A Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between Team Trust and Loyalty toward the Sponsor's Brand: The Mediating Role of Team Identification

Amr Sharawy[1] and Abeer Mahrous[2]

[1]Affiliation not available
[2]Cairo University

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Amr Sharaway

Business Administration Department, Cairo University

email: amr_sharawy@foc.cu.edu.eg

Abeer A. Mahrous

Professor of Marketing, Cairo University email: abeer.mahrous@foc.cu.edu.eg

Orcid: 0000-0002-6082-4621

Scoups: 36141959400

Abstract

As competitiveness increases in professional sport industry (Hill and Green, 2000; Robinson, 2006) sponsoring in the field has also been raised recently (Biscaia et al., 2013). While the impact of sponsorship activities on different aspects of branding is now well clarified, the impacts of those activities have on the brand loyalty hasn't received much attention (Mazodier and Merunka, 2012). This preprint aims to report on the association between team trust, team identification and both types of loyalty, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty. The conceptual model is derived from TRA "the theory of reasoned action" and SITS "the social identity theory". This study sheds some light on the Egyptian fans and what drives them in order to provide some help to different football clubs and sponsors of these clubs alike which could be reflected to the sport industry as a whole in the country in the end.

Keywords : Team Trust; Team Identification; Sponsor's Brand; Sports Marketing; Egypt

Introduction

As a result of the increased competitiveness in the sports and events industries (Hill and Green, 2000; Robinson, 2006), providers of these events are trying hard to have more customers to attend matches and to buy different related services (Theodorakis et al., 2009). Therefore, we can see that sponsoring in the sports field has been rising in the past few years (Biscaia et al., 2013). Thus, the goal now is to get more spectators to follow the games (Theodorakis et al., 2009). As the International Events Group (IEG, 2012) showed that 68% of money invested in sponsorship worldwide is now directed toward sports, this can be explained with the fact that sport sponsorship has been perceived now as a vital income tool for both corporate sponsors

and sport teams (Bühler et al., 2007). However, the impact of sponsorship activities on different aspects of branding (e.g. brand awareness and brand image) is now well clarified unlike the impacts of those activities have on the brand loyalty itself (Mazodier and Merunka, 2012). While Berry (2000) mentioned that the significant gains from a brand that can give to its customer is trust, Wu et al. (2012) suggested that trust is the base of establishing fan loyalty.

In the same line, studies indicated that team identification can help in facilitating the attendance and consumption process of games and matches-related services (Wann et al., 2001). As for this suggested linkage between team identification and the consumption of sports-related services, much research argued that raising team identification is now a main goal for sport teams (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002a).

As a consequence some research questions can be raised here: (1) can the fan trust lead to attitudinal or behavioural loyalty toward sponsor's products and services (1) would the fan trust lead to higher team identification, (2) does team identification impact the fan loyalty toward the sponsor's brands, and (3) can the team identification have different impacts on both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

There is paucity of literature on team trust, identification, and attitudinal and behavioural loyalty toward sponsor's products and services links, especially in Arab and emerging markets such as Egypt. Arab and emerging economies are under researched contexts in the marketing field in general and in the sports marketing field in specific (Khattab and Mahrous, 2016; Gupta et al. 2018; Mahrous, 2013; Mohsen et al. 2018; Shazly and Mahrous, 2017; Marzouk and Mahrous, 2017; Mahrous and Kotb, 2014; Adel et al., 2018; Adel and Mahrous, 2018). Therefore, this paper is a part of a multifaceted project that aims to (1) conceptually build a research framework that identify the links between team trust, team identification and loyalty to sponsors brand; and (2) empirically investigate those identified relationships.

The paper proceeds as follow: first, the constructs of the study and the development of the hypotheses are identified. Finally, a discussion of the expected contribution and implications of the study is presented.

Background

Trust

Trust has not been under much consideration in previous literature; however, the developments and emerging trend in marketing literature concerning relational orientation brought it into focus (e.g. Morgan and Hunt, 1994). However, there hasn't been one definition of trust, O'Boyle & Shilbury (2016) mentioned that most previous research on trust discuss common aspects such as expectations, taking risk, vulnerability, and honesty (Klijn et al., 2010). Trust can be critical when uncertainty is present (O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016). In sport literature, and even though this concept is more complicated for the unique features of the sport service, it has not yet gained much attention (Tsiotsou, 2013)

Team Identification

Team identification has attracted a huge attention in the past few years (Theodorakis et al., 2012). Team Identification is fans or audiences' involvement and commitment to a certain sport organization (Sutton et al., 2012). Raising team identification for individuals has become very important aim for sport teams due to the strong link between it and the consumption of sport events (Fink et al., 2002). Fans identification with the team can be a strong influencer on fans' activities and behaviour (Fisher, 1998; Theodorakis et al., 2009).

Loyalty

Oliver (1999) indicated loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (p. 34). Brand Loyalty has always been associated with repeated purchasing (Yoshida et al., 2015). Most previous research has agreed that loyalty involves attitudinal and behavioural dimensions (e.g., Bodet and Bernache-Assollant, 2011). While Behavioural loyalty refers to actual purchasing behaviour (e.g., attending matches and

buying merchandise) (Stevens & Rosenberger, 2012), attitudinal loyalty refers to the fan's inner attachment (Bauer et al., 2008) and other psychological aspects such as commitment and personal preference (Kaynak et al, 2008).

Research framework and hypotheses development

In figure (1) we present our conceptual framework where attitudinal and behavioural loyalty toward sponsor's products and services are the final outcome of the relationship with the fan trust to the team.

