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Consumer-brand relationship. The case of football fandom.

Abstract

Purpose.

The aim of the paper is to explore the consumer-brand relationship; in particular, the research is applied in sport business.

Theoretical background.

Consumer-brand relationship has attracted interest and relevance in literature and management practice. The relationship between a brand and consumers produces positive outcomes for both sides. Firms are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate to brands, why some brands engender feelings (Fournier, 1998; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence, 2013) and are preferred to others. Consumers feel emotions, bear sacrifice and commitment, engage and develop loyalty by brands.

Originality.

Sport football is the sector of research because strong, unwavering and durable consumer-brand relationship features this industry. Football fans are consumers with special emotions and behavior with their football club brand (Wann, 1999; Cayolla and Louriero, 2014). Fans highly involved with a club have a long-term relation with its brand, can be extremely loyal, and hold a particular team as central to their identity. In order to better explore the topic, it needs to gather data regarding the perspectives of consumers about the experienced phenomenon.

Methodology

Qualitative marketing research. Phenomenological approach (Goulding, 2005). Narrative techniques with direct interviews.

Findings.

Exploring the hidden latent constructs of consumer-brand relationship of fan. The findings of the research is to understand cognitive perceptions of emotions felt by fans of football club, motivating the relationship.

Implications.

The research contributes to knowledge in emotions that drive the consumer-brand relationship, as well as provides insights to brand managers to run forces to create the right passionate relation with fans.

Keywords

Consumer-brand relationship, Emotions, Loyalty, Fans, Football, Phenomenology

Introduction

Consumer-brand relationship has attracted interest and relevance in literature and management practice. The relationship between a brand and consumers produces positive outcomes for both sides. Firms are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate to brands, why some brands are preferred to others and even loved. Consumers feel emotions, bear sacrifice and commitment, engage and develop loyalty by brands.

Nowadays, many sport clubs are acting like commercial firms, this has strongly influenced the adoption of marketing competencies and practices. According with Keller et al. (2002) in an increasingly competitive world populated with millions of marks it must be taken into account not only the differentiation of the brand, but also the benchmark market and what it has in common with the other competitors. In this vein, each football club is a brand, and so should be managed with the same assumptions than brands of organizations associated with other sectors of economic activity (Cayolla and Louriero, 2014). Sport managers are beginning to view their teams as brands to be managed. The aim of professional sport teams is to create a strong brand, which influences the behavior of actual and potential fans (Gladden and Funk, 2001), and which creates opportunities for brand extension across merchandising categories and geographic boundaries. Therefore, a stable fan base as an imperative driver of a club brand competitive advantage.

Sport brand key issues are fan attraction, building strong and loyal relationship with, encouraging them to have a more and more attachment with club brand. Sports fans have never had so many options, opportunities, places and events to spend their time and money. The search for fans has become essential to the very survival of sports and thriving of club brand, then sport firms (Rein, Kotler, Shields, 2006).

Treating sport teams as brands (Buhler, Heffernan, Hewson, 2007), the present research aims to explore consumer-brand relationship, in particular context of football fandom, as it happens in their everyday lifeworld. This is a particular context wherein to explore the topic because of deep connecting emotions and hard stability of relationship.

We use a nontraditional methodology in marketing research, we adopt phenomenology as a theoretical lens and empirical methodology to investigate consumer-brand relationship through personal narrative experience of fans of a football club.

This paper has twofold aims: exploring the features of a particular consumer-brand relationship, in a context wherein it is stable and deep, the football fandom; furthermore under a methodological point of view, illustrating how phenomenology can be useful as nontraditional empirical research methodology in marketing.

Theoretical background

The growing academic and managerial interest in understanding the mechanisms behind the relationship between brand and consumers lead the magnitude of Consumer-brand relationship research topic.

In general, several authors have pointed out the centrality of feelings proved by consumer to explain the strength of consumer-brand relationship. Among others, Fournier (1998) studies different relationships a consumer may have with a brand; suggesting the metaphor of human relationships, she proposes a six-faceted brand relationship quality construct which comprises love/passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, and brand partner quality.

Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) propose that brand love is influenced by a hedonic product and self-expressive brand and it has a positive effect on brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

They underline that brand love includes a willingness to declare love, as if the brand were a person, and involves integration of the brand into a consumer's identity. A self-expressive brand is the consumer's perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one's social self and/or reflects one's inner self.

Batra et al. (2012) posit a brand love prototype, based on interpersonal love, that is featured by: an antecedent, perceptions about great quality/qualities; the core of brand love; and its consequences, brand loyalty, positive WOM, resistance to negative information, and willingness to pay a price premium. It assesses satisfied consumers' passionate emotional attachment to particular brands they love.

When consumers feel strong attractive feelings towards a brand, identify themselves with it, and live a positive experience or imagine this favorable experience, they can be aroused and this process of activation conducts to strong positive emotions like delight (Oliver et al, 1997; Loureiro 2012).

Self identification with the brand is an important factor that leads to brand love, consumers in love and committed with their brands are more willing to sacrifice. Therefore, as an outcome of being attracted, passionate, and committed to the brand, the consumer tends to be more willing to sacrifice and pay more for the product (Loureiro, 2011).

Research on brand passion construct reports it can be defined primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors (Bauer et al., 2007). It depends on brand identification and brand trust, establishes a passionate feeling for the brand, influences brand commitment, willingness to pay a higher price for the brand, and finally positive word of mouth (Albert et al., 2013).

Furthermore, sport football is our particular research context because strong, unwavering and durable consumer-brand relationship features this industry. Football fans are consumers with special emotions, behavior and relationship with football club brand of their heart. Some authors have attempted to understand the motivations and feeling of sport fans and their relation with club brands (Wann and Branscombe, 1990, 1993; Wakefield, 2007; Bauer et al., 2008; Cayolla and Louriero, 2014). Fans highly involved with a club have a long-term relation with its brand, can be extremely loyal, and hold a particular team as central to their identity. Team success and failure produce personal joy and sadness emotions, it means a personal success and failure. Indeed, Team Identification is defined, in social identity theory, as the spectators perceived connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's failings and achievements as one's own (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Gwinner and Swansson, 2003).

A rich body of literature posits Sport Team Identification construct and its different terminology purposed in sport marketing literature ("fan identification", Sutton, McDonald, Milne, and Cimperman, 1997; "club identification", Van Leeuwen, Quick, and Daniel, 2002) to explains the quality of relationship between fans and a sport team. Several authors argue that psychological attachment to a sport team influences various aspects of sport consumer behavior (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Sutton, et al., 1997; Van Leeuwen, et al., 2002; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004; Wakefeld, 2007) and it is now more often studied as a variable that causes consumer loyalty (Kwon, et al., 2005).

Furthermore, the particular phenomenon of Basking-In-Reflected Glory (BIRG) and its implications in sports is argued in the literature (Cialdini et al., 1976). Identifying with a particular sport team is a strong fan motivator, indeed highly identified fans are likely to Bask-In-Reflected Glory by doing such things as wearing team-identifying apparel after a team win, describing team wins in terms of what 'we' did, and, in general, seeking to enhance their public image by connecting with positive aspects of the team. The result of BIRGing is enhancing self-esteem in the highly identified fan. But on the other side, Cutting-off-reflected failure (CORFing) attitude is exposed too, it describe a self-esteem related process that

reflects an individual's desire to decrease an association with an unsuccessful other (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Wakefield, 2007).

Identification is an outcome of psychological attachment; following this, and other, attachment outcomes, individuals may reach a level of psychological allegiance, loyalty to the team (Funk and James, 2006). Loyalty expressed as allegiance to a team becomes the critical piece in a consumer's decision to re-purchase a sport product or service for the long-term.

More strongly consumers are attached to a brand, more willing they are to forsake personal resources to maintain an ongoing relationship with that brand. Thus, they are willing to sacrifice to follow a football club brand (Cayolla, Loureiro, 2014).

Fans experience pleasure and satisfaction with successful teams, but, they also experience feelings of *delight* or excitement that deeply resonates within the identity of the individual fan, such that the effects are likely to be long-term (Wakefield, 2007). Sport elicits strong emotions. Sport fans regularly experience joy, pride as well as anger, frustration or worry. Moreover, fans act out these emotions with less restraint in comparison with other social settings (Burmah and Schade, 2010). Sports brands are so successful because of the deep relationship they have with each of their fans.

Other social or emotional features of fans-football club relationship are explored. Gladden and Funk (2001) and Stockburger-Sauer and Exler (2008), in their research on loyalty, identified four relevant benefits: nostalgia, escape, social interaction and emotions. Furthermore they investigated pride in place, peer group acceptance, identification and entertainment. Wann (1995) identifies eight common motivations of sport fans: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family. Furthermore, social interaction is proposed to explain the will to develop and maintain relations with other fans (Swanson et al. 2003), and a strong relationship between it and brand attitude is observed (Bauer, Stockburger-Sauer and Exler, 2008).

Therefore, Football fans have a club brand involvement that product brands can only dream about.

We argue that the attachment, fans feel in the relationship with brand, needs to be explored from the ground up, built on an open-ended, wide and deep understanding of how consumers experience it.

Methodology

In this research, we adopt phenomenology as research methodology and theoretical lens.

The phenomenology is a qualitative methodology of research for gathering and analysis data. The method allows people's lifeworld to be discovered, thus capturing their personal and intersubjective experiences; its goal is to enlarge and deepen understanding of the range of immediate experiences. Critical elements of this methodology are a direct description of experiences without subconscious motivation that yield indispensable invariant properties of the experience of interest (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Phenomenological methods can bring the researcher into closer touch with individual and social realities, while ascertaining the heterogeneous dimensions involved (Kupers et al, 2013). Phenomenological researchers generally agree that central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived (Finley, 2009).

Phenomenology views all human experience as intrinsically narrative, therefore the main instrument of data collection is the interview. The interviewee's language is the central medium for transmitting meaning, it is needed to convey information and describe reality

along with the assumption that with shared experiences come shared meanings (Creswell, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Thompson, 1997).

The empirical context of our research is football fandom. The research consisted of 22 direct in-depth interviews lasting between 45 and 80 minutes each and 3 follow-up interviews lasting between 25 and 35 minutes to check and deepen particular understandings.

All interviewees declare to be fan of a football club, to have a club of their heart, following its every matches, attending its stadium or watching them on TV, buying its merchandising. They are between 22 and 54 years of age, at least with high-school diploma. The profiles were heterogeneous from university student to entrepreneur, from white-collar to professor.

The interviews were as open as possible, getting interviewees with complete freedom to explain their reasoning, telling the story, experiences and events which in his opinion illustrates their relationship with the club. The interviews were based on free personal narration on the importance club has in interviewees' life and on their social life. Every interviews was recorded and transcribed to conduct the analysis (Thompson, 1997).

Findings

The findings of the research highlight: emotional factors motivating fans-football club brand relationship, fans behavior driven by emotions, unconditioned loyalty (Fig.1).

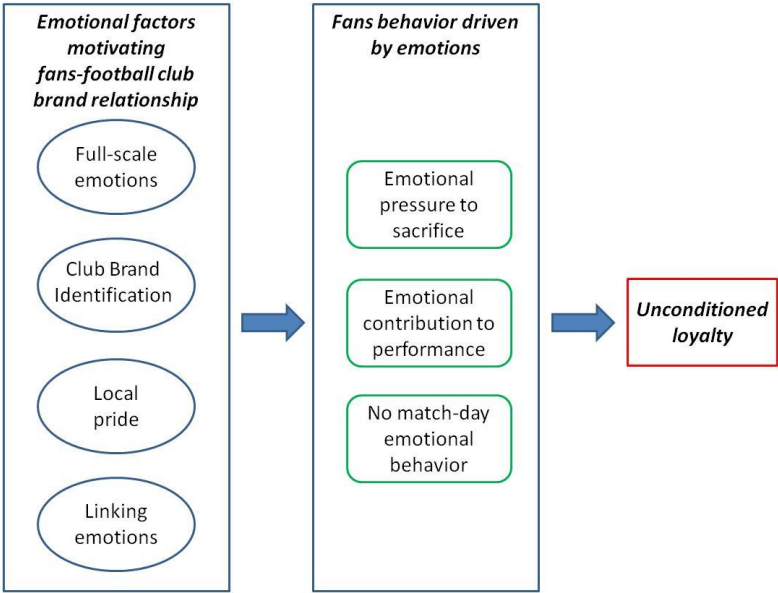


Fig.1 – Fans-Football Club Brand Relationship

Emotional factors motivating fans-football club brand relationship

Full-scale emotions.

This is more obvious element, it is part of entertainment property of sport. Football is able to capture the attention, fans feel escape sense from everyday life. But for fans of a football club it is not only entertainment, because they feel a total emotional engagement only following football club they love. Fans report strong positive emotional responses to their team's successes and deep negative affect subsequent to their team's losses. Interviewed fans declare

to have cried for a football match or hugged known people, showing intimate evidences of strong emotions.

In this way, it creates a full-scale emotion, consciously fans leave everything behind to follow their football club and, when they are involved by the match, they forget everything thanks to deep and intense emotions the match gives.

From interviewees:

“When we won, my father was happy and he didn’t speak about unemployment more. Everyone were no more angry in the city, it was as if it rained gold.”

“I feel a strong emotion, it cancