Marketing Psychology in Sports Branding: A Case Study of EPL, Li-Ning and Peak

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Abstract. Contemporary sporting retailers and sporting teams are increasingly intertwined together, with their profits and competitiveness in the market to be highly dependent on their marketing strategy. The present review aims to evaluate how sport psychology has become a useful discipline in enhancing company value by supporting firms' marketing strategies. Specifically, the present review employs various psychological variables, theories and case studies aim to explain the 'Why' and 'How' components of consumer purchasing behaviour. After all, the present review has identified the importance of using 'social identity theory' and 'positive consumer experience' to improve consumer's intention to purchase. Also, the relevance of 'brand awareness', 'consumer involvement' and 'brand equity' in maintaining continued long-term growth has also been highlighted by the present review.

Keywords: Sports Psychology, Marketing Perspective, Purchase Intention, Consumer Behaviour.

1. Introduction

The sporting field is one of the most lucrative industries that most producers would want to share and drive-in sales toward its direction. In fact, sports and business have been intertwined for many years that major sports teams and clubs are also big retailers. Hence, growing consumer consumption became one of the main competitive necessitates for brand's survival in the market. While an increase in fandom size and brand awareness helps the company to gain a competitive advantage, it is impossible to achieve this without an effective marketing strategy. Sport psychology closes this gap by assisting brand's marketing to change consumer's attitudes, beliefs, and motivation for the product to increase profitability. The present review has utilised previous studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of different psychological variables for enhancing positive consumption. Variables such as 'social identity theory' and 'consumer experience' have all seen great importance in improving consumer attitudes. Other variables such as 'consumer involvement' and 'brand equity' are important for maintaining brand's long-term growth. While these previous studies have advanced the understanding of the use of these single variables. The present review aims to close the gap and investigate how these variables may work together to increase consumer's intention to purchase.

To facilitate the understanding of the use of sport psychology in practice, the present review also invested few case studies where sport-psychology strategies have been used to improve market performance. Studies have shown the English premier league raised its profits through improving communication via online platforms to provide a better online experience. Commercial retailers such as Li-Ning has used strategies such as corporation with celebrities and teams, international advertisement, and technology improvement to improve the emotional bond between the brand and consumers. Besides, the present review has also utilised PEAK as a reverse case to inform mistakes that should be avoided in designing a marketing strategy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Sport Psychology

Sport psychology could be attributed to a few areas; on the one hand, sport psychology is a discipline that has been widely employed in understanding the performance and the general well-being of individuals [1], that focuses on aiding the athletes' training and practices for an improvement

in their performance in future games. On the other hand, Fletcher pointed out that the whole management and marketing domain has much to study from sports psychology [2], this is because sporting events could alter consumers' intention to purchase by stimulating their moods and attitudes. In fact, sport psychology has become an important discipline in the development of a sports team, and among the most critical use of sport psychology is its ability to influence the consumer's consumption behaviour.

Consumers' purchase behaviour is, in a nutshell, their propensity to acquire a certain product at a certain time or location. It is crucial since it is the driving element that will affect consumption and is directly related to the revenues of the firms. Market directors can use the premise of sport psychology to affect the purchase intentions of prospective consumers to entice them to acquire brand's product and enhance continued commitment to sporting activities.

2.2. Sport Market Structures

The sports market lacks specific definitions of the organisations involved in the market. Unlike most commercial industries where the tiers are often based on the function of an organization in the supply chain, such as retailer, distributor, manufacturer, and raw materials. In the context of sports, it is a multi-tiered system [3]. in which each tier has its distinct function and interest, with the club or the league as the core hierarchy. The players or the athlete are the most significant building block, as evidenced by the growing interest in the concept of star players, in which a large portion of the brand's revenue is derived solely from the actions related to the star athletes.

The next hierarchy is the team itself, in most team sports, the sports club is responsible for arranging events which is where most fans' interests focus on. The revenue for this tier comes from tickets, sponsorship, media rights and team-related merchandise. Sports directors or federations are responsible for making marketing decisions to attract attendance to these events, encourage international expansions and compete with other teams. Hence, it is crucial for federations to comprehend the consumer's purchasing behaviour or intention to maximise profits.

