

A Study on the Consumption Behavior of Shanghai Sharks Fans Based on Identity Theory

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Abstract. The sports industry has grown rapidly in recent years, but the problem of its irrational industrial structure has also come to the fore. In order to improve the industrial status of competition performance, many sports researchers have chosen to look at professional sports clubs and professional sports leagues to find effective measures to improve the industry's poor structure. As the main driving force behind the development of clubs and leagues, fans are a popular research subject. This research examines the differences between fans' identity-based sports consumption behavior and other consumer behavior when they are the main consumers. Therefore, the core issue of this study is the study of fan consumption behavior based on identity theory. The study selects Shanghai Sharks basketball fans as the respondents and explores the relationship between fan identity and fan consumption behavior from the perspective of the influence mechanism. Literature, content analysis, questionnaires, and rooted theory were used in the research process to study fan consumption behavior in conjunction with identity theory. Based on the research, the following conclusions were drawn: Firstly, it was proved that the fan identity model has some scientific validity and that self-identity, social identity, and cultural identity constitute the identity of Shanghai basketball fans. Secondly, it is further verified that the Shanghai basketball fan identity has a more significant influence on the consumption behavior of fans. Specific suggestions are also suggested to enhance Shanghai basketball fans' consumption tendencies and behavior.

Keywords: Identity; Shanghai Sharks; Consumer behavior; Fans.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

In terms of self-identity, Gabriella suggests that people identify with identity because of the meaning they perceive it to have and the experiences they have had [1]. Identity, as explored in this study, is when an individual adopts a position or role and has sameness with others in that position or role. Felafel argues that people derive self-worth and a sense of belonging from their membership in a group, which explains the influence of identity on the consistency of group behavior, and that cultural identity is a specific expression of social identity in a cultural context [2]. The identity explored in this study refers to the fact that when an individual adopts a certain status or role, this individual has sameness with others in that status or role. This study refers to how fans identify with their fan identity.

Regarding consumption behavior, Maslow's needs theory points out that when people's basic life needs are satisfied, they will pursue a higher level of consumption. Sports consumption satisfies people's spiritual needs more to improve physical quality [3]. Brian proposes that sports consumption behavior is determined by the actual purchasing ability of the purchaser as well as the purchasing psychology together. This process is the purchaser's way of satisfying their consumption. Brian proposes that sports consumption behavior is determined by the purchasing ability of the purchaser and the purchasing psychology, a process whereby the purchaser produces a purchase to satisfy their consumption needs [4]. This study argues that sports consumption behavior is susceptible to changes in the environment in which it takes place and the consumer's emotions. It is a process of purchasing sports products and services based on financial means while not violating their sporting values. This is expressed in the study regarding perceptions about sports consumption, the level of sports consumption performed daily, and the evaluation of sports consumption performed. Jeyhun points

out that even in developed Western countries, the sports industry market is characterized by low attendance of fans at games. The survey suggests that fan loyalty is a key influencing factor and that fan loyalty is related to the level of facilities and services experienced at the game [5]. This researcher argues that fan consumption behavior is the process of purchasing goods and services related to a team or game within their ability due to the influence of their social environment and their recognition of the team's game.

1.2 Literature review

Concerning research on fans' consumption behavior, Liu Zhiyun, in his preliminary study on the relationship between the monthly income of football fans and football consumption in Hubei Province, conducted a realistic investigation into the income of football fans and their sports consumption. And This concludes that the current consumption level of football fans in China is still at a low stage and that the potential of the consumption market can be stimulated by guiding fans [6]. In their study, Xu Bo concluded that member fans are more loyal than non-member fans in spending on their team's home games. And this study concludes that fans' financial ability and emotional level influence the spending loyalty of both types of fans through a survey study of fan loyalty among 256-member fans and 246 non-member fans [7].

Concerning the study of identity, at the psychological level, Alpert proposed the theory of ego development, in which he argued that the formation of ego states is gradual, with the developmental process moving from physical to social to psychological to present a good ego state truly [8]. From a sociological point of view, sociologist Michael proposed the research direction of identity construction, arguing that an individual's identification with an identity originates from the social category to which he belongs and that the formation of this identity is the process by which the individual experiences social construction [9].

Current research on fan consumption behavior defines it as the physical and mental activity of paying for, buying and using products and services to satisfy consumers' consumption needs. These studies mainly involve the interaction between psychological cognition, personal emotions, personal behavior, and the environment in which they live. Bauer suggests that loyal fans are more likely to spend money on attending live games, following team reports, and buying team peripherals [10]. Foreign experts and scholars have identified several factors that influence fan spending behavior and fan loyalty, including the quality of the players and their performance in the game, the level of fan involvement, and the reasons for identification.

Gladden shows that when fans hear and see the name and logo of their favorite team, they feel a sense of psychological attachment, which builds intangible assets for the team [11]. As for the relationship between a club's brand and team identity, Singh argues that when a brand is competitive, its personality will be distinct. A brand with a high degree of uniqueness and prominence is more likely to strengthen its connection with consumers [12]. In the relationship between professional sports clubs and their fans, the more fans know about their brand, the closer they feel to the club, a psychological expression of team identity.

In summary, the majority of identity research in sports today is concerned with professional identity, cultural identity, and the relationship between identity and behavior. This study is based on identity research to investigate the mechanisms influencing fans' consumption behavior.

1.3 Research framework

The study explores the factors influencing fans' willingness to consume and provides a framework for the management of Shanghai's club to think about building a specific identity and forming a reasonable and scientific consumption decision. In addition, to guide the development of the fan market, better use the fans' demand to enhance the club's brand effect, improve the club's influence, and boost the development of Shanghai's team. This will provide a reference for China's professional sports basketball clubs in the marketing process of the fan market.

2. Method

2.1 Documentation method

The researcher conducted a large amount of relevant literature collection and collation. An extensive search of literature related to the topic of this study was conducted on the China Knowledge Network using the keywords identity, sports consumption behavior, fan consumption behavior, and identity. Then, this paper summarizes the relevant theoretical foundations and the main research methods adopted based on this literature.

2.2 Questionnaire Method

The questionnaire used in this study was structured based on the findings of the literature and the construction of a comprehensive fan identity model. The questionnaire was divided into three main parts, and the first part was a survey of basic information on fan demographics. The second part was a survey on the consumption behavior of basketball fans in Shanghai, which was adjusted by screening the questionnaire for reliability and validity to form the final questionnaire distributed. The survey was conducted using a convenience sampling method. Due to the epidemic, fans were initiated to fill in the questionnaire through Questionnaire Star in Shanghai basketball posting, Hupao forum, and Sina Weibo Shanghai basketball topic. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed, 157 were returned, and 154 valid questionnaires accounted for 97.5% of the questionnaires. A total of 160 questionnaires were distributed, and 157 were returned, 154 of which were valid, accounting for 96.25% of the questionnaires distributed.

2.3 Rooted theory method

This study used MAXQDA software to code 100,000 words of internet material collected from Hufflepuff forums, Baidu postings, public reviews, etc. Based on the initial understanding of the fans' identity in the early stage, the material important to the issue under study was selected for analysis. Then, new material was continuously added. Thus, the cycle was repeated. The reliability and validity testing of qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that the reliability in quantitative research is more about examining research conjectures by repeatedly measuring the collected data through mathematical and statistical methods. In contrast, qualitative research is more about grasping the autonomy of the research subject's thinking and the credibility of the target speech. Therefore, in order to ensure that the results obtained in this study are both credible and objective, the complete collection of relevant comments posted by fans on websites, forums and Apps was collected in their original form during the data collection process, from which the causes of the observed people's experiences and opinions can be studied. This study analyzes online data to test the hypothesis, so unlike the data in quantitative research, the validity-testing precision of qualitative research cannot be accurately measured. Therefore, in the data collection process, the influence of validity on the research questions was avoided as much as possible, and more of a neutral observer role was played by collecting all the comments of the research subjects to avoid subjective human selection of omitted content.

