclusion

Due to increasing competition in today's world, the needs of organization to use customer-oriented approaches in their marketing strategies have remarkably increased. Organizations have learnt that customer attraction is not an easy task, yet turning customers into loyal customers is much more difficult. Research has shown that customer satisfaction is no longer enough and it is customer retention and gaining their loyalty which are important. This has gone beyond service

organizations and encompasses other sectors such as sport. Nowadays, one of the most important concerns of club managers and sports marketers is to attract spectators to sports events and to retain them. Robinson (2006) states that meticulous marketing plans capable of meeting their expectations are essential to attract spectators to sports events. Results of the present study found no significant difference in terms of brand dimensions between the viewpoints of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team spectators; this is not in line with Lin's (2007) findings. Each brand in an industry has its own specific attributes and this is also the case among sports brands. Well-known brands try to more differentiate their attributes from those of their competitors. Bauer et al (2008) argue that sports brands should influence sports customers' minds more by presenting special attributes and benefits and create a positive attitude accordingly. Despite the importance and status of brand in successful sports teams in developed countries, brand building in sports teams is often overlooked by sport managers. Lack of specified rules about brand building in Iranian sport might be an important cause.

Results showed that there was a significant difference in terms of brand loyalty between the viewpoints of Javaheri Gonbad-Kavoos volleyball team and Gorgan Municipality basketball team spectators; this is consistent with findings of Lin (2007) and Sajadi et al (2011). Brand loyalty is critical to organizations' competition and profitability. Many researchers believe that each organization wants to have the most loyal customers. Unfortunately, though, not every organization would achieve this. Building and retaining loyal customers are at the heart of marketing maps of organizations especially in competitive markets and due to dedifferentiation of products. Aker (1991) stated about the role of loyalty in brand equity that brand loyalty will lead to particular competitive advantages such as cutting the costs of marketing and customer attraction

despite competitive strategies of competitors. It is certainly clear that loyalty is one of the ways in which customers express their satisfaction with goods or services.

It can be argued as to brand loyalty in the two teams that there are many factors which affect fans' loyalty. Some are tangible and some are not. In general, sports club manager should identify other factors influential on fans' loyalty and try to enhance them accordingly.

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