

The effect of the category of sport team on the role of nostalgia in an individual supporter's psychological connection to that sport team

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Abstract:

With the many benefits related to high levels of psychological connection with a sport team, marketers, management and communities desire supporters to be highly connected with sport teams. A major gap has been identified in relation to the effect of the category of sport team on the role of nostalgia in determining that connection. A conceptual model is presented together with a proposed methodology. This research will aid academics and administrators in their communications with and targeting of consumers and affords communities the opportunity to benefit from consumers' higher levels of psychological connection with a sport team.

Introduction:

From an Australian economic indicator perspective, sport is an extremely valuable industry with research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing that to June 2005 the total income of organisations in the sport and physical recreation industries reached nearly \$AUD9 billion per financial year, employing over 111,000 people with a volunteer network of over 181,000 people (ABS, 2007). This indicates that the sport industry accounts for over 1% of Australia's GDP and employs over 1.5% of the workforce in this country (ABS, 2007). Globally, research has identified that trade in sport and sport related activities constitute between 3-4% of world trade (Davies, 2002; Szymanski, 2001).

From a societal perspective, positive social consequences of sport for an individual include the boosting of an individual's self-esteem, the reduction of depression and a decrease in any sense of alienation (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). Further, when considering the wider community, sport teams provide individuals with ties to the larger structure of society that now seemingly consist of fewer community and kinship ties (Branscombe et al., 1991) as well as creating solidarity amongst members of a community, health awareness and entertainment within the community (Zhang, Pease, & Hui, 1996).

Therefore, given that sport and sport consumption are important both economically and socially, it is clear that sport is a relevant context in which to study consumer behaviour phenomena. In qualifying the use of the word sport, this research focuses on high profile spectator sport, or sport as display, not sport as play (Smith, 2005; Williams, 1997). This research will explore individual supporter motivations and influences of team sport consumption with a focus on stadium-based sport within a national sporting league.

With the many benefits related to high levels of psychological connection with a sport team, sport marketers, team management and communities at large desire supporters to be highly connected with sport teams. Moreover, research has identified that key to developing high levels of sport team connection within supporters' psyche is to manipulate a number of social-psychological mechanisms such as awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Funk & James, 2001, 2006; Gladden & Funk, 2002). However in spite of this fairly extensive research to date, none have yet considered the effect of the

category of sport team on the role of nostalgia in an individual supporter's awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance to that sport team, where nostalgia is defined as being "the emotion and cognition directed towards a memory from the past that helps construct the present".

Previous research has focused on well established sport teams when investigating sport team identification (Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Wann, 1995, 2006; Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Wann & Dolan, 1994). However, with more corporate involvement in modern sport than ever before there are now mergers, relocations, collapses and creation of teams in most national sporting competitions (Mason, 1999). This provides a unique and interesting proposition when considering nostalgic effect on supporters' psychological connection to a sport team as the varied histories encountered across different categories of teams (be they a foundation, new, relocated or blended team) in national sporting competitions will have an effect on the role of nostalgia and, therefore, the supporters' psychological connection to that sport team. This study aims to afford academics and managers a better understanding of the specifics of the relationship between the type of sport team, nostalgia and the social-psychological mechanisms of awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. Therefore this proposed program of research will answer the following research question: ***What is the effect of the category of sport team on the role of nostalgia in determining an individual supporters' psychological connection to that sport team?***

The proposed study will investigate the role of the category of the target sport team and nostalgia on an individual supporter's psychological connection with a sport team and the literature review pertaining to these three concepts is presented next.

Category of Target Sport Team:

In modern, stadium-based sport within a national sporting league there are four key sport team categories (this categorisation has been devised following a content analysis of literature pertaining to national sport leagues such as Mason (1999) and Sutton *et al.* (1997)) – a formation team, a new team, a blended team and a relocated team and these are defined as follows: *Formation team* – a team that was formed at or near the commencement of the national sporting league. An example of this category of team includes the Melbourne Football Club in the AFL which was one of the foundation teams of the national sporting competition formed in 1877; *New team* – a team that has recently been formed and competes in a well established national sporting league. An example of this category of team includes the Fremantle Football Club in the AFL which was formed in 1994 and competed in the AFL, a national sporting competition which commenced in 1908, for the first time in 1995; *Blended team* – a team that was formed following the merging of two others and competes in a national sporting league. An example of this category of team includes the Brisbane Lions Football Club in the AFL. This team was formed following the financial collapse of one of the AFL foundation teams, the Fitzroy Football Club, and the need to bolster one of the new AFL clubs, the Brisbane Bears, in 1996; and, *Relocated team* – a team that was formed at one point in time and was based in one location before moving to another. An example of this category of team includes the Sydney Football Club in the AFL which was formed as the South Melbourne Football Club in 1874 and was one of the foundation teams of the AFL competition but was relocated to Sydney in 1982 by the sport's governing body.

