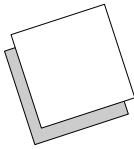


*An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this issue*



# A conceptual approach to classifying sports fans

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**Abstract** *Develops a classification or typology of the sports fan. Specifically, contends that five different types of sports fans exist: temporary, local, devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional. The need exists to identify the different types of fans due to the inadequacies of past theories to explain the totality of fan behavior. The usefulness of the typology is demonstrated by offering specific segmentation strategies for each classification. Finally, directions for future research are presented.*

## Fan motives and behavior

Discerning sports fans' motives and predicting their behavior is important to sports marketers. However, our understanding of fans is limited. Existing conceptualizations have tended to concentrate on team performance as the primary determinant of fan behavior (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976; Grove *et al.*, 1991; Mann, 1974; Snyder *et al.*, 1983; Wann and Dolan, 1994). Yet, fan motivation and subsequent behavior goes beyond the record of teams and, at times, seems unrelated to performance (cf. Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). In fact, fan behavior is often cited by coaches and players as a determinant rather than as a consequence of team performance. In addition, researchers have focused on ticket sales and attendance as the desired outcomes resulting from the exchange between sports marketers and fans. However, sports marketing also involves corporate sponsorships; advertising using sports publications, arenas, and stadiums as media and players and coaches as endorsers; sales of licensed team apparel, concessions, and memorabilia; and virtual attendance via the radio, television, or Internet (Bandyopadhyaya and Bottone, 1997). Thus, a conceptualization is needed that accounts for the full range of fan behaviors that are of interest to sports marketers.

The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptually-based classification or typology of sports fans. One reason for the limited utility of existing conceptualizations is that fan motives and behavior vary depending upon the type of fan. Thus, our conceptualization should enable those researchers interested in sports marketing to better explain and predict fan behavior by accounting for variance in fan type. We begin by defining this particular type of consumer – the sports fan. We utilize three theoretical orientations to suggest how and why an individual might develop into a fan of sports:

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- (1) basking in reflected glory;
- (2) information processing; and
- (3) attachment as it relates to the self.

Each of these theories has specific utility in explaining and predicting fan motivation and behavior. We then introduce our classification scheme, using these extant behavioral theories and specific examples to highlight the differences between each type of fan. The managerial implications of this conceptually-based classification follows. Since sports fans' motives and behavior vary by the type of fan, our typology may be used as a basis for segmentation by sports marketers. Finally, we suggest future research, including empirical verifications, that may follow from our work.

## Classification

### Development of sports fans

We define a fan as an enthusiastic devotee of some particular sports consumptive object. Thus, a fan is a consumer of organized sports. We use the term devotee to mean that the fan has some level of attachment with an object related to sports. Fans manifest their attachment through specific behavior toward the object. Further, that a fan is an enthusiastic consumer means that he or she is motivated to engage in behavior related to sports. The sports consumptive object can be a sport in general, or a specific league, or team. Or the object can refer to a personality such as a player, coach/manager, broadcast announcer or other individual who has strong associations with a team or sport. Since the object of devotion, underlying motivation, and actual sports-related behavior can vary from fan to fan, we propose that different types of sports fans exist.

## Targets at different levels of the schema

How does a consumer develop into a fan of some sports consumptive object? Based on information processing theory, we propose fans develop into different types through a halo process. It has been suggested that a reservoir of memories feeds fans' enthusiasm and passion for sports and links them to the sports institution, interpersonal relationships, and experiences. This reservoir of information is termed a schema, and it contains expectations, beliefs, and perceptions associated with the schema target (Hunt and Bashaw, 1999b; Keaveney and Hunt, 1992; Fiske and Taylor, 1984). Once a consumer has processed sufficient information to form an overall judgment of the target, a schema is likely formed consisting of related, hierarchical levels, and with new information processed relative to that knowledge. The target of the schema is the sports consumptive object and may represent the sport itself, a league, a team, or a player or coach on a team. For example, if the target of the fan's schema is the league, the fan may indicate a preference for the American Football Conference to the National Football Conference. If the target of the schema is at the team level, the fan may identify with the Denver Broncos. Finally, the fan's schema target may be at the player level, at which point the fan may surmise that he or she is a fan of John Elway. As illustrated in this example, there is a definite connection between targets at different levels of the schema. If the primary target of the schema is "I am a fan of John Elway", then a halo effect is most likely to exist extending the schema to "I am a fan of the Denver Broncos", or to the American Football Conference, or to the NFL in general.