Fernandes defines purchasing behaviour as when consumers make a purchase decision for sport-related products or services (e.g., tickets, membership, sport-wears) that satisfy the demand of the consumer [4]. From a spectator's perspective, they would not make a purchasing decision unless the result of their searching, engaging, or assessing behaviour satisfies their demand. Ortiz reveals that, contemporary consumers are willing to express their loyalty to their favourite teams [5], novels or even TV series; the most devoted fans would even dress up as their favourite team or individuals. Thus, we could argue that the level of support relies on individual's dedication to the sport or the event. Hence, methods to lure higher levels of satisfaction become the key to higher consumption. Furthermore, this idea of dressing to support the favourite team suggest that sporting could also incorporate tangible goods and products, which brings us to the next level of the hierarchy: sports merchants. The number of sales that can be made for products such as athletic shoes and apparel depends on the expected value for the associated team. Traditionally, only professional athletes were using sporting goods. In recent years, sports products have become an integral element of exercise routines for the majority of individuals. Intriguingly, customers utilise these things for a variety of reasons, such as a reflection of their lifestyle, as a means of acquiring certain reputations or as a portrayal of their consumer loyalty to enhance their self-esteem among other fans.

Furthermore, studies have identified the significance of social influence on sports product purchase intention [6]. Their findings indicate that the demand for sporting goods is driven by the rising participation and acceptability of sportswear among the general population. The data provides support for the notions that sportsmen purchase sporting items for professional use, whereas the general population may make purchase decisions for other objectives. In response to the rapid increase in interest in sporting goods, sports retailers are engaging in significantly more advertising to influence consumer decisions. This is due to the rapid growth of different online platforms such as social media and the internet. In fact, Ritson has identified the persuasion power among social media platforms [7]. He proposed that the use of social media encourages an emotional relationship to be built between

fans and their support teams, creating brand loyalty. Retailers also should utilise the different online platforms as much as possible to enhance their brand awareness for better competitive advantage.

According to Abdomaleki and his colleagues, successful sports marketing begins with retailers understanding the 'why' and 'how' of sport spectatorship behaviours [8]. This is the investigation of the psychological factors linked with spectatorship. In fact, the consumption of sporting goods is tied to several psychological factors that are directly associated with sporting goods. The decisions and activities of coaches, athletes and federations are essential to the development of marketing strategies for the sports market. Thus, to succeed in the market, both hierarchies (sports teams and sports retailers) require an understanding of sport psychology in order to recognise and meet the demand and expectations of consumers. To analyse the topic comprehensively, the present review firstly looks at individual differences between populations. This author will then employ a number of variables followed by an evaluation of case studies to provide examples of the use of sport psychology in enhancing fandom consumption.

3. Psychological Variables

The target consumer in the sports industry could be dived into two categories: hedonistic consumers and rational consumers. According to Kirgiz, hedonic consumers are individuals that enjoy consuming a product based on their personal perception of it [9]. These consumers desire not only the highest-quality goods but also those that would benefit them mentally. They tend to purchase items because of the product's meaning and individual satisfaction. The hedonic consumer also purchases goods for status and social appear (e.g., fashion and price). Moreover, these customers place a large focus on the store's decoration (external factors) [9]. Rational consumers on the other hand, tend to examine the quality and the cost of the product before making a purchase decision (more rational). Hence, sports retailers can utilise the notion of hedonistic consumers to make sure the proposed marketing strategy could consistently meet the demand of each type of consumer.

Bae & Miller also examined consumer purchasing behaviour among the two gender groups [10]. They discovered that male and female consumers have distinct responses to brand advertisements. For example, female consumers demonstrate more complex information processing compared to males. According to Bae and Miller, female tends to analyse products and advertisements more carefully, whereas male consumers exhibit much more simple information processing [10]. Female tends to spend more time shopping and searching for product information. In fact, Bae and Miller found parallel findings where female consumers are more towards the hedonistic spectrum, indicated by the ease of impulsive purchase among female consumers [10]. Male consumers tend to be more rational when making a purchase. Female consumers are also more interested in high-priced products because they believe that brand and price are the most critical quality indicators whereas males care more about functionality and quality. These assumptions indicate that male and female consumers will exhibit distinct purchasing habits for sporting goods.

While this notion of hedonistic consumers and gender differences indicates individual differences between consumers, consumers' purchase behaviour could also be influenced by multiple psychology-related factors [11]. The present investigation will examine team identification, consumer involvement, brand equity and consumer experience to demonstrate how retailers could use sports psychology to encourage higher consumption.

3.1. Team Identification

Team identification has a variety of social and emotional impacts on consumer behaviour. Team identification refers to the psychological connection between the team and the fans [12], which is characterised by the extension of individual identity to the team. Respect and pride are enhanced when fans are encouraged to contribute to the team's success through team identification. The entire premise behind team identification is based on the social identity theory, which states that when the group value is greater, the individual will develop and sustain a continuous social relationship with

the group. However, if the reflected value of the group is lower than the individual, or when certain elements of the group value create a negative reflection, this will result in a loss of team loyalty and potentially they may extract themselves from the group [13].

Organisations could take advantage of the team identification theory; one method is the use of BIRGing. In simple terms, BIRGing is a concept where consumers may seek to share the glory of the winning party. The basis of BIRGing is that spectators or fans may wish to strengthen their relationship with a winning team as a method to boost their self-esteem [14]. Many previous studies have shown that highly identified consumers display increased team-related consumption behaviour [15][13]. For instance, people are more inclined to wear a team's clothes while the club is successful than when it is unsuccessful. Spectators who perceive that their identity is strengthened or endangered by the team's performance are prone to experience emotions, which may result in a loss of behavioural control, such as impulsive buying. Besides, BIRGing is an example of a psychological perspective that is useful for explaining brand loyalty among consumers. Decoration, colour, price, and quality can all be used to encourage consumer loyalty formation and loyalty fans that have long supported the team, tend to continue supporting their team even without considering the cause [13] and the outcome of the game [16]. Such a positive evaluation of the team is likely to cause consumers to engage in impulse purchases and demonstrate continued loyalty by making additional purchases in the future.

Team identification also has a positive influence on evaluations of brand's advertisement content. If the sports team or retailers continues posting attractive content, highly identified fans are likely to participate in biased information processing, resulting in an increase in consumer trust and purchase intention [17]. Because of in-group favouritism among loyal fans, they always view advertisement content from their support team to be valuable. To rationalize their cognitive process and prevent unpleasant affective states, they have a tendency to process group-relevant information in a biased manner by exposing themselves to messages that are congruent with their pre-existing beliefs [17]. Simultaneously, loyalty fans tend to conduct a more critical analysis of a product licenced with a competing team [18]. Thus, this finding highlights the importance of maintaining a highly identified fan base, as well as indicated that providing information that is both informative and interesting will preserve consumer loyalty and encourage future purchase intention.

From a retailer's perspective, they should capitalise on team identity theory to increase impulse purchases and encourage the formation of loyalty fans. According to Prayag and colleagues, team identification appears to be an accurate predictor of consumer satisfaction and loyalty [19]. To increase team identification, organizations should invest in marketing that aims to increase team awareness. As Kang & Hwang and the team development theory have identified that an individual's relationship with a certain team develops into continuous commitment simply from team awareness [20]. Consequently, fans can establish team identification simply by being aware of the team. With increased team identification, game attendance and customer loyalty will also likely be increasing leading to a rise in business profits [21].

3.2. Consumer Involvement

Demand for sport-related commodities and merchandise is frequently determined by the level of consumer involvement. Organizations and business place a significant deal of emphasis on keeping a continuous presence in the market to increase profits and promotions. In fact, companies invest millions of dollars in sports advertising and sponsorship to increase the level of participation in sports and ensure consumers continue to purchase the brand's goods [22].

Studies have found a relationship between participants' involvement and purchasing intention. Using social exchange theory, Fernandes et al (2013) empirically studied consumer behaviour and sports involvement [4]. Their results indicated consumers' purchase intention is directly proportional to the amount of time they devote to sports. This means the amount of participation in sports is an accurate indicator of the behaviour of consumers in the sports industry, representing a direct relationship between involvement and marketing performance [4]. Based on the social exchange

theory, consumers will continue to engage in a sport as long as they perceive it to be beneficial. The commitments are propagated by a relationship in which the benefits outweigh the cost. Likewise, consumers will be committed to engaging in an activity if the action is accompanied by a pleasurable experience. Thus, such findings provide valuable insights for teams and businesses on how to encourage sustained participation, namely by reducing the cost of participation and providing a pleasurable experience that outweighs the cost of entry.

3.3. Brand Equity

Studies have shown that brand image, brand trust, and perceived quality to positively influence consumer purchase decisions [23]. Therefore, to be successful in the market, companies must recognise that the long-term success of any future marketing programmes for a brand is significantly influence by the firm's brand equity that has been established by brand's short-term initiatives. For instance, a company with a history of excellent quality and product design is more likely to appeal to consumers in the future. Thus, methods to enhance product associations for better recall becomes the key. NAM identified the importance of matching consumer expectations [24]. It states that when this expectation is met, it creates satisfaction which makes recall more likely [25]. This satisfaction is also useful for maintaining brand loyalty. Despite the previously mentioned concept of biased information processing among loyal fans. Loyal fans in some cases, can also entice others by using the products or advertising others which is also useful for brand's future growth. Consequently, it is critical for managers to comprehend the effect of their marketing programmes on consumer leaning and subsequent recall of brand-related information to provide marketing strategies that meet their expectation. One method to achieve this from psychology perspective is to provide the consumer with a positive and unique experience.

3.4. Consumer Experience

Theories for 'consumer involvement' and 'brand equity' have all identified the importance of positive experience for higher purchasing intention. The theory of 'consumer experience' creates this experience by fostering emotional attachment between the brand and consumers [26].

Consumers' purchasing behaviour at a particular store is largely influenced by their perception of the brand or the team [26]. Thus, it appears that method to improve satisfaction is a crucial tactic for convincing them to make a purchase. Among them is the use of goods and services within a physical store. For instance, physical retailers have a comparative advantage over online stores because they offer superior services that enhance customer experience. The physical location and direct interactions between the brand and the consumers make them more enticing than online stores. If the result of the interaction between the provided service and consumer leads to a positive experience, this creates potential loyal fans who may make frequent re-visits and possibility for further purchases.

Several studies have also demonstrated that social skill in sport psychology is crucial for boosting consumption behaviour [27]. Sporting products are often subject to the evaluation of others, meaning better product attributes may lead to a better evaluation of self by others. Many physical stores ensure a positive shopping experience by providing multisensory stimuli that may be attractive to hedonic consumers who put a large emphasis on store decoration. Consumers who care about the evaluation of others, may purchase the most stylish sportswear and shop at the most fashionable retail store, gaining satisfaction through purchasing at those particular stores. This creates a positive experience that may attract them for continued re-visit and creates positive brand equity that they may wish to recommend to friends and family [27]. Therefore, consumers who care about the evaluation of others, may purchase the most stylish sportswear and shop at the most fashionable retail store.

4. Case Studies

4.1. English Football Premier League

The English football premier league is an example of how consumer experience has been leveraged to increase consumption. This was accomplished through the rapid expansion of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Due to a rise in preference for engaging with football clubs via social media, which is arguably underpinned by the pandemic in which social media usage continues to rise, the English premier league has placed a great deal of emphasis on maintaining its fan base from major online platforms. They achieved this through categorizing consumers among different social media platforms so a favourable experience is delivered. They recognised that many of their fans interact on various social media platforms because each offers a unique experience. Facebook's algorithm encourages long-form content, whereas clubs will utilise Twitter as an information stream to attract viewers to their website. Instagram on the other hand, has a predominantly younger user profile. Clubs are producing content that is more entertaining and fun for those groups. Such differentiation helps clubs in achieving relevance for their audience in their preferred environments.

