

Analysis of Sports Brand Marketing Strategy Optimization Based on Fan Psychology

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Abstract. Cause of increased competition in sports branding, the main issue for powerful marketing is to understand fan psychology. The attachment of a fan to their team and athletes has much to do with their purchasing behavior and brand loyalty. For that reason, understanding those psychological dynamics is necessary for a brand when trying to figure out an effective marketing strategy. The study shall now explore how sports brands utilize psychological frameworks, such as the Psychological Continuum Model, to nurture emotional connections that will lead to brand loyalty. Case studies are provided relating to Li-Ning and Nike, where it has been seen that aligning with athletes through limited edition product launches and special content given to fans drives deeper consumer engagement. However, it is hypothesized that if there is a heavy reliance on a fan-driven approach, mainstream market opportunities could be lost, and this may reduce longer-term growth. To this end, sports brands are suggested to balance fan-focused approaches against broader market segmentation, ensuring the process and strategy that will help meet diverse consumer needs and inclusivity for sustainable development. The insights provided here seek to guide brands toward maximizing their reach and brand resilience by harmonizing fan loyalty with mainstream appeal.

Keywords: Sports brands, Fan psychology, Marketing strategy, Brand loyalty, Psychological Continuum Model.

1. Introduction

With such a large development of the sports industry, competition among sports brands is becoming increasingly fierce. In this process, the fan base has become a crucial supporting force for all the sports brands. The favorite of fans for sports brands not only brings enormous commercial value to the brand but also provides sustainable momentum for its development. Therefore, a deep understanding of fan psychology and the development of marketing strategies based on fan psychology are crucial for the success of sports brands. Through various aspects such as physically and mentally issue.

This article aims to analyze in depth the marketing strategies of sports brands based on fan psychology. The article will start with analyzing the psychology of fans and explore the marketing strategies of sports brands. By studying relevant theories and analyzing practical cases, strategic suggestions for sports brands in product design, brand communication, marketing activities. Therefore, were proposed to provide reference for the development of sports brands.

2. The Characteristics of Sports Fans

The mood of a sports fan changes completely with the sports object they follow, if a person follows a team that is winning a game, they are happy and when that team loses the game, they are sad. But there is also a difference between the feelings of a spectator and a fan, a spectator of a sports object will slowly be attracted to become a fan. The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) is a conceptual framework that aims to differentiate between spectators and fans [1]. The various ways in which spectators and fans interact with sport objects like sports or teams are understood in terms of the

different stages of the longitudinal psychological continuum [1]. There is a discernible progression from mere observation to active engagement, which this framework delineates into four stages: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance [1]. At the initial stage, the awareness phase, individuals become aware of the existence of a sport or team but do not devote significant attention to it. At the second level, the attraction phase, individuals begin to demonstrate a proclivity towards the sport or team in question, indicating that they have identified a preferred sport or team. The third phase is attachment, during which the individual develops varying degrees or intensities of attachment to the sport object based on their valuation of the physical and psychological characteristics of their preferred sport object. The final stage, allegiance, is characterised by the individual's devout adherence to the sports object they espouse, which may manifest in the form of enduring behaviours such as the consumption of goods associated with the sports object.

For those who have become avid fans, support is expressed even in the absence of a natural outlet for such expression [2]. This is evidenced by the fact that avid fans do not merely demonstrate their support when their team is playing or featured in the news. Rather, they express their love for the sports object they follow more consistently in their everyday lives and may refer to their team with great frequency. The study found that these rabid fans have a strong psychological attachment to the team, that such individuals are less likely to be dissuaded from following a team, that they are more likely to stay with the sports team through downturns, and that their loyalty and sense of belonging to the team is unchanging [3].

3. Case Analysis

3.1. Li-Ning

Li-Ning is a Chinese sportswear and sneaker brand founded in 1990 by former Olympic gymnast Li Ning and has gradually become one of the brands that represent the Chinese sports field.