This concept of identification with a target at a certain level of a schema (such as the sport "basketball") leading to identification at other levels (such as the team "Los Angeles Clippers") is consistent with the findings of Fisher and Wakefield (1998). They found that fans' identification with the players

or sport can lead to fans' identification with the team, and eventually leading to subsequent actions such as attendance, game behavior, and purchase of licensed team products. In fact, they detected these identification effects outside the context of a winning or successful team. Similarly, it is possible that given identification at one level, a fan may become a fan at a different level on a temporary basis because of the halo effect. For example, a fan generally devoted to the Super Bowl, Kentucky Derby, or Olympic Games may temporarily root for a particular team, horse, or athlete, respectively, without continuing attachment to these latter sports consumption objects.

### **The halo effect**

This halo effect seems to indicate that becoming a fan may be sequential in nature. That is, one may become a fan of the sport first, then a team, and then a player on the team. However the opposite is also possible, one may become a fan of a player with the halo effect going to the team and then the sport. As a further illustration, consider a young child who is exposed to sports. The child is exposed to information about a specific sport. These bits of information may include, but are not limited to:

- exposure to specific sport elements;
- the child's ability to play the sport;
- parents' and siblings' preferences;
- friends' preferences; and
- local media attention to the sport.

### **End-node leverage**

Once the child has processed sufficient amounts of this information to form a schema, he or she may be predisposed to become a fan of the sport. Specifically, the child's schema may contain an end node that tags the schema with how he or she should respond when processing information about the target. If that end node contains positive affect and feelings, the probability increases that the child will be motivated to engage in behavior relevant to the target sport (Hunt, 1995; Hunt and Bashaw, 1999a). Sports marketers attempt to leverage such end nodes. Conversely, the end node may be tagged with negative affect and feelings that decrease the probability of engaging in "fan" behavior. Again, most typically the child would first become a fan of the sport before becoming a fan of the league or team. However, given the widespread use of player endorsements, the sequence may be reversed. For example, a child may see "Space Jam" or MCI commercials and decide "I like Michael Jordan", and therefore, "I like the Bulls", and "I like basketball". The degree to which the halo effect takes place is dependent upon the strength of the schema. A strong, well-defined schema should be able to transcend many different levels. That is, a strong schema for Michael Jordan would allow the positive end node – "I like Mike" – to attach itself to the Chicago Bulls and the NBA (Hunt, 1995). A weaker schema would be less likely to allow the halo effect to take place.

### **Classifying sports fans**

Others have realized the existence of different types of sports fans and the need to classify fans. For example, Smith (1988) made the distinction between "serious" and "normal" sports fans. The primary difference proposed is that the serious fan believes that the result of the sports contest matters. Similarly, Real and Mechikoff (1992) suggested the notion of a "deep fan". Deep fans have a ritual identification with mass-media sports productions, portrayals of athletes, and related commercial advertising. For the deep fan, sport provides a means of identification, celebration,

expression, and interpretation of social life. Although descriptive of important differences between fans, fan motives and behavior are more rich and complex than characterized by these simple dichotomies. We propose an alternate classification scheme to capture critical motivational and behavioral distinctions, consisting of five different types of fans: the temporary fan, the local fan, the devoted fan, the fanatical fan, and the dysfunctional fan.

## **Motivation and behavior**

Our classification scheme focuses on the source of motivation and on the behavior exhibited by different types of fans. Similar to the concept of involvement, the linkage between motivation and actual behavior can be temporary or enduring (cf. Richins and Bloch, 1986). For example, if social pressures or temporary circumstances are the source of a consumer's motivation to engage in sports-related behavior, then such motivation is termed situational. Situational motivation is bound by time or space and thus is more temporary in nature. Conversely, if the source motivation is not context bound, then motivation is identified as enduring. Enduring motivation is likely, given that the fan perceives the sports object as important to his or her self-concept. Unlike situational motivation, enduring motivation has no such time or location constraints. Within our classification scheme the source of temporary and local fans' motivation is situational, while the source of motivation for devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional fans is enduring.

