Understanding Fans Loyalty in Brazilian Soccer

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Abstract

Introduction-No other cultural phenomenon appears to represent the 'Brazilian Soul' better than soccer.Due to its popularity, soccer can be seen as part of the national identity. People in general are very proud of the FIFA World Cup that was won five times by the national team. Independently of gender, religion, ethnicity or social class, most Brazilians are encouraged to adopt one soccer team as part of their own identity. During childhood, people are influenced to choose a team to support according to their parents commitment. Parents try to influence their children's preference exalting the glories of their preferred teams, depreciating the adversaries' success or dressing themselves and the children with the teams' colors.Identification with a sports team resembles two marketing subjects: brand image and brand loyalty. Brand image refers to the cumulative associations about a product in customers' imaginary (Bauer, Sauer Exler, 2008). Brand attributes like sincerity, sophisticateon, competence, excitement and ruggedess, presented in brand personality (Aaker, 1997) can also be seen in team symbols.Brand loyalty presumes a deep commitment to buy the same brand (Oliver, 1999; Bell, Auh Smalley, 2005).

Index terms—

1 Introduction

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Identification with a sports team resembles two marketing subjects: brand image and brand loyalty. Brand image refers to the cumulative associations about a product in customers' imaginary **??**Bauer, Sauer & Exler, 2008). Brand attributes like sincerity, sophisticateon, competence, excitement and ruggedess, presented in brand personality (Aaker, 1997) can also be seen in team symbols.

Brand loyalty presumes a deep commitment to buy the same brand (Oliver, 1999; **??**ell, Auh & Smalley, 2005). According to East, Gendall, Hammond and Lomax (2005), loyalty can be both attitudinal and behavioral: attitude refers to the rational action (i.e. to recommend a brand) and behavior reproduces the act itself, not necessarily rational (i.e. buying the same brand). In sports loyalty it is more than that: it is quite devotion that evokes an emotional commitment (Mahony, Madrigal & Howard, 2000).

Nowadays customers' base comprises one of the most important sources of income in all business structures, and therefore it is very important to focus on branding strategies to improve their satisfaction. Satisfied people tend to patronize the same brand in order to avoid risk of dissatisfaction and strong brands represent competitive resource in all businesses, including sports (Brodie, Glynn & Little, 2006).

44   In the field of sports loyalty can also be constructed along with satisfied events (i.e.: success in winning
45   successive championships), but it is not only restricted to this. Parents or friends may influence people to
46   develop positive attitude to a team despite bad results. Affinity, in this case, is a kind of passion that does not
47   depend on any objective reward.
48   Sportive marketing seeks to attract public recognition, enlarge team fan bases and improves brands' credibility
49   **??**Zunino, 2006). According to Couvelaere and Richelieu (2005), team's performance is extremely important for
50   fans satisfaction; therefore an efficient positioning strategy may reduce financial instability when the team fails
51   in winning important competitions.
52   Marketing professionals involved in creating brand equity in sports must understand the relationships between
53   teams image and fans loyalty. Fun emotional attachment to clubs' brand may help sports managers to improve
54   trust, loyalty and profitability (Holt, 1995). This work explores relationships between image and fans loyalty in
55   some Brazilian soccer teams, in order to understand if the way fans evaluate a sports brand can influence their
56   loyalty, and how that can be achieved.

2   II.

3   Loyalty

59   For Oliver (1999), loyalty presumes a deep commitment to buy the same brand regardless the situation and/or
60   competitors efforts. Loyalty is primarily characterized by repeated buying (Day, 1969;Keller, 2001) including a
61   psychological assurance of commitment for the same brand. According to Bell et al. **??**2005), loyalty represents
62   a commitment by the customer to purchase more and varied products from the focal organization and to help it
63   succeed (e.g., through wordof-mouth recommendations).
64   Loyalty encompasses two important components: attitude and behavior (Day, 1969;Dick & Basu, 1994;Grisaffe,
65   2001;East, et al., 2005; **??**ainak, Salmam & Tatoglu, 2008). Behavior is represented by buying the same
66   product/brand during a certain period of time. Attitude refers to a psychological assessment about one's
67   commitment to a brand or to its related meanings (Day, 1969;Grisaffe, 2001; **??**ainak et al., 2008;Koll and
68   Wallpach, 2009).
69   Loyalty to the strong brands tends to be higher than the loyalty to the weaker ones (Keller, 2001). For that
70   reason companies are encouraged to research within their customer's base to improve knowledge about their
71   brand images.