In 2012, Li-Ning signed with NBA star Dwyane Wade to launch a signature series of basketball shoes and apparel called "Way of Wade", marking a key moment for its brand to gain global recognition. The series strengthened the emotional connection between Wade's fans and Li-Ning, increasing their brand awareness. By doing that, fans felt they have built a closer connection with Wade by wearing his signature shoes, especially his designs reflect personal elements of his career and life. At the same time, Li-Ning has also launched many limited-edition sneakers, taking advantage of the scarcity psychology. Fans who love basketball shoes and Wade's legend have bought these exclusive products, which have become collectibles. As a result, that creates a sense of exclusivity and enhances the brand's appeal in sneaker culture. Furthermore, cooperating with Dwyane Wade enables Li-Ning to sell products at a higher price, because fans are willing to pay more for exclusive products related to their favorite athletes, and this premium price can increase the brand's profits.

3.2. Nike

Taking Nike as an example, Nike has signed numerous world-class sports stars, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, LeBron James, Michael Jordan. Fans are full of love for these sports stars, and their outstanding performance and personal charm on the field make fans' love for the stars also affect the brands they endorse. Fans will purchase sports shoes, sportswear, and other products that are the same as those of celebrities to express their support and imitate their lifestyle. This worship mentality enables sports brands to leverage the influence of celebrities to attract a large number of fans to pay attention to and purchase their products. In addition, there is a psychological identification with brand values; Taking Adidas' slogan "Impossible is nothing" as an example, this slogan conveys a positive and challenging value system, attracting many fans who pursue self-breakthrough and challenge their limits. These fans identify with Adidas' brand values, believing that the brand represents a positive attitude towards life and spiritual pursuit. They are willing to choose Adidas products to showcase their values and lifestyle. The identification psychology of brand values enables sports brands to establish a deep emotional connection with fans and increase their loyalty

3.3. NBA

NBA through selling the city-specific jerseys and producing star players' documentaries to expand brand influence.

Fans are kind of strong emotional relationship with their favorite players or teams, which has been used by most of brands to distinguish the consumer and the fan [4]. Therefore, it is very important to effectively use the mental activities of fans to publicize and promote the brand. NBA do a really good job in this case. It catches the attention of fans and meets the demand. This not only enforces fans' loyalty to the brand but also expands the brand's popularity. NBA built a deep psychological connection between fans and them by two measures.

3.3.1 NBA City Limited Jersey

NBA launched the relevant city limited edition jerseys for cities that own teams. They added some cultural significance or elements unique to each city in order to inspire local fans' sense of belonging to their cities. Take Denver Nuggets City Limited Edition Jersey as an example, their jersey was printed with 5280. The meaning of 5280 is the Denver City is located in the high land that 5280 meters high. Thus, through printing the element of Denver's high altitude features in the jersey to enhance the emotional connection between the local fan and the local team. The local fan is willing to buy this special jersey to support their home team. Additionally, the city limited edition jersey is kind of symbol that can tell the public where people are from, or which team people support. This fashionable and personalized symbol also can inspire fans to buy the jersey. This characteristic design makes the jersey represent not only the team, but also the reflection of one's different taste.

3.3.2 Documentary on the growth of players

In order to promote the stars in the league, NBA not only publish the player biographies, but also create a series of documentaries for them. For example, the "More Than a Game" of LeBron James in the early days, and the recent NBA documentaries for Anthony Edwards, SGA and Jayson Tatum. Without exception, all of these are telling the growth process and story of how the player make it. Documentaries show positive figures to fans. Then, fans are influenced by them and regard star players as their role models. In this way, it solidifies the relationship between the player and the fan. Moreover, the documentary of the player also contains their daily lives, which can make fans feel, reduce the sense of distance from the stars and create a deeper emotional link.

4. Potential Risks and Suggestions

4.1. Neglect of Potential Consumer

Over-reliance on using fans psychology to promote brand image and awareness may lead to neglect of potential consumer and causing the brand to miss some important opportunities in the mainstream market. The greatest group of potential buyers is usually represented by the mainstream market. Focusing too much on the needs of core fans and ignoring mass-market consumers can cause brands to miss out on huge revenue potential. At the same time, sales are often driven by mainstream consumers, and if a company fails to meet the expectations of mainstream consumers, its profitability and long-term growth may be limited.

4.1.1 Suggestion

To avoid losing mainstream consumers and balance different consumer needs, brands are encouraged to innovate their marketing concept and conduct market segmentation. Market segmentation is a widely accepted concept in marketing, its theory suggested that for businesses to attain a competitive edge and, consequently, better financial performance, they must identify demand segments, target certain segments and create unique marketing 'mixes' for each targeted market group [5]. Therefore, by adopting this strategy, companies that continuously innovate and launch new

products that keep pace with the times can effectively avoid ignoring the possibility of mainstream consumers.

4.2. Irrational Fans Behaviors Damage to Brand Image

Fans behaviors are irrational. Emotions are what drive the sports industry. As a result, feelings have an impact on fan behavior, which includes involvement, engagement, merchandising consumption, and match attendance [6]. Those fans, who experienced negative feeling due to star scandals or unsatisfactory competition results might leads to extreme fans behaviors, for instance, refusing to buy the products and spark ‘fans war’ spread across social media, creating negative publicity and damage brand image.

4.2.1 Suggestion

To avoid toxic fan behavior, brands can actively encourage positivity in fan communities. Set the tone through social media campaigns and brand messaging to promote respectful speech and discourage toxic behavior. For example, brands can highlight fan stories that express kindness and make fans feel proud to be respectful fans.

4.3. Failing to Meet Fans High Expectation

Difficulty in meeting fan expectations leads to disappointment and loss of fans. Fans often have very high demands and expectations of brands and expect brands to meet their various needs, including product quality, service and interaction. Brands often fail to address all fans' ideas and find it difficult to meet all fans' expectations, which can lead to disappointment and, as a result, fan churn. For example, when the historic New York Yankees moved to a new home in 2009, their management recognised the power of stadium culture. So out of respect for their fans, they kept the name Yankee Stadium, didn't sell the naming rights and called the new stadium 'New Yankee Stadium', which most fans embraced with open arms. But also in 2009, the then owner of Premier League giants Newcastle United renamed the 119-year-old St James' Park stadium Sports Direct Arena, which included the name of a company owned by the new owner. He hoped the sale of the naming rights would generate €10 million a year for the team. Instead, the move drew the ire of the entire city and the new stadium's name became a comedy punchline that was ridiculed across the country. The team owner's decision further alienated the fans, damaged his company's image nationally and regionally, and did little to attract other potential buyers of the stadium's naming rights.

4.3.1 Suggestion

Brands should be committed to building and maintaining relationships with their fans, constantly providing them with high-quality products as well as positive interactions, considering their thoughts, respecting their ideas and actively adopting their suggestions, and reducing the negative impact of fans’ dissatisfaction or disappointment.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing how sports brands use fans’ psychology to sell products, which is showing the importance of gaining fans’ support and reliance. The analysis of three cases shows that sports brand established a deeper mental bridge between the star players and fandom by signing famous athletes, launching limited products and make special documentaries for them. Moreover, the influence of the brand and the global popularity have also been improved. This marketing strategy aims at using fandom’s psychological to sell not only can gain a large group of loyal consumers but also provide sound foundation of long-term development of the brand, making the brand develop consistently.

In addition, the article also points out that there are some imperfections in the marketing strategy that using fans psychology to sell. For example, over-reliance on marketing to fan groups leads to ignore other potential opportunities in the main market. The brand pays too much attention to the fan will reduce the influence and the numbers of customers in the sports market. Besides, some of fans’

behaviors are irrational, and it is hard to matching the fans' mental expectations, which will make them feel upset. They are also problems that brands will face. So, during the brands' marketing, brands should not only focus on and meet the needs of the mainstream market, but also actively remove the negative emotions that made by fans. Communicating with fans as much as possible and learning their demand can reduce the bad influence of brands.

All in all, if a sports brand wants to be a legend and achieve sustained success, it must pay attention to the fans' mental activities and create novel marketing strategies to impress fans and build a long-term relationship with fans. Plus, brands need to pay close attention to the potential profits. Through these efforts, the brand can not only improve its competitiveness and influence in the market but also can remain success.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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