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Title: “A Game of Two Halves”

Are sports marketers *an emerging cohort to be admired as a force in marketing or merely accomplices to mediocrity in new marketing approaches?*

Abstract:

Consumers and Publics alike today are insatiable. Sport has now become the elixir of new and modern marketing trends. Publics can justifiably infer sport has become not only big business, but a standalone entertainment industry as the embodiment or ‘mantra’ for all things ‘generation lifestyle’. The argument leads to fierce debate as to the validity and perspectives offered for the case for sports marketers to be taken seriously?

This paper seeks to add to the debate by clarifying the current position of sports marketing within academia in an engagement with sports students, practitioners and the industry as a whole. The objectives will be to establish benchmarks for sports marketing to join the mainstream school of marketing excellence in both theory and practice.

The discussion paper will focus on current practice, dialogue and debate, with support from academic enquiry on current marketing research and programmes of higher educational provision in the sports marketing arena.

Paper Type: Discussion paper /Viewpoint

Key words: sport, marketing, consumers, publics, publicity, sponsorship, promotion,

Title: “A Game of Two Halves”

Are sports marketers *an emerging cohort to be admired as a force in marketing or merely accomplices to mediocrity in new marketing approaches?*

“A game of Two Halves”

Shilbury, D.(2004) highlights the prospect of the ‘**half-time**’ conceptual dichotomies and divisions in commenting that “sports marketing has developed two major thrusts: the marketing of sports products and services directly to consumers of sport, and a marketing of other consumer and industrial products or services through the use of sport promotions.”

Sports as a construct within academic research and consideration for conceptual thinking have not truly registered. The authors and theorists with sporting frameworks and practicing marketers would most likely take a ‘**fall back**’ position along traditional and well versed marketing models, theories and paradigms.

The growing consideration and responses among sports marketers is to understand the motivations that bring individuals to consume sporting events and related goods and services. Pons, F., Mourali, M., and Nyeck, N. (2006) have formulated a model of consumer orientation in this context (OSE) which offers a definition of orientation towards a sporting event. This model can provide an initial indicator of the relevance and impact of the required debate surrounding the themes and discussions of this paper. Sports and sports marketing are essentially about **consumption and engagement** where the ethos and relevance to marketers lies in the affect this has on their goods, services and reputations.

As Shannon, J., R. (1999) remarks “it is time that the marketing discipline recognized the size, importance, and potential of this industry and embraced it.” Research and publication in the sport marketing area should not only be accepted in “mainstream” marketing journals, it should be encouraged. Furthermore, as sports will always reach ‘*hearts and minds*’ of the public, then clearly sports marketing can never be marginalized or consigned to the sidelines. Marketing will always be about partnerships as evidenced by the growth in sponsorship and sports business incomes (*Sports Business International*: 2009) over the last few decades. Therefore marketing research and marketing academics need to ensure that they can demonstrate the **efficacy of this partnership** and relationship opportunity. Research is needed to show the advantages of linking such partnerships to other marketing initiatives and disciplines to eschew the benefits of association with sports and through the additional reach provided.

Marketing efficacy

Drucker, P. (1974) famously commented that “When a subject becomes totally obsolete we make it a required course”. Perhaps the corollary of this is that when a subject becomes so popular we should delete it as a course. Perhaps as a starting point to this critical argument on the efficacy of the subject we need clear demarcation on the aims and objectives of those involved in the whole process. Efficacy is defined as *Power to produce effects; operation or energy of an agent or force; production of the effect intended.* Marketing is a dynamic force as many esteemed academics (Kotler, P., (2008), Jobber, D., (2007) Baker, M., (2002), Peters, T., (1982), Levitt, T., (1975), testify and promulgate the belief to practitioners of marketing.

Kahle, L.R., & Riley, C. (2004) comment that *“the academic study of sport marketing represents a new direction for marketing research”.* The view should be taken therefore that this contributes a new strand of thinking of distinctiveness and separation. The debate needs to recognise this and consider the impact and information channels that are created as a consequence. The continued commentary that sport has become a significant driver of leisure tourism for example and, consequently, a vital component in place marketing (Kahle & Riley, 2004) only adds to the catalyst perspective of sport as a marketing tool. Sports, and the marketing of them, reside in locations and settings surrounding them and the consequent significant marketing drivers.

Perhaps the debate has been understated and resides in a kind of unemotional straightjacket or as Fisk et al. (1993) remarks that *“academia by its nature is conservative and hidebound”.*

The attention given to sport, its place in our lives and its contribution to language and culture makes it a major influence on attitudes, behaviour and community. The marketer who ignores sport as an influence on the consumer and especially the male consumer makes a major mistake. Although much of this discussion paper on sports marketing focuses on the practical issues of sponsorship, promoting sports teams and sport and advertising, we can also acknowledge that research in marketing and consumer behaviour has tended to ignore sport. Therefore, given that many people are sports fans, researchers need to have some deeper appreciation of what that means in practice. Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw (1999) present us with a conceptual basis for understanding sports fans and with some thoughts on what that means for sports marketing. Rein et al (2006) comment how sports fans can vary from the temporary to the dysfunctional. From people who like sport through to people whose entire life is dominated by support for a sport, sports team or the individual sportsman. Clearly the emotional intensity of sports participation and the consumer's subsequent involvement is a marketing consideration of enormous significance. As Hunt et al. (1999) further emphasise, when they remark that there are also important observations that illustrate the paucity of past research into sports fans.

Future Research frameworks and discussions

The sporting canvas is a cornucopia of engagements and partnerships which the marketing world would be wise to respect. The assertions of *public patronage, systematic support, lascivious loyalty, demonic duty and above all unyielding unity* are clear indicators of, not only metaphorical frameworks for marketing academia, but more significantly models and paradigms for marketing practitioners to pursue. The art and practice of marketing modeling and management should transcend any boundaries or barriers that have been present to-date in any reluctance to embrace the emergent constructs of this paper.

Hunt et al (1999: 440) define the sports fan as “*an enthusiastic devotee of some consumptive object. Thus a fan is a consumer of organized sports.*” Sports devotees clearly represent an important segment and demographic for marketers in terms of building brand based equity. Kevin L Keller (2008) constructs his own model of **CBBE** (Consumer Based Brand Equity) which is founded on **brand awareness and image**, and suggests that values and associations are evolved through saliency, intensity and association. Echoes and resonance of this can be found in sports fans and their classifications and allegiances.

The Sports Fan Based Equity Model: *SFBE model* –Research and philosophical considerations

In appreciation of themes for this paper it is useful to appraise some models and frameworks of marketing participation, patronage and association. Schwartz, E. C., and Hunter, J.D (2008) suggest the development of what they term “Sport Marketing Decision Support System (DSS)” where the importance of research is ‘to collect the various data available in one place for use in making efficient and effective sports marketing decisions.’ A likely scenario therefore for future discussion could reside in a new model which, for the purpose of this paper, is referred to as a **sports fan based equity (SFBE)** model. The researcher and author of this discussion paper intends to investigate and design a framework based on this model aimed at University students studying marketing within sports settings. The hypothesis to be challenged will test the allegiance of these cohorts to their own individual sports teams that they support. The association dispensed and connected to sports teams and events could be registered as a mechanism for marketing segmentation and reference. Behaviours, motivations, practice and patronage are key constructs to be considered in any marketing planning. The insight and intensity that this patronage brings via sports enquiry should lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of how sports marketers can benefit from a study of this nature. As Rein I., Kotler, P., Shields, B. (2006:43) remark “the challenge for the sports industry is to find other avenues and paths to create committed fans.”

Reawakening Marketing Myths and Legends

Sports marketing has contributed to a revitalisation of marketing activities and trends. A recent article in the *Observer* (28/10/07) suggests the new philosophy of ‘Games without Frontiers’ where twenty first century sports spawns a new era of explosive globalization in the marketing of sporting events and associations.

Retaining old fans and attracting the new ‘world fan’ will become an accepted norm of marketing practice within the contexts of sporting domains. A comparison of the last twenty years growth indicates the pace at which sport offers the new marketer a completely different type of audience. The figures in this article make a stark and compelling argument as to the future impact for sports marketers. A snap shot vision includes:

- 14 the number of live league football matches shown on TV in 1986-7: **today Sky & Setanta(now ESNB) show 184 matches;**
- £3 million total paid by BBC & ITV for football rights per season: **the latest deal with digital TV is worth 1.7 billion (£567m for the next three seasons);**
- 5 the number of hours of ‘Grandstand’ shown on Saturdays- the programme was axed in January2007: **a response to “the way the sporting world and sports broadcasting is changing”.**

The Discussion paper: Evaluations and Interpretations- *a move towards accepted convergence rather than discontinued and disconnected mediocrity*

Shank, M. (2009) comments that “Sports organisations can eliminate marketing myopia by focusing on meeting the needs of consumers rather than on producing and selling sports products”. This paper points to a belief that sports marketing needs a renaissance and rebirth, together with a collective re-awakening of marketing as well as sports considerations. A new dawn of marketing research and acceptance to embracing sports marketing philosophies by both practitioners and academics alike should be welcomed and embraced. This new adoption will be to the betterment of future students and aspiring sports marketing leaders in all fields of academic and research interests. Schwartz E.C., and Hunter J., D.(2008) advocate “ a sports marketing information system to enhance this process through a structure of interacting people, infrastructure, and techniques to gather, sort, analyse, evaluate and distribute relevant, well timed, accurate information for use by sport marketing professionals to formulate sports marketing plans.”

The sports marketing dynamic will only prosper in creating platforms of marketing equity by connecting with their audiences and publics. This connection should develop exponentially and transformationally. This play may be evident, rather than through the *Elusive Fan* concept as depicted by Rein et al (2006), but more significantly for marketing practice through the new *Captivated Fan*. They may well be best ascribed as the *consumptive and engaged* participant to meet the new academic marketing agendas of sports and markets alike. Perhaps the embodiment of a new ‘world fan’ able to match **both halves of the game!**

This paper significantly attempts to ‘raise the metaphorical sporting bar’ in this new essential debate. The author welcomes significant contributions to the practice and research considerations in the emergent sports marketing sectors as well as the contentions alluded to in this overview article.

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