3. Result

The Shanghai Sharks, as a strong team in the CBA league, have a significant track record and a large fan base, making them valuable to study. This study identifies the research question of Shanghai fans' identity and consumption behavior based on a preliminary literature review. Then, after two months of data collection and a large amount of textual data obtained from fan interactions in Hupao Forum and Baidu Post, a theoretical model of Shanghai basketball fans' identity was constructed using the qualitative research method of rooting theory. Based on the established identity model, a questionnaire was designed by reviewing relevant literature, and 154 questionnaires were distributed

to Shanghai basketball fans on Hupao Forum, Baidu Post, and Weibo topic areas. 154 questionnaires were completed based on data integration and analysis, and the following conclusions were drawn.

3.1 Shanghai basketball fan identity consists of three major categories

The identity of Shanghai fans is composed of three categories: self-identity, social identity, and cultural identity. The self-identity of Shanghai fans is reflected in the internalization of the self-role of Shanghai basketball fans and the attitudes, behaviors, and perceived psychological activities of the Shanghai Sharks during their participation in the Shanghai basketball team. Social identity consists of both fan group interactions and everyday interpersonal interactions. Cultural identity is constituted by the background of the Shanghai basketball environment and the cultural atmosphere of the team, through which fans deepen their cultural identity with the Shanghai Sharks.

3.2 The identity of Shanghai Sharks basketball fans has a significant effect on their consumption behavior

This study has developed an identity model. Based on the identity model and the summary of related research findings, it is proposed that identity impacts fans' consumption behavior. The survey analysis further demonstrates that the three dimensions significantly influence fans' consumption behavior. Fan self-identity positively influences fan consumption behavior, while social and cultural identities significantly influence consumption behavior.

3.3 Suggestions in response to the findings of the research analysis

The researcher gives the following five suggestions in response to the findings of the research analysis.

3.3.1 Value the role of fans and provide services that deepen their self-identity

Clubs should value their fans and base their services on respect for them. The support and trust of the fans are the foundation and prerequisite for the sustainable and long-lasting development of the club. Therefore, clubs need to raise awareness of their services to the fans and put the deepening of their self-identity as a top priority. The club can take advantage of the fact that the Shanghai Sharks are located in East China, in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai, rich in sports and culture. The Shanghai Sharks basketball team should combine its services with the development of the local city, seize the geographical advantage, use the hometown plot to attract local fans, deepen the identity of local fans and build a local brand in Shanghai. Foreign fans can take advantage of the attraction effect of the team and players and hold activities on and offline to attract fans to participate. Transforming implicit fans into explicit ones and improving the stability of fans, thus promoting the club's healthy and long-term sustainable development.

3.3.2 Strengthen the sense of belonging of the fan base and enhance social identity

The club also needs to pay more attention to fan groups, such as fan organizations, and strengthen its management and service awareness. The current active fan groups of the Shanghai Sharks men's basketball team are mostly formed by fans on their initiative and have a low level of interaction with the club. It is recommended that the focus should be on positioning the official organization as an intermediary link between the club and the fans through standardized management, allowing for better communication between the club and the fans. On this basis, official organizations can strengthen the stability of fan organizations by implementing a fan membership management system to form a more solid fan base. This can also increase the sense of belonging among the fans and improve social identity, thus influencing sports consumption behavior and raising the level of fan spending.

3.3.3 Promote healthy fan culture and create a good fan culture atmosphere, starting from cultural identity

As the influence mechanism of cultural identity is significant, the league and the club should focus on disseminating its team culture and creating a cultural atmosphere. The Shanghai Sharks men's basketball team has taken advantage of its geographical location to create a team culture that aligns with the characteristics of Shanghai and Eastern China. Thus establishing a healthy and positive cultural image in the community, thus taking on more social responsibility within its capacity and gaining social support while actively guiding the cultural development of fans and fan groups. Based on a good cultural development direction, the team's culture can be shaped in depth regarding the team's traditional spiritual heritage, the club's cultural history, the on-site online cheering style, and the fan viewing experience. Thus, providing a suitable fan cultural atmosphere for developing and optimizing the fan culture.