Attempting to cultivate emotional connections with the fans was another crucial component for their success. They are attempting to foster a sense of community across several platforms. This stimulates social interactions and establishes social relationships between their fans, thus encouraging sustained commitment and allowing a sense of identity and belonging to be formed within the community. In addition, the clubs recognise that the majority of social media users seek amusement. Therefore, they attempt to make the material as entertaining as possible to attract continued interest in viewing the information provided. This attracts fans with a similar attitude or identity through the combination of the aforementioned tactics.

4.2. Li-Ning

Li-Ning is a Chinese sporting goods firm formed in 1990 by the renowned gymnast Li Ning, and it has gradually become one of the brands that represent China in the field of sports. Its primary success stems from a combination use of social identity theory and better consumer experience.

LI-Ning has utilised the social identity theory by promoting its product to the international market, which has greatly raised product awareness and improved self-esteem among its fans. In 2018, Li-Ning participated in two fashion weeks in New York and Paris and included numerous Chinese themes in their product design. Being one of the first Chinese brands to participate in a such high-standard event, it created a lot of over-sea fans. Simultaneously, it motivated its fans within the country to be part of its success hence creating loyal fans.

Secondly, Li-Ning has also attempted to increase its loyal fan base through cooperation and investment. For example, Li-Ning signed Gai, the winner of the competition "China's Hip Hop" and partnered to develop cobranded sneakers, which has allowed brand awareness to be grown in the field of music. Additionally, a similar strategy was also applied to Esport. At the 2018 global championships for League of legends, Li-Ning started a collaboration with one of the most renowned teams, EDG and released a collection of EDG-styled clothing. These tactics have been seen to be very effective for increasing the existing fan base as well as gaining loyal fans. This is because both the gaming and music industries have been gaining popularity in recent years, and both 'Gai' and 'EDG' are the one of most successful individuals or teams within the industry, with an already established fan base. Such cooperation does not only improve brand awareness in these industries but also creates associations that attract interest from those already establishes fans. As the Social identity and team development theory as states the possibility of turning consumers from just knowing to loyalty creates massive potential for improving Li-Ning's future fan base.

In terms of consumer experience, Li-Ning has spent a substantial amount of money to improve the shopping experience for consumers which have seen to be successful in the formation of positive brand equity and continued purchase intention. Li-Ning and Ali cloud have partnered to create digital

stores that are able to collect data on consumer's behaviour patterns, so the system can more directly grasp customer demand and automatically provide the best pairs of products that would match consumer's demand, greatly enhancing the shopping experience. Since the entire premise behind consumer's purchase decisions is to match products with their expectation, this procedure would accurately provide consumers with the most accurate product, significantly increasing the likelihood of purchase. This exceptional experience is likely to stimulate further purchases and creates positive brand equity.

4.3. PEAK

On the downside, 'PEAK' has experienced a significant decline in sales over the past few years. One major reason for this is the failure in targeting the correct consumer segment. Their product design and advertisement are heavily focused on product quality, and they have not placed enough emphasis on product appearance to keep up with the current fashion trend. While product quality does play a vital part in developing brand equity over the long term, it results in a significant loss of new fans. In fact, data have shown that most consumers of sport-related products are between the age of 18 to 30, and their desire to purchase mainly comes from their interest in fashion and better self-evaluation. Their marketing strategy on both the design and advertisement aspects have all failed to attract the interest of the consumer. It's no doubt that good quality creates good brand equity and attracts consumers in the long term, but its current fandom size simply cannot compete with other long-established firms in the market, which ultimately leads to its failure.

Another factor contributing to PEAK's decline in sales is its lack of brand awareness. PEAK does not have many physical stores, restricting the opportunities to provide consumers with promotions and direct in-store shopping experiences; On top of this, their online advertisement is also minimal. Consumers are not obtaining enough informative content to sustain their interest, which has heavily damaged its existing fan base. Given social identity has to be developed from brand awareness and continued interaction between consumers and the brand, PEAK has not successfully formed this emotional bond between its consumer and the brand. Ultimately leading to loyal fans losing interest and seeking alternatives, which can be reflected in its decline in sales.

5. Discussion

Sports retailers recognise the relevance of sport psychology and its connection to consumer behaviour. Sports psychology is a valuable domain for influencing consumer behaviour to boost the profitability of businesses. For sports retailers to have a substantial impact on their consumers. This review has examined a number of psychological variables that influence consumer purchase behaviour, demonstrating consumers' attitudes, often manifested in the form of 'developing positive purchasing experience' or establishing a social identity within the community, is an essential determinant of consumer's purchasing behaviour.

This review has demonstrated the importance of identity in determining whether to consume a product. Following the social identity theory, consumers may wish to be associated with an exceptionally high-performing or popular team among most of the consumer population. In fact, as consumers become fans of a particular team or brand, the success of their favourite team or brand will have a significant effect on the development of their self-esteem, self-confidence and psychological well-being [28]. Consumers will likely be undergoing strong emotional bonds with the team or brand [18]. Retail stores are taking advantage of this, as the case study of Li-Ning has shown. They are utilizing celebrities, and teams to influence the decisions of consumers to purchase from the given brand, positively driving purchases from retail stores and increasing the revenue returns. Furthermore, the review has also indicated the importance of brand awareness for brand development. Retailers should utilise the idea of social identity to improve their brand awareness.

In terms of consumer's experience, the most important conclusion that can be drawn from this perspective is that if a retailer's primary goal is to provide a positive experience with any products or

the entire brand, it is crucial for the retailer to improve the consumer's brand association (e.g., the emotional bond between the consumer and the brand) through interaction [26]. Retail stores such as Li-Ning have shown to be effectively using these premises to enhance consumer experiences with a focus on establishing positive interaction with the consumer, thereby socially influencing consumers to purchase the brand's product. A better consumer experience increases the likelihood that consumer will refer their friends and other potential consumers to a particular retail store [27]. The employee's social interactions also enhance consumer experiences and ensure that such stores have loyal customers who are more likely to be satisfied as a result of social attraction and enhance consumer experience. Interestingly, the case study of Li-Ning has also shown as the potential for technology improvement for providing a better shopping experience.

Other psychological elements highlighted in this analysis, including brand equity have also shown importance in influencing purchasing behaviour. Companies are realising that short-term marketing initiatives designed to increase brand awareness and brand image have an effect on long-term brand image and profits. However, the use of promotions that are firmly related to the product category does not contribute to the creation of a distinctive brand association that provides consumers with a compelling reason to make a purchasing decision with a particular brand. Hence, managers have to consider the employment of more inventive promotional stimuli as a means of providing consumers with a unique selling point [29]. As an illustration, Li-Ning's investment in the music industry and Esports was a fantastic method for enhancing brand equity, as they have developed brand associations with another industry, which enhances brand awareness and adds perceived quality to the brand's name.

Individual distinctions between hedonistic and rational consumers, as well as gender differences, are also influential. These distinctions are required because individual variances exhibit diverse consumption patterns. This could be evidenced by PEAK's decline in sales as a result of its failure in targeting the correct consumer group. It indicates older age groups tend to be more concerned with product quality, whereas younger age groups are more concerned with product appearance and fashion. This individualised difference in attitude for the consumer also occurs among different gender groups. Female consumers spend more time shopping than male consumers, and they are more concerned with issues of quality and pricing [10]. This is similar to the idea of hedonistic and rational consumers where hedonistic consumers are more concerned with multi-sensory stimulus whereas rational consumers care more about functionality. Retailers should utilise this psychological perspective to enhance the value of their brands.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, the aim of the present review is to determine how sport psychology may be used to enhance brand value by influencing consumer purchasing behaviour. The present review explored the psychological elements that drive consumer purchasing behaviour in the sports industry, which can also be lingered in sports retail stores. A review of consumer-decision making is essential for the sports retail industry, and information regarding consumer decision-making can be a factor in enhancing a retailer's competitive advantage in the market. The review has helped sports products reveal efficient factors in marketing that seek to satisfy consumers, uphold loyalty and enhance future fan growth. Furthermore, the case studies have shown the practical uses of the aforementioned psychological variables that may be of important consideration for marketing directors. However, the current analysis does not include all psychological factors concerning consumer and spectator consumption. Thus, additional research is necessary for a more conclusive conclusion.

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