4   III.

5   Brand Image

74   Brand image can be conceptualized as cumulative associations consumers do in their minds about a product
75   **??**Bauer et al., 2008) or what the brand is characterized by and should stand for in the mind of N consumers
76   (Keller, 2001). By those associations, consumers credit some characteristics to the brands and those attributes
77   influence choices and buying behavior **??**Porter & Claycomb, 1997). Brand image is the way the consumer
78   recognizes brand identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000), and for that reason organizations need to invest in
79   developing good images (Fatt, 1997) to create strong brands.
80   According to Koll and Wallpach (2009), organizations must know how to improve brand strength, since attitude
81   and behavior reflect perceptions about the brand. Strong brands improve organizations' competitive advantage
82   and contribute to encourage repetitive buying or patronizing behavior **??**Porter & Claycomb, 1997).
83   IV.

6   Brand Image in Sports

85   Sports constitute an interesting market always. According to Morgan and Summers (2005), the activity of people
86   watching or listening sports is called 'sports consumption'. "Sport can be consumed directlythrough watching a
87   game played live or by participating in a sport -or indirectly -through watching a game on television, listen to it
88   on the radio or reading about it in a newspaper or magazine" (p. 15). Sportive clubs tend to adopt professional
89   management practices to take advantage of fans loyalty and to improve their brand performance **??**Bauer, Sauer
90   & Schmitt, 2005).
91   Team image can be understood as the result of management efforts to build a common view of team reality
92   among a social or cultural group **??**Bauer et. al. 2008), and its image tends to be more favorable during the
93   time the team succeeds in high level competitions than during the falls (Garcia, Pérez & Rodríguez, 2008).
94   Abosag, Roper & Hind (2012) shows that supporters accept their club as a brand, what supports brand
95   extension assumption, since there is a clear link between this acceptance of branding activity and supporters'
96   emotional involvement within the club. Santini, Ladeira & Araujo (2013) confirmed that the club´s image
97   increases the possibility of a fan´s purchase intention of their sports products what indicates that marketing
98   tools can be used to motivate the fan base to support the team's competitiveness in many ways: buying and/or
99   using club's original products and symbols; patronizing club's services (i.e. fitness, beauty parlors, dieting);
100 cheering for the team during the games; etc.

Sportive management challenges must go beyond the team itself: besides the team performance, it is imperative to care about the club brand **??**Bauer et al., 2005), and to explore the fan base emotional attachment to improve confidence and loyalty (Holt, 1995).

Sportive clubs must improve brand's wealth since strong brands intensify fans attachment with the club **??**Zunino, 2006) and therefore contribute to the club prosperity.

V.

7 Loyalty in Sports

Sportive marketing can be understood as an exchange process that encompasses a set of activities specially conceived to satisfy sportive consumers (Contursi, 1996). According to **??**organ and Summers (2005, p. 25), "similar to services encounters in other industries, consumers' satisfaction with sporting events is largely determined by the quality of their experiences", and these experiences are impacted by other consumers, by the physical surroundings (servicescape) and by the consumers' mood or feelings. Besides some recent improvements, loyalty in sports still requires some advances (Kaynak et al., 2008). Brazilian soccer, for example, is famous for the players' talent and competiveness; the "national sport" is very popular among people of all ages and social classes. But besides the recognition and pride that people assign to soccer in Brazil, marketing strategies are still scarce among clubs across the country.