For those fans whose motivation with sports is more enduring, differences occur because of their level of attachment to the sports object (i.e. the degree of centrality of sport to self). Ball and Tasaki (1992) suggest that attachment is conceptually distinct because the object of attachment acquires meanings and significance beyond that of simple involvement or importance. Fans reveal their level of attachment through their sports-related behavior. So, within our scheme, devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional fans differ in terms of their attachment to the sports consumptive objective, as exhibited by their behavior towards that object. We now explain our classification scheme in more detail using conceptual arguments and specific sports-related examples to support our ideas.

## **Identity**

### **The temporary fan**

The theory of self postulates that objects are used by individuals to identify the self to one's own self and to others (Belk, 1987; 1988; 1990; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Ball and Tasaki, 1992). Objects can include tangible possessions such as team sports wear and also less tangible labels such as "I am a Bulls fan" that are disclosed through social discourse. We propose that an important aspect of understanding sports fans comes from their own determination that being a fan is a necessary part of defining themselves and of presenting to others their self-identity. So, the activities in which fans engage that are of interest to sports marketers (e.g. attendance at sporting events, watching sporting events on television, buying products endorsed by a favorite athlete, or participation in a fantasy sports league via the Internet) are a result of the fans' acting out their own identity – an identity which they have given themselves.

The stronger an individual identifies himself or herself as a "fan" the more the individual uses this specific identification with regard to external others and internally, to discern himself or herself. However, being a "fan" is not used by the temporary fan for self-identification (i.e. being a fan is not central to the temporary fan's self-concept). The temporary fan's interest in

the phenomenon is time constrained. After the phenomenon of interest is over, the fan is no longer motivated to exhibit behavior related to the sports object, but rather returns to normal behavioral patterns. Thus, the temporary fan is a fan for a specific, time-bound event. This recognized time boundary is the primary factor that differentiates the temporary fan from other sports fans. The time boundary may be as short as a few hours or as long as a few years, with the sports fan becoming a non-fan once that time period has expired.

For example, a significant recent event was the single season home run record chase in 1998 by both Mark McGwire of the St Louis Cardinals and Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs. The Fox television network carried the Cardinal and the Cub games recognizing that there was an increase in the number of people interested in this event. The increase in the number of people interested in the chase to beat Roger Maris' single season home run record over and above those usually interested in baseball represents an increase in the number of temporary fans. After the baseball season is over, these temporary fans return to their previous disposition toward the game of baseball and their normal viewing and purchasing behavior. Of course, Major League Baseball hopes to convert these fans into more long-term fans of the sport and beyond their temporary status.

### **Temporary fan time boundaries**

The time boundary for a temporary fan may exceed that of the previous example. The time period of a temporary fan whose schema target is a player may last for years, but still has a time limit or boundary. Consider the enormous popularity of Michael Jordan. Many of his fans have been enthusiastic about the National Basketball Association generally, and about the Chicago Bulls specifically, simply because of the presence of Mr Jordan. However, now that he has retired, the temporary fan likely returns to some lesser state of fan attachment because the target of that fan's schema is no longer relevant to the fan's self-concept. Again, both the NBA and the Bulls hope that these fans have not been temporary, but are more permanent. We further discuss how a temporary fan may become a more permanent fan, below.

What might explain a temporary fan's motives and behavior? Cialdini *et al.* (1976) suggested basking in reflected glory (BIRG) theory as a way to understand fans. BIRGing involves the tendency for an individual to attempt to internalize the success of others. Cialdini *et al.* found that university students were more likely to wear school identifying clothes after a win by the school's football team, than after a loss. In addition, students were more likely to use the word "we" to describe a win ("we won"), and the pronoun "they" to describe a loss ("they lost"). Further it has been demonstrated that fans disassociate themselves from teams that fail. The phenomenon has been referred to as "cutting-off reflected failure" or CORFing. Thus, the desire to BIRG and CORF may be the critical motivational source underlying the differences between temporary fans and the other types of sports fans. For example, a temporary fan of the 1998 home run chase may be basking in the reflected glory of Mark McGwire or Sammy Sosa.