This paper uses 'TRA' to explain the customer loyalty toward certain items (Dick & Basu, 1994; lin & lin, 2008). According to TRA, the information that the person has is a main determine of his behaviour and that this behaviour is affected by two factors; attitude and the subjective norm (Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1967). TRA helps to predict consumer behaviour (Donald, & Cooper, 2001).

In addition SIT is used to explain the team identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory suggests that the members of any group try to build and preserve a positive identity of that group (Reysen et al., 2012), and that they seek to do that in order to increase their self-confidence and satisfaction (e.g., Hogg and Turner, 1985). Identifying with a group, among individuals, can vary. As Gwinner and Swanson (2003) mentioned that highly identified fans of certain sport, as a sort of a social group, can be very loyal to their team, and vice versa.
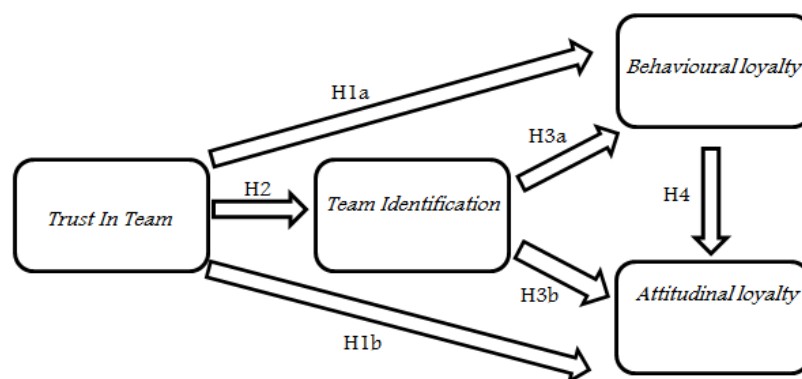

Figure1: Conceptual framework

3.1. Trust and loyalty

Trust is a very important aspect when considering constructing long and lasting relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As Reichheld and Schefter (2000) indicated that fans must trust their organization before they can develop loyalty toward it. Therefore we propose:

H1: there's a positive impact of team trust on being loyal toward the sponsor's products/services.

H1a: there's a positive impact of team trust on attitudinal loyal toward the sponsor's products/services

H1b: there's a positive impact of team trust on behavioural loyal toward the sponsor's products/services

3.2. Trust and team identification

The concept of trust in services context possess a unique importance for the specific attributes of the services, as many researchers mentioned that most customers may not be able to assess the service until after its consumption which imply that services must have credence attributes (Chiou et al., 2002; Trawick & Swan, 1981). Sport is that type of service that best reflect that thought, as for the fans to attend team's games, for example, they need to trust in the team and the players to give an ethical game (Wu et al., 2012).

3

Many prior researches confirmed that there is a positive impact of trust on identification. For instance, Restubog et al. (2008) found that employees possess higher identification when they trust the authority inside the organization. Keh and Xie's (2009) also found a positive link between team trust and team identification. While Borgen (2001) explained that identification is critical for the development of trust. Therefore, it's hypothesized that:

H2: Team Trust in the team is positively linked with team identification

3.3. Team identification and loyalty

There are a few studies that discussed the link between loyalty and team identification and. For example, on one hand, Matsuoka et al. (2003) found a significant relationship between team identification and satisfaction on loyalty. On the other hand, Bodet and Bernache-Assollant (2011) indicated that team identification is a predictor of attitudinal loyalty, but, it does not influence behavioural loyalty (i.e., how many years an individual was a fan of the team and how many games they watched). Therefore, we propose:

H3: there is positive impact for team identification on loyalty

H3a: *there is positive impact for team identification on behavioural loyalty*

H3b: *there is positive impact for team identification on attitudinal loyalty*

3.4. Fan's behavioural and attitudinal loyalty

Behaviour of loyalty is related mostly to significant attitudes (Bauer et al., 2008). As attitudinal loyalty must always grasp the attitude of the actual purchasing (Kaynak et al., 2008; Stevens & Rosenberger, 2012). Biscaia et al. (2013) mentioned, as well, that attitudinal loyalty is positively associated with behavioural loyalty. Therefore:

H4: there is a positive association between fan's behavioural and attitudinal loyalty

3.5. The mediating role of team identification

According to the abovementioned arguments (presented in relation to hypotheses 2 and 3) that proved, according to previous research, trust is positively associated with team identification while identification with the team can enhance loyalty, we also propose the following:

H5: team identification mediates the association between team trust and (a) attitudinal loyalty; (b) behavioural loyalty toward sponsors' products/services

H6: attitudinal loyalty mediates the link between team identification and behavioural loyalty toward the sponsor's products/services

H7: attitudinal loyalty and team identification mediates the link between team trust and loyalty toward the sponsor's products/services.

4. Research Implications

Although there is plenty of work that studied team identification, there is still few that discussed the determents that help to increase that identification (Absten, 2011). As well as, the linkage between loyalty and sponsorship activities has not been well established so far (Mazodier and Merunka, 2012). There is paucity of literature on the association between team trust, identification, and attitudinal and behavioral loyalty toward sponsor's products and services.

This study has some managerial implications for practitioners. Popular teams, with high connections with their fans, have always been a target to firms to tie their brands with (Carlson et al., 2007). This study sheds some light on the Egyptian fans and what drives them in order to provide some help to different football clubs and to the sponsors of these clubs as well which could be reflected to the enhancement of sport industry as a whole in the country at the end.

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