Loyalty in sports can be conceptualized as an allegiance or devotion to a team based on the spectator's attachment to that team over time (Sumino & Harada, 2004). "Sports fans are emotionally committed to consumers of sporting events" **??**Mahony et al., 2000, p. 15), displaying a much greater propensity to watch and attend games.

Loyalty to sportive organizations may differ from loyalty to other type of business, since fans do not necessarily depend on any objective reward. Fans are unique consumers because their interest in a brand is self-sustaining (Pimental and Reynolds, 2004); "they voluntarily engage in behaviors beneficial to the relationship he or she shares with the brand, such as spreading positive word-of-mouth, protecting the brand, and ensuring the brand's continued existence and legacy" (Chung, Farrelly, Beverland & Quester, 2005, p. 43). But for exploring sports fans' brand loyalty, rational factors are not sufficient to explain their attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty. The phenomenon needs to be explored from the aspect of "fans' emotional attachment". Factors influencing fans' brand loyalty have a more psychological dimension, such as habits and long history, social and emotional identification, brand symbolism and self image (Lin & Lin, 2008).

8 VI.

9 Brand Image and Loyalty

According to Aaker (1992) and Keller (2001), brand's wealth contributes to improve customers' loyalty to the brand; and in sports a good team's image improves loyalty among the fan base (Holt, 1995;Fortunato, 2008). For Bauer, Sauer and Exler (2005), soccer brand image contributes to loyalty in two aspects: by attitudes (psychological commitment), and by behaveioral loyalty. Therefore we expect that: Customers' commitment intensifies loyalty to a brand **??**Larán & Espinoza, 2004;Prado, 2006). In service industries, like leisure and amusement, involvement may be more important to loyalty than the service quality itself (Lee, Graefe & Burns, 2007). In sports, psychological commitment and behavioral loyalty may vary from low to high. High levels of commitment and conscience generate more faithful loyalty **??**Bauer et al., 2005 **??**Bauer et al., , 2008)). These assertions permit us to expect that: H 3 -Psychological commitment influences behavioral loyalty in sports positively Our theoretical model derives from **??**auer et al. (2008), to evaluate possible relationships between brand image and soccer fans loyalty to their preferred teams. Brand image can be conceptualized as the cumulative associations consumers make on their minds about a product **??**Bauer et al., 2008). In consequence, it is also possible to speculate about reverse relationships between image and loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral); in other words, it is also possible to conjecture that fanatic fans tend to evaluate the team image more generously than the "average" fans do, since fans use team colors to express part of themselves **??**Belk, 1988). Therefore it is possible to set up the following alternative hypothesis:

10 Sample and Measures

A sample was collected among undergraduate students involved with soccer, living in Recife metropolitan area -one of the greatest capital cities in northeast Brazil. The preference for undergraduate students was decided based on the convenience (easy to collect samples) and taking into consideration that most of the young Brazilians are prone to be involved in sports in general.

Team image was measured by nine (of ten) variables suggested by Beccarini and Ferrand (2006): XX is a great club (IM1); XX has a good team (IM2); XX is an ambitious club (IM3); XX is brave (IM4); XX is well managed (IM5); XX was not impacted by scandals (IM6); XX player could demonstrate a lack of combativeeness (IM8); XX management is not always competent (IM9); and XX results could be better (IM10).

Psychological Commitment and Behavioral Loyalty were surveyed through scales proposed by Bauer, Sauer and Exler (2008). Psychological Commitment was represented by eight variables: I am a real fan of my favorite

club (PC1); I am very committed to my favorite club (PC2); There is nothing that could change my commtment to my favorite club (PC3); I will not change my affiliation from my favorite club to another club in the future just because it is not successful anymore (PC4); I would defend my favorite team in public even if this caused problems (PC5); I will not change my affiliation from my favorite club to another club just because my friends try to convince me to (PC6); It is really important to me that my favorite club continues playing in the major league (PC7); and The long-term success of my favorite team is important to me (PC8). Behavioral Loyalty was represented by eleven (of twelve variables): I have often attended games of my favorite team live in the stadium (BL1); I will often attend games of my favorite team live in the stadium (BL2); I have watched games of my favorite team on TV (BL3); I will watch games of my favorite team on TV (BL4); I have often followed reports about my favorite team's players, coaches, managers etc. in the media (BL5); I have purchased a lot of club-related merchandise (BL7); I will purchase a lot of clubrelated merchandise (BL8); I often wore the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team (BL9); I will often wear the colors and/or the logo of my favorite team (BL10); I have often participated in discussions about my favorite team (BL11); and I will often participate in discussions about my favorite team (BL12).

The questionnaire was developed and hosted at Google Docs and answered on-line. Students were invited to participate both personally and/or via e-mail by VIII.

11   Results

The sample was predominantly masculine (75.4%), 53.5% of them were fans of Sport Club Recife, 27.9% declared preference for Santa Cruz and other 19.6% pointed Náutico as their preferred team. One item (IM7) failed to pass in the test (skewness < 3; curtosis < 10) (Kline, 2011) and had to be excluded.

12   a) Complete model

The measurement model and structural relationships between latent variables were estimated altogether in a complete model. All the manifest variables showed significant relationship with the latent variables they were attached to; the latent variables confirmed composite reliability over 0.9 and extracted variance over 0.89, which exceeds the minimum recommended (0.7 and 0.5). The model showed accep- Results confirmed that team image is an important antecedent of psychological commitment, what reinforces H1, but its capacity to influence behavioral loyalty directly (H2) is fairly limited. As we can see in Table 2, team image influences behavioral loyalty positively, but the significance of this relationship is somewhat peripheral (P<0.1). Results also confirmed that psychological commitment strongly and directly influences behavioral loyalty (H 3). In other words, results confirmed that psychological committed fans are significantly more inclined to attend the games, to buy branded merchandise, to dress in team's colors, etc., what is in accordance with H 3 . The indirect effect of team image in behavioral loyalty is also an important finding. As we can see in Table 2, the indirect effect of team image through psychological commitment accounts 0.510 for the behavioral loyalty, what means that psychological commitment is not only an important antecedent of behavioral loyalty itself but also a mediator for team image what strongly reinforces H 3 .

13   Behavioral

14   b) Alternative (reverse) model

The supposed influence of loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral) in the image perception (reverse way) found no significant relationship (P<0.05), however some interesting insights can be extracted from that. Besides not achieving the required significance the estimates indicate that image perception may be influenced by different factors according to the loyalty degree (attitudinal or behavioral). As we can see in Table 3, team image goes high when behavioral loyalty increases and goes down when psychological commitment improves, what means that behavioral fans are more prone to recognize good attributes on team image and that the attitudinal ones, in opposition, tend to be more critical about that. IX.

15   Antecedent

16   Discussion

This work evaluated the influence of the team image in fans loyalty both, attitudinal -the psychological commitment -and behavioral. Results suggest that the image customers have about their preferred soccer teams is an important determinant for attitudinal loyalty, but its ability to improve behavioral loyalty directly is fairly limited. On the other hand, psychological commitment is an important antecedent of behavioral loyalty; therefore sports management may explore team image to attract sympathizers and subsequently convert them into stadium habitués to improve financial support for the team activities.

Results suggest that attitudinal loyalty is strongly dependent on the team image, but a good image alone does not guaranties any behavior implying selves. Once in the stadium, they feel as part of the match, as they help the team with their incentive, are rewarded with team's victories and suffer with their idols when defeated. This unconditional loyalty may bias positively customer perception according to his or her passion and not objectively.