### **BIRG, CORF and attribution theory**

A demonstrated link between attribution theory and BIRG and CORF exists, such that the sports fan internalizes the attribution of winning – "we won" – and externalizes the attribution of losing – "they lost" (Grove *et al.*, 1991; Mann, 1974; Wann and Dolan, 1994). And winning is an important element of fan attendance and identifying oneself as a fan (Wann *et al.*, 1996). Thus, winning or some similar type of sports "glory" appears to explain why one develops into a temporary fan. However, many other factors are much

stronger predictors of fan identification than the team's winning record, e.g. whether the team is a local one, whether the fan is born in the team's town, whether the family supports the team, and the style of play of the team (Jones, 1997). In fact in the Jones study, team record was only the 14th strongest predictor of fan identification with a team. We suggest that BIRG is limited in explaining general fan behavior because it applies best to only one type of fan – the temporary fan. In fact, anecdotal evidence supports this contention that winning (and losing) is not everything, at least with regard to fan behavior. For example, die-hard fans of the Chicago Cubs and Boston Red Sox continue to engage in consumption behavior relevant to the sport, teams, and players, yet the last time the Cubs won a World Series title was 1908, and the Boston Red Sox last won in 1918. We believe that this example best illustrates the local fan.

### **Geographic constraints**

#### **The local fan**

While the temporary fan is bounded by time constraints, the local fan is bounded by geographic constraints. The local fan exhibits fan-like behavior because of identification with a geographic area (e.g. where he or she was born or lives). Jones (1997) found that the two most frequently cited reasons by fans for currently supporting their favorite soccer team were that it was the local team (53 per cent) and that the fan was born in the town or city (10 per cent). Certainly, one would expect to find more Chicago Cubs fans as a percentage of the total population in Chicago than in any other city in America. However, like the temporary fan, the local fan still operates under a constraint: if a local fan moves away from the city where the schema target is located, the devotion of the fan diminishes.

For example, if the fan's schema target is a specific sports team, moving from the city would tend to decrease the extent to which the local fan identifies with that team. On the other hand, if the local fan's schema target is a specific player, separation of either the fan or the player from that locality would tend to decrease the local fan's devotion to that player. The movement from the locality leads to diminishing enthusiasm and devotion to the player or team remaining at the previous locality. If the local fan's target is a specific player and the player moves to another locality via a trade, the local fan's enthusiasm and attachment toward that player would also diminish. Again, by definition, a local fan's motivation is geographically-based. Given the emphasis on the relationship between locality and self-concept, we posit that the local fan uses being a "fan" as only a peripheral object for self-identification. Devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional fans see the sports consumptive object as more central to their concepts of self.

### **Breaking the boundaries of time and place**

#### **The devoted fan**

The next type of fan in our classification scheme is the devoted fan. While the temporary fan was limited in terms of time and the local fan was limited by geography, no such limitations exist to the devoted fan. Initially, the devoted fan probably started as a temporary or local fan. Their motivation toward and attachment with the consumptive object (personality, team, league, or sport) increased, thus breaking the boundaries of time and place. The devoted fan remains loyal to their team or player even if either the specific, short-term event that captivated their temporary attention has ended or if they are removed from the context of the original geographical location.

According to Ball and Tasaki (1992), a person is attached to a particular object to the degree that the object is used to maintain his or her self-concept. In other words, the object to which we are attached plays a key link in

becoming and broadcasting our ideal self. The more an object constitutes part of a consumer identity, the more the consumer exhibits protective behavior toward the object, the greater the effort the consumer spends on maintaining the object, and the greater the consumer's emotional difficulty in accepting deterioration or loss of the object. The concept of ownership, as used in the consumer behavior literature, is primarily transactional (i.e. we purchase objects, such as a car, to define ourselves and to round out our self-concept). In relation to sports, we broaden the concept of attachment to include persons, places, and ideas, rather than just inanimate, static, physical objects. We further posit that ownership of such entities can take place via an emotional transaction whereby fans spend emotional capital in "acquiring" a sport, team, or personality as their own.

### **Attachment process**

Once we have become attached to, for example, a team, this attachment can be used to explain our resulting behavior. Thus, a devoted Chicago Bulls fan wants to attend Chicago Bulls' basketball games, watch Bull's games on television, and purchase products endorsed or sold by Bull's personalities. Awareness of fans' attachment and the attachment process may enable sports marketers to develop more appropriate messages and use more effective media to convey these messages to the targeted audience.