Team identification:

Team identification is based on the theory that one's self-concept is composed of a personal and a social identity (Fink et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One's personal identity consists of attributes such as abilities and interests, while social identity is based on attributes such as group membership (Turner, 1982). Therefore, it can be said that if a person identifies with a team they develop a "oneness with or belongingness to the organization" where the consumer "defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992:104).

Supporter identification is one of the most important aspects for sport teams to foster because highly identified supporters are more likely to have a strong sense of attachment and belonging to the team, even during periods of poor performance (Fink et al., 2002; Mitrano, 1999; Sutton et al., 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Supporters' levels of identification with a sports team has economic considerations as higher levels of identification leads to higher levels of support exhibited by an individual, a greater likelihood of attending events both at the team's home ground and away and a higher spend on tickets (Murrell & Deitz, 1992; Wann et al., 1990). The concept of nostalgia and its interrelationship with sport team identification is discussed next.

Nostalgia:

Researchers in the fields of sociology, psychology, consumer behaviour and marketing have devoted attention to the phenomenon of nostalgia (Holak & Halvena, 1992). Nostalgia itself is not a preference, but rather a feeling or mood that may result in preferences for things that tend to produce nostalgic responses (Holak et al., 1992). Nostalgia generates positive rather than negative consumer responses of the past (Davis, 1979) and has the capacity to influence consumer behaviour emotionally (Batcho, 1995; Davis, 1979; Hirsch, 1992; Holak & Halvena, 1998) and cognitively (Holbrook & Schindler, 1994; Sierra & McQuitty, 2007; Stern, 1992). These emotional and cognitive responses to the past may help individuals understand their identity in the present (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Sierra et al., 2007). Therefore, the definition of nostalgia used in this study will be "*the emotion and cognition directed towards a memory from the past that helps construct the present*".

Nostalgia has been shown by sport researchers to be a longing for the past based on personal and vicarious experiences thereby aiding in the development of a psychological attachment and allegiance to a sport team (Funk et al., 2006). The greater the nostalgic benefits perceived to be received by an individual from a sport team the greater the level of attachment and allegiance felt by the supporter (Funk et al., 2001, 2006). A supporter's thoughts relating to the past go beyond the team merely winning on the sports field, although success is considered important to any sport team (Wann, Hamlet, Wilson, & Hodges, 1995), but rather drives the development of greater personal meaning to the individual that lasts through unsuccessful periods as well and acts as an important predictor of a supporter's psychological connection to a sport team (Funk et al., 2001, 2006; Wakefield, 1995).

There are two types of nostalgia – personal and vicarious nostalgia (Sierra et al., 2007). Personal nostalgia is based on a person's direct experience. It involves one's search for an idealised past that they have lived and the things, memories and people associated with this past (Baker & Kennedy, 1994; Goulding, 2001). In contrast, vicarious nostalgia is not based on any direct link to the past. Rather it is based on the simulated emotions and memories associated with an object or event created by a third party. This form of nostalgia then relates to events or objects that a person has never directly experienced but that he or she longs for

(Baker et al., 1994; Merchant & Ford, 2008). From a commercial perspective this third party re-creation or simulation is done through marketing activity.

Surprisingly, there is little research explaining consumer behaviour in nostalgic contexts (Braun, Ellis, & Loftus, 2002; Muehling & Sprott, 2004; Rindfleisch & Sprott, 2000; Sierra et al., 2007). This study aims to redress this gap in our knowledge by investigating the role of nostalgia, both personal and vicarious, and the strength and magnitude of its effect on sport team identification and how it moves consumers through the PCM. Specifically, this study incorporates both cognitive (attitudes to the past) and emotional factors (yearning for the past) in a proposed conceptual model that aims to explain the role of nostalgia in determining the strength of supporter identification with a sport team. A conceptual model is presented next followed by a proposed methodology.

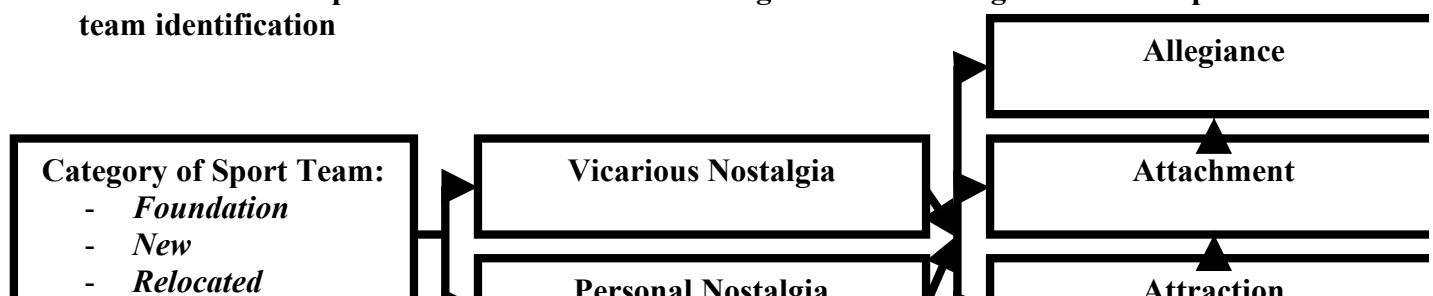
Conceptual model:

Funk and James' Revised Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk et al., 2006) has been used by sport marketing researchers as a platform from which to investigate supporters' psychological connection to a sport team (Beaton & Funk, 2008; Funk et al., 2006). Their model suggests that the psychological connection between an individual and a sport team are governed by the complexity and strengthening of sport-related mental associations such as nostalgia (Funk et al., 2006). The PCM enables sport academics and managers to make a distinction between marketing activities that lead from an individual's mere awareness of a sport team, to their attraction to the sport team, their attachment to the sport team, through to marketing activities that, over time, aid in the development of an endearing allegiance by the supporter to the sport team.

The PCM states that there are four hierarchical stages in a supporter's psychological connection, or identification, to a sport team (Funk & James, 2006). *Awareness* is the lowest stage and describes when a supporter knows of the existence of a sport team but is not interested in supporting that team. *Attraction* is the next stage and describes when the initial attitude formation toward a sport team has developed. *Attachment* is the second-highest stage and depicts a stronger relationship between the supporter and the sport team being formed based on a meaningful psychological connection. Finally, the highest stage is *allegiance* whereby the psychological connection between supporter and sport team becomes resistant, persistent, biases cognition and influences the supporter's behaviour.

It is proposed that the two types of nostalgia, personal and vicarious, are likely to have an effect through the strength and magnitude of cognitive and emotional components to determine supporters' level of identification with a sport team. The positive potential associated with reliving past experiences and memories (personal nostalgia) together with the connection to a happier past (vicarious nostalgia) are likely to have a positive impact on the degree of identification with a sport team. However, the extent to which the sport team can evoke nostalgia is dependant on the category of that target sport team:

FIGURE 1: Conceptual Model: The role of nostalgia in determining consumers' sport team identification



Methodology:

The research approach to be used in this project includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research process will be initiated using qualitative data gathered through focus groups and this data, together with information gathered from the literature reviewed, will contribute to the scale development process. The second stage will be quantitative, comprising of the main study with self-completion questionnaires distributed to sport team supporters.

A triangulation approach will be utilised, where a combined approach will be taken within this study (Leedy, 1993). In this study a methodological triangulation, or mixed method approach, will be adopted thereby enabling some of the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to be contained within this one study (Neuman, 2003). In this study the initial approach will be qualitative in nature to enable a deeper understanding to be gained into the perspective of the sport supporter. Focus groups of supporters of team sport events will be held with the resultant data to provide valuable insights into the aspects of sport team identification within the sport spectating context. This will be followed by a quantitative approach with data to be collected through a self-completed survey instrument. The instrument will be partly constructed through an analysis of the data to be collected in the qualitative stage of the research together with the use of adaptations of existing scales including the Sport Supporter Identification (Wann et al., 1993), Nostalgia-Proneness (Holbrook, 1993; Holbrook et al., 1994) and Consumer Alienation (Singh, 1990) scales. The quantitative stage will enable the researcher to gain a volume of response that would not be possible in a wholly qualitative approach.

The main data collection will focus on the influences on nostalgia in sport consumption and its role in determining supporters' identification with a sport team. As a result, four sporting teams will be approached to participate in the data collection process. The teams selected will all be involved in a national sporting competition and will have established records of their full financial members that will be utilised in the sample selection in this study. Judgement sampling will be utilised whereby a non-probability sample will be selected that is deemed to be representative of the population as a whole (Zikmund, 1997). It is anticipated that the four national sporting teams that will participate in this study will be drawn from the main national sporting competition in Australia – the Australian Football League (AFL).

Conclusion:

As discussed previously, a major gap has been identified in the literature in relation to the effect of the category of sport team on the role of nostalgia in determining supporters' psychological connection, or identification, with a sport team and this phenomenon has not been investigated previously. A conceptual model based on the extant literature was presented together with a proposed methodology for this research. The ability to determine the role of nostalgia in determining supporters' psychological connection with a sport team will aid both academics and administrators in their communications with and targeting of consumers of sport in modern, stadium-based, national sporting league. Further, the community benefits of higher levels of psychological connection with a sport team will be able to be enhanced.

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