The psychological commitment is a kind of loyalty that expresses the importance consumer ascribes to his/her relationship with the team. According to the results, this loyalty is somewhat egoistic: the more committed a fan is with a team, more critical he or she is about the team management and performance. This c) Insights from the alternative model Due to the lack of significant results, the alternative model may be taken only as an indication that the "truly fans" (the ones who spend money to support the team actions) differ from the psychological committed ones (people that love wearing the team's colors and/or watching the matches on television, but are not openhanded enough to support the team expenses during the lean times) in terms of image perception. Fans that usually attend the matches or that in some way support the team's expenses may fill as "extra players", and adopt the team as part of themmatch, passionately stating their commitment to a "club in money spending. In Brazilian soccer context, for example, it is not rare to find people that never attend a entertainment or leisure activities at the stadium before or during the interval time. Taking into consideration that behavioral loyalty tend to be more beneficial to the team image and that attitudinal loyalty tend to improve fans criticism about that, it is possible to infer that investment to capture sympathizers attention can be senseless unless the managers find a way to convert these "fans" into real devotees in a reasonable period of time. Although in a different context, for evolving passion and emotion, our findings suggest that brands in general tend to be better evaluated when consumer is psychologically committed to it. This assumption addresses two important points: (a) in managerial terms our findings suggest that strengthening emotional links with consumers can be an interesting strategy for the brands in general; (b) in social terms it is possible to say that the improvement of links connecting people to the local and national teams -in particular to the soccer teamsmay turn this practice more competitive and pleasing to the professional players and therefore more attractive to the socially excluded youths.

This work is limited by respondents' characteristics, since we employ a non-probabilistic (convenience) sample, composed exclusively by undergraduate students living in the same city. Although the city where the sample was collected from is one of the greatest metropolises in Brazil, we can't assure that the same will occur in other capital cities.

Tests of the alternative model suggest that loyalty has no significant impact on team image. But besides the lack of significance, the opposite signs of the loads suggest that attitudinal and behavioral loyalty may influence image perception in different ways: higher levels of behavioral loyalty tend to improve image evaluation; and higher levels of attitudinal loyalty tend to decrease image evaluation. In managerial terms these findings suggest that campaigns to enlarge games audience on TV, for example, may be less worthwhile to the team image than marketing initiatives involving of the heart". Sports magazines frequently survey soccer enthusiasts to estimate the size of the teams' fan bases and managers of the top ranked ones use these results as a sign of success. According to our understanding, this is a risky assumption, once not all the declared "lovers" are really consumers of team products or events. People in this condition are "egoistic lovers" that expect to be rewarded with team's victories but do not commit themselves to support its expenses. It is possible to speculate, for example, that people in this condition may be more susceptible to use false branded products (with team colors) than the "true lovers" do. This way, the task to convert the sympathizers (the simply committed fans) into team supporters is still an endeavor for sports managers.

Other studies are deeply encouraged to check possible needs of scale or sample enlargement, and professional soccer managers are deeply encouraged to explore the emotional attachment to the team to intensify behavioral loyalty as found by Lee, Graefe and Burns (2007). [1]

Figure 1: Global

1
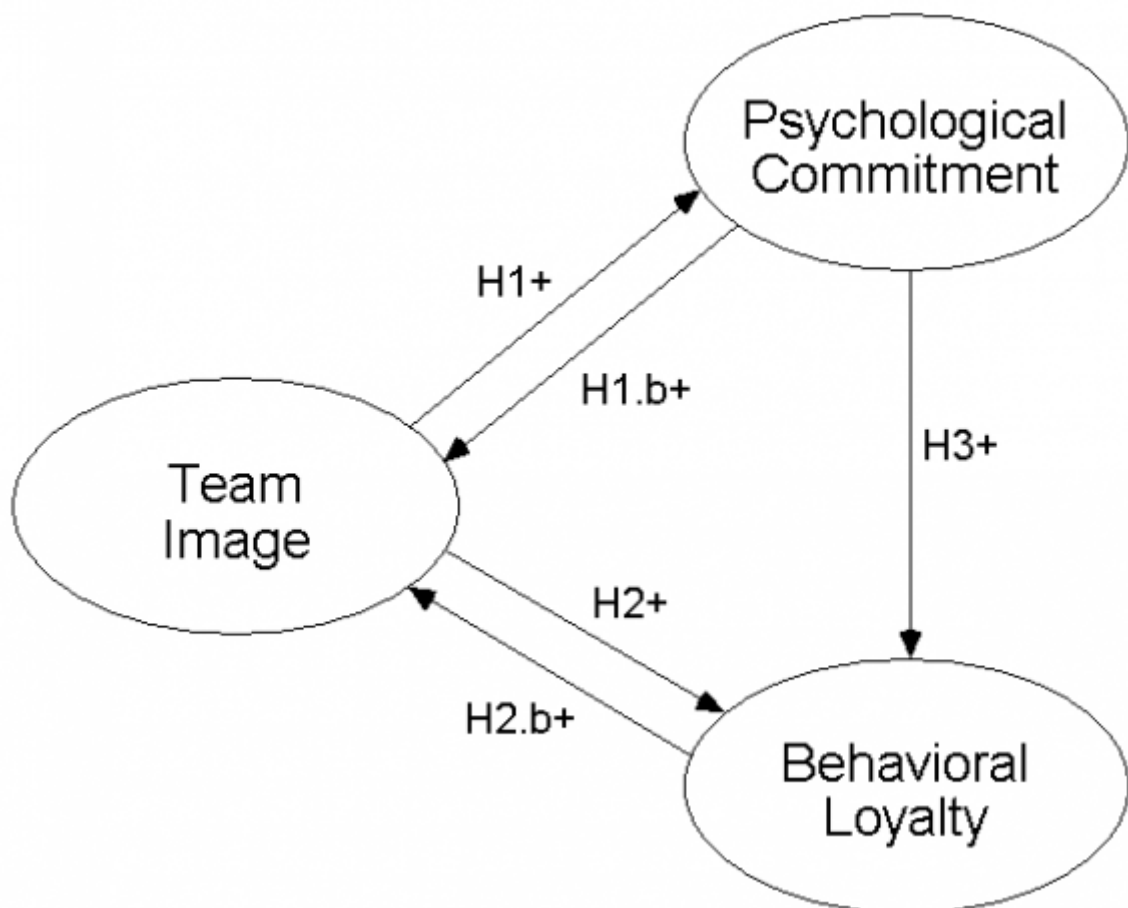
Figure 2: Figure 1 :

Latent Variables	Manifest Variables	Estim.	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-Value	Composite Reliability	Explained Variance
	IM1	0.383	0.061	6.279	0.000		
	IM2	0.772	0.034	22.706	0.000		
	IM3	0.684	0.042	16.286	0.000		
	IM4	0.572	0.051	11.216	0.000		
Image	IM5	0.655	0.044	14.886	0.000	0.94	0.89
	IM6	0.463	0.057	8.123	0.000		
	IM8	0.729	0.038	19.184	0.000		
	IM9	0.63	0.045	14.000	0.000		
	IM10	0.663	0.043	15.419	0.000		
	PC1	0.789	0.027	29.222	0.000		
	PC2	0.883	0.017	51.941	0.000		
	PC3	0.718	0.034	21.118	0.000		
Psychological Commitment	PC4 PC5	0.375 0.057 6.579 0.689 0.036 19.139			0.000 0.000	0.98	0.95
	PC6	0.466	0.052	8.962	0.000		
	PC7	0.687	0.036	19.083	0.000		
	PC8	0.739	0.032	23.094	0.000		
	BL1	0.705	0.035	20.143	0.000		

Figure 3: Table 1 :

Figure 4: Table 2 :

	BL2	0.82	0.023	35.652	0.000
	BL3	0.473	0.052	9.096	0.000

: Alternative Model

Figure 5: Table 3

16 DISCUSSION

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