3.3.4 Improving the quality of the club's products and services to meet the consumption intentions of the fans according to the characteristics of Shanghai Sharks basketball fans

Club products and services are the core of club operations, and the extent to which fans identify as fans largely depends on the win-win feeling they experience in supporting the team. The study revealed that Shanghai Sharks basketball fans are positively willing to spend, but the club currently offers few products with brand characteristics. By studying and learning from the product models of famous foreign basketball clubs, the Shanghai Sharks have established their brand, designed a distinctive brand image and team logo, and regularly offered influential and collectible team memorabilia. Secondly, working with fan organizations to brainstorm and understand fan preferences and needs, designing team peripherals, and opening them for sale online and offline will create a fan viewing atmosphere and increase fan engagement. Fans' identity is increased, their willingness to consume is satisfied, and fan consumption is increased.

3.3.5 Market segmentation and differentiated marketing and management for fan consumer groups

Clubs can provide different personalized services for different types of fans. In the face of the actual consumption level and consumption willingness will be affected by the value of the team and the team culture, in terms of consumer behavior, to show rational maturity of the group. From the level of culture and the current market development, to deepen the group for the team value and market value balance treatment, the formation of a reasonable cultural identity, so that they can be guided from this aspect of consumption. For fans, their actual spending levels and willingness to spend are easily influenced by social identity. Hence, it is important to start with the club's professional fan organization, strengthen the communication between the official organization and other fan groups, and communicate the club's attitude. This will not only strengthen the interaction between the organizations and increase the members' sense of belonging in the fan group but also strengthen the fans' identification with their own fan identity and inspire them. It also strengthens the fans' identification with their fan base, generates enthusiasm for the team, and ultimately improves the performance of the club's experienced management and supports the team's long-term development.

4. Discussion

4.1 Shanghai men's basketball fans' self-identity has the most significant positive impact on fans' consumption behavior

Among the three identity dimensions of the identity model constructed in this study, fans' self-identity has the most significant positive impact on their consumption behavior. This is demonstrated by the fact that current Shanghai basketball fans can reflect on their own identity based on their experiences. The self-identity of fans is a dynamic process of self-reflection and self-reflection that

leads to the formation of self-identity. Fans' self-identity is more subjective and motivated, and they want to improve their identity construction process through positive consumption behavior. Therefore, the willingness of fans to consume and their consumption behavior can show the extent of their self-identity. Compared to the other two identities, self-identity has the most significant impact on fans' consumption behavior. Shanghai basketball fans pay more attention to the construction of their own fan identity in the process of satisfying their consumption intentions. However, at the same time, attention to the social identity of the fan base and the cultural environment of Shanghai men's basketball can be neglected.

4.2 Social identity has a significant impact on fans' consumption behavior

The study concluded that social identity influences fans' consumption behavior. Research on social identity links individual identity with social identity. A review of the relevant literature reveals that consumers are more likely to identify with groups with high reliability in deciding to consume, and their judgment of consumption decisions and their implementation of consumer behavior are more likely to be influenced by these groups. Thus, a certain level of social identification can influence fans' consumption behavior. However, previous expert scholars have not concluded whether the nature of this influence is positive or negative. Only Forehand & Deshpande suggest that the presence of certain social identities can be an effective guide to consumer attitudes and decisions, and this study concludes that social identity has a more positive effect on fan consumption. In order to further explore the impact, this study analyses the various factors that constrain fans' consumption.

The questionnaire revealed that when investigating who fans most often watch the broadcast and live matches with, only around ten percent of fans go with fellow fans from fan organizations. This shows that fans are less closely connected. In the social identity section of the questionnaire, the relationship between fans and fan groups is vulnerable to group pressure. Most fans believe there is a lack of cohesion between fan groups due to the inconsistent performance of the Shanghai basketball team and the inability to meet fan expectations.