We propose that one difference between temporary and local fans and their more enduring, devoted counterparts is attachment. Specifically, for temporary and local fans, either the temporary interest in the sport, team, or personality was never linked to the fan's self-concept, or that sports object no longer remains as an important link to the fan's concept of self. Why do devoted fans remain attached in a more permanent manner? Perhaps because of emotional significance, defined as "the associations of the object with significant people and events in a person's life" (Ball and Tasaki, 1992, p. 163). In a hierarchical sense, emotional significance would appear to be a higher order type of attachment. For example, we may be attached to a team, but there may not be an emotional significance to that attachment. However, if there is an emotional significance associated with that team, then we are also attached to the team. This would explain the temporary interest or attachment to certain sports, teams, and personalities while to others more devoted fans remain forever attached. Clearly, an individual might become attached to a specific sporting team or player. Because of this attachment, the individual uses that affiliation or attachment as a significant part of identifying and expressing his or her self-concept to others and to his or herself. Attachment may also help explain how fans develop or change from one fan type to another over time. For example, a local fan may become a devoted, fanatical, or even dysfunctional fan to the extent that being a fan becomes more central to self-identification over time.

### **"My team right or wrong"**

Since attachment explains the underlying enduring motivation of the devoted fan, this type of sports fan remains fanatical even if the team does not experience a winning record. Thus, BIRG does not explain the motives and behavior of the devoted fan. Since the devoted fan remains a fan even during and across losing seasons, the devoted fan may have little ability to bask in reflected glory. However, neither does the devoted fan engage in the opposite behavior, that of cutting off reflected failure or CORFing. Therefore, while the devoted fan would enjoy the opportunity to BIRG, he or she may not have the opportunity to do so and, in addition, would not engage in CORFing behavior. The devoted fan may possess an attitude of "my team right or wrong". An alternative explanation of why fans stay devoted in the face of losing seasons as mentioned above, is that they are attached to a

## Degree of fan-like behavior

## Primary form of self-identification

different level of schema. In other words, because they identify with and are attached to a player, sport, or league, they may still identify with and support the losing team because of the halo effect (cf. Fisher and Wakefield, 1998).

In sum, the critical difference between a devoted and a more temporary fan, is the degree of attachment. Identification as a fan is closer to the core or center of self for a devoted fan than is the identification of a local fan, yet less central and further from the core than either the fanatical or dysfunctional fan. This representation is used to infer that the devoted fan uses being a fan as an important part of self-identification, yet not the most critical or central self-definition in one's life.

### The fanatical fan

The next type of fan in our scheme is the fanatical fan. We realize the term "fanatical fan" may appear redundant since "fan" is a derivative of "fanatical". However, we use the term to emphasize the degree to which this fan is engaging in fan-like behavior. The fanatical fan is similar to the devoted fan in that the fanatical fan is not bounded by time (as the temporary fan) or distance (as the local fan) and defines self through attachment with the sports consumptive object. Such identification is very close to the center of the self for a fanatical fan, yet remains firmly outside the core center. This representation is used to infer that the fanatical fan uses being a fan as a very important part of self-identification, yet there remains at least one aspect of their lives (family, work, religion, etc.) that the individual uses for identification that is stronger than being a fan. This primary difference between the devoted fan and the fanatical fan is manifested through the actual behavior toward the schema target or sports object. The fanatical fan engages in behavior that is beyond the normal devoted fan, yet the behavior is accepted by significant others (family, friends, and other fans) because it is considered supportive of the target – sport, team, or player. The devoted fan may go to games. The fanatical fan will go to the game and paint their body the colors of the team, go in costume, or in some way exhibit behavior different from the devoted fan. For example, there is a man who attends the Denver Bronco football games dressed in a barrel. He is not surprisingly called "barrel man". Another example is certain male fans of the Washington Redskins. The offensive line for the Redskins used to be known as the "Hogs". These men attend games in female attire and wear fake pigs noses. These male fanatical fans call themselves the "Hogettes", in theory, to support the offensive line of the Washington Redskins. These two examples illustrate the difference between a devoted fan and a fanatical fan. The National Football League recently recognized this type of fan by honoring the specific examples listed above at the NFL Hall of Fame.

The devoted fan may buy memorabilia. The fanatical fan may construct shrines dedicated to the object of that fanaticism (a team, a player, etc.). There was a fan in the Denver Colorado area that painted his house the color of the Denver Broncos, and painted the team's logo on the roof. This man would be classified a fanatical fan. Therefore, it is the degree to which one engages in fan-like behavior that differentiates a devoted fan from a fanatical fan.