Overall, most fans still need the sense of belonging to a fan group and feel they share the same values as the fan base. However, while the fan needs to be identified with the fan group or group, he is still less willing to spend money on the Shanghai men's basketball team and the actual level of spending. Currently, among the developed professional basketball clubs in Europe and America, most of them focus on fan development. But domestic clubs still place less emphasis on fans and do not realize the importance of building positive fan relations. Successful professional clubs emphasize the importance of good fan relations as a foundation, with teams participating in high level

Getting good results in competitions satisfies fans with a sense of honor, while at the same time, the team's strength and experience are enhanced. However, the researcher found that the Shanghai men's basketball club ignores the real needs of the fans in this regard. Communication with them is lacking, not forming a positive and good fan relationship, and no mutual trust between the two. Therefore, despite the relatively high identification of Shanghai men's basketball fans with the fan organization, the willingness of fans to spend and their actual spending is reduced. Due to these external factors, the club does not maintain the relationship with the fans and even sets up interference in some cases.

4.3 Cultural identity is an important factor influencing fans' identity and consumption behavior

The study found that fan cultural identity has an influential role in the fans' self-identity, perceived social identity, and consumption behavior. This shows that cultural identity is important in constructing fan identity and consumption behavior. Moreover, it indicates that the cultural background and geographical environment in which the fans live can play a role in the fans' identification of their fan identity and the sense of belonging to the group they are in, as well as the degree of support from society. Currently, the social environment, team norms, and sporting culture of the Shanghai men's basketball team all play a subtle role in Shanghai basketball fans. This shows

that fans are always under the influence of the environmental background and cultural atmosphere to clarify their individual and group identity and influence fans' perception of the value of the Shanghai basketball team.

5. Conclusion

As a strong team in the CBA league, the Shanghai team has a notable track record and a large fan base, which is of research value. This study identifies the research question of Shanghai basketball fans' identity and consumption behavior based on a preliminary literature review. Then, after two months of data collection and fan interactions on Hupu Forum and Baidu Post, a large amount of textual data was obtained. And a theoretical model of Shanghai basketball fans' identity was constructed using the qualitative research method of rooted theory. Based on the established identity model, a questionnaire was designed by reviewing relevant literature and distributed to Shanghai basketball fans in Hupu Forum, Baidu Post, and Weibo topic area. 154 questionnaires were completed, and the following conclusions were drawn through data integration and analysis.

5.1 Shanghai basketball fan identity consists of three major categories

The identity of Shanghai basketball fans is composed of three categories: self-identity, social identity, and cultural identity. The self-identity of Shanghai basketball fans is reflected in the internalization of the self-role of Shanghai basketball fans. And the attitudinal behaviors and psychological activities that they exhibit and feel during their participation in Shanghai basketball. Social identity consists of both fan group interactions and daily interpersonal interactions. Cultural identity is constituted by the environmental background of Shanghai basketball and the cultural atmosphere of the team, through which fans deepen their cultural identity with Shanghai basketball.

5.2 Shanghai basketball fans' identity has a more significant effect on their consumption behavior

This study was conducted by developing an identity model. The hypothesis of the influence of identity on fans' consumption behavior was proposed based on the three dimensions of the identity model and the summary of relevant research results. Data calculation and analysis of the hypothesis further prove that the three dimensions show significant effects on fans' consumption behaviour. Among them, fan self-identity positively influences fan consumption behaviour, while social identity and cultural identity significantly influence consumption behaviour.

5.3 The positive influence mechanism of cultural identity is more obvious, and the positive influence of fan self-identity on social identity is significant

The study validated the feasibility of the identity model and the influence of identity on consumption behaviour through structural equation modeling analysis, thus confirming the scientific validity and rationality of each dimension. The validation results demonstrate that there is an influence relationship between the dimensions. The four hypotheses included in the fan self-identity model were confirmed, with cultural identity having a positive and significant effect on both fan self-identity and social identity, and fan self-identity and social identity having a positive and significant effect on each other, with self-identity having a more significant positive effect on social identity.

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