### The dysfunctional fan

The last category of fan in our classification scheme is the dysfunctional fan. The dysfunctional fan uses being a fan as the primary method of self-identification. The dysfunctional fan uses the sports team, player, or whatever the schema-target is, as the primary method to identify his or her



## "Hooligans"

self to others and to his or her own self. This representation of the dysfunctional fan graphically illustrates the important difference between the fanatical fan and the dysfunctional fan. While the fanatical fan sees being a fan as an important part of self-identification, the dysfunctional fan sees being a fan as the primary form of self-identification. Smith (1988) stated that what distinguishes serious sports fans, is their belief or illusion that the results of the sports contest matters. For the dysfunctional fan, it not only matters, but is vital for self-identification, and maybe even existence.

This difference in attachment between the fanatical fan and the dysfunctional fan manifests itself not by the degree to which one engages in fan-like behavior (as was the case with the difference between a devoted fan and a fanatical fan), but rather the degree to which the behavior is anti-social, disruptive, or deviant. Rather than engage in behavior that is supportive of the team, the dysfunctional fan engages in behavior that disrupts the event and the social exchanges surrounding the event. The dysfunctional fan will readily engage in violent or other disruptive behavior under the pretext that this behavior is somewhat justified because of being a fan. The classic example are those British soccer fans who are labeled "hooligans" due to their anti-social behavior disguised as nationalistic support for their team. While violence and hooliganism is one manifestation of the dysfunctional fan, the dysfunctional fan may also forgo his or her job, family, or friends. The dysfunctional fan identifies himself or herself so strongly with being a fan, that this identification interferes with the ability to perform normal role behavior outside of the behavior as a fan.

Although violence and hooliganism by fans has been investigated from a sociological perspective (e.g. Lang, 1981; Taylor, 1972), little attention has been paid to this phenomenon by marketers. The sports marketer must take all measures to ensure that fans do not become dysfunctional for a number of reasons. First, dysfunctional fans are a threat to the other fans around them. For example, Philadelphia has set up a court at Veteran's Stadium to deal with unruly fans. In addition, too many or too frequent interactions with dysfunctional fans tends to decrease attendance at sporting events by other fans. Many sports stadiums in the USA have tried to address this problem by having alcohol-free sections in the stadium. The assumption is that alcohol increases the probability of dysfunctional behavior.

## Marketing strategies

### **Managerial implications**

In addition to its conceptual contributions, our typology of sports fan has important implications for sports marketers, particularly as a segmentation variable. Once fans are categorized into one of the five types of fans, marketers may leverage this information to develop the best product, distribution, and message mixes to more efficiently reach the specific fan type. Because of their differing motives and behavior, different types of fans may require differential emphases in critical marketing stimuli that sports marketers control. As such, type of fan may serve as an important basis for segmentation. We suggest specific strategies and tactics related to each fan type, below.

#### *Reaching temporary fans*

Timing is the key to reaching the temporary fan. The window of opportunity may be a narrow one. For example, a boxing promoter trying to promote a heavy-weight championship bout needs to reach the temporary fan. They may not be a devoted boxing fan, but they may be persuaded to attend the bout or buy a pay-for-view package if they can be convinced of the event's

“once in a lifetime” status. Promoters should attempt to communicate that the bout is more than boxing, but is about being there or about hosting a party around the bout. One way to reach the temporary fan is to convince them of the bout’s value as a social event. Just as markets for Tupperware, Mary Kay, and other party-type products are embedded in existing social systems and networks, so attending and watching sports events are also embedded in extant social networks, particularly for temporary fans. Team marketers should attempt to leverage past successful events by reminding temporary fans of these events and of their enjoyment from their involvement. For example, in 1998 the St Louis Cardinals drew approximately 3.3 million fans, many of whom were temporary fans attending to watch the Mark McGwire home run race. Marketers of the 1999 St Louis Cardinals should try to develop reminder advertising which makes an association between the home run chase of 1998 and the 1999 Cardinals. Many temporary fans may now attach emotional significance with some aspect of their attendance (i.e. stadium, players, team, etc.) and may attend more games or may become devoted fans as a result of this positive attachment.

### **Nostalgia**

Another example would be for team marketers to take advantage of a temporary attachment by reminding fans of the significant events that occurred during their attachment and making references to experiences that occurred with significant people. One specific example is for a baseball team to give away team logo ball caps to fathers on Father’s Day. This could remind a father (or son) of their experience together at the baseball game, thus re-enforcing the emotional significance of the sport, team, and perhaps personalities associated with that Father’s Day outing.

Marketers of products have long recognized the existence of the temporary fan. In 1999, advertising rates for the Super Bowl increased to \$1.6 million for a 30-second ad. Advertisers take advantage of reaching a vast audience of football fans, perhaps the majority of whom are temporary fans, gathered to witness perhaps the biggest single day sports event in the USA. In addition, advertisers of collegiate sports events take advantage of associating temporarily with specific games by sponsoring NCAA football bowl games like the Nokia Sugar Bowl game in New Orleans and the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl game in Tempe, Arizona.

### **A “stake” in their local team**

#### *Marketing to local fans*

The local fan derives satisfaction because they associate some element of the sports consumptive object with a local, geographic aspect. In trying to reach the local fan, the marketing of the sports team should revolve around tying the team and individuals associated with the team to the local community. For example, sending personalities into the community serves to reinforce the local fan’s notion that the team and the personality are part of the local community. Team marketers should develop messages convincing and reminding the local fan that the fan has a “stake” in their local team. The local fan should be told about and reminded of the benefits the fan receives because of the team’s location in their community. Any messages developed about the team should include their local affiliation and reinforce that local appeal. In deciding on a name and mascot, the team should use a broad, yet meaningful designation to appeal to a large local fan segment, e.g. the “Colorado Rockies” rather than the “Denver Zephyrs”. Finally, the league and the team should make a concerted effort to keep the team in that locality to the extent that the local fan makes up a significant portion of the fans

served by the team. The long-term goal of marketing the team should be to move the local fan closer to becoming a devoted fan.

A marketing campaign may also be developed which specifically attempts to reach the local fan in order to sell a firm's products. The success of the campaign with the local fan will hinge on their associating the local aspect of the team or personality with the endorsed product. The selling firm should also consider advertising that reaches the local fan while attending a game in the local sports venue, buying signage in the stadium, or naming the venue after the firm.

#### Availability of information

##### *The devoted fan segment*

Beyond game attendance, the devoted fan seeks information about a particular personality, team, league, or sport. We believe the devoted fan is less likely to spend additional money beyond buying their local newspaper and perhaps general purpose sports publications, such as *Sports Illustrated* and *The Sporting News*. In addition, given access to the Internet, the devoted fan will seek free information via the World Wide Web. Team and league marketers must continue to feed this information need. While they do not control the contents of the local market newspapers and national magazine publications, they can at least influence the local paper by feeding press releases to the media, holding press conferences, and developing relationships with local and national writers through a good public relations effort. By maintaining a devoted fan base, teams and leagues realize such benefits accruing from fan game attendance, fan viewing of local and national television broadcasts, and fan listening to local and national radio broadcasts. Importantly, this fan base is the one that tides over teams through bad times – when the team is not winning or when it has changed localities – when the temporary or local fan has become a non-fan.

Corporate marketers looking to segment a market based on activities and lifestyles may well benefit from linking their goods and services using the newest mass medium, the Internet. Team marketers, in an effort to feed the information need of the devoted fan, have increasingly used the Internet to create a “team page” devoted entirely to their specific team. Linking their goods and services or their firm's name with the team on the “team page” appears to be an avenue many companies are choosing to pursue. In addition, many teams create their own “insider” publications. Sponsoring or advertising in these publications allows the devoted sports fan to make associations of the team with the advertiser or sponsor.

#### Expressing team devotion

##### *Marketing and the fanatical fan*

Using a player to endorse a product may be less risky to the extent that a large proportion of the player's fans are devoted, or better yet, fanatical. Should the player be traded or should the player have a bad year, or should the player get caught in nefarious activities, temporary or local (or perhaps in the latter case, devoted) fans are likely no longer attracted to the player and thus the products he or she endorses. However, more fanatical fans will stay with their players, and the products they endorse.

The fanatical fan is similar to the devoted fan with the exception of the emotional intensity felt about the personality or team. Team marketers should attempt to leverage the feelings and the experiences of the fanatical fan not only by offering information outlets to the fanatical fan (similar to the devoted fan), but also offer additional ways for the fanatical fan to express their devotion to the team, such as bumper stickers, license plate holders,

### **The right communication message**

team clothing, and other team memorabilia. To the fanatical fan, displaying their loyalty and identification to “their” team, by purchasing such memorabilia, is critical to self-identification. In addition, team marketers need to understand the critical nature of the role the fanatical fan plays at the sporting event itself. The event itself can become more of a positive consumptive experience for the local, temporary, and even the devoted fan (Holt, 1995). The more the experience itself is seen as positive, logically, the more likely the local and temporary fan are to attend more games and become devoted fans. In addition, this may also increase the likelihood that devoted fans become fanatical fans.

To product marketers, while the fanatical fan may represent a relatively small proportion of fans, reaching them with the right communication message may result in a more loyal customer. By definition, the fanatical fan is “crazy” about their team. They are willing to take socially risky chances by wearing a barrel to a game or by dressing up like a “Hogette”. Obviously the team is very important. The fanatical fan would be expected to be more loyal to products and firms whom they closely associate with “their” team. For example, while Anheiser-Busch no longer owns the St Louis Cardinals, they have long been associated with that team and most likely are still reaping the benefits of the halo effect that has been created for many beer-drinking fanatical Cardinal fans. In addition to team ownership, product marketers would be wise to consider the benefits of “connecting” with the fanatical fan by sponsoring and/or advertising in any or all of the following:

- “team pages” on the Internet;
- broadcasts (radio or television) of national or local games; and
- “insider” team publications in which fans pay for a subscription; and
- through sponsorships, by paying a fee to be the “official” product of a team or league.

### **Negative effects**

#### *Demarketing to dysfunctional fans*

The major marketing effort to the dysfunctional fan would be to channel their socially unacceptable behavior into behavior that is more socially acceptable – in other words, a demarketing effort. The team would be better served by turning the dysfunctional fan into a fanatical fan. Teams do not want to realize the negative effects of losing game attendance of the local, temporary, devoted, and maybe even the fanatical fan as a result of the behavior of the dysfunctional fan. Many teams have begun to at least minimize this negative impact by developing “get tough” policies for punishing the unacceptable behavior displayed by some dysfunctional fans, by segregating other fans from them – creating family sections – and by disallowing the sale of alcohol after a certain point in the game.

#### **Future research**

The contributions and utility of our classification scheme are bounded by the conceptual perspectives we assumed. We adopted a perspective of the sports fan that emphasized individual, internal motivations, internal processes, and behavior. We believe the interaction between the fan’s self and the sports consumptive object defines what a fan is. Thus, our scheme was built upon the concepts of identification, the self, and attachment and the processing of information as an internal, non-social process. However, other more social processes and concepts may also help explain fans’ motivations and behavior. Certainly there are elements of the self that are social – we tell

### Sequentiality of the classification

others who we are by what we consume. Socialization, which is a social process explaining how individuals learn to live and behave in the world among others, is one perspective that may explain the development and behavior of the social self. Such a perspective suggests that a fan's social role may be learned through interactions between young consumers and socialization agents such as their families, schools, and peers. Future research should examine fans in this social context.

In addition, our classification scheme was conceptually derived and supported by specific, managerially-relevant anecdotes. Future research is needed to test the relationships underlying, and utility of, our scheme. For example, specific propositions could be developed and tested regarding the variation in strength of the relationships between attachment, emotional significance, and specific sports-relevant behavior across the different fan types. Those results could be compared against the influence of team performance on fan behavior. The work of Ball and Tasaki (1992), who measured attachment and emotional significance in the context of possessions, and that of Fisher and Wakefield (1998), who examined fans' identification and behavior in the context of team performance, serve as a model and starting point for such research. In addition, by allowing the researcher to isolate a specific type of fan for investigation, we believe between-class-variance can be minimized, thus increasing the explanatory power of conceptual relationships developed to predict fan behavior.

The authors hint that the classification presented may be sequential. That is, one may start as a temporary or local fan and progress to devoted, fanatical, or a dysfunctional fan. An important area of investigation would determine if indeed the typology is sequential, and what factors influence whether one progresses to the next classification. Investigation into the sequentiality of the classification and the factors that influence whether one progress to the next stage would also include determining how to prevent the fan from becoming dysfunctional. Marketing has done little research into deviant behavior. Perhaps the key to preventing the fan from becoming dysfunctional lies in a better understanding of deviance.

In conclusion, to this point researchers have used the relationship between sports marketers and fans as a context to test and apply theories of interest. We hope that our research will encourage others to develop conceptualizations specifically for explaining fan motivation and behavior and tests of the relationships of interest to sports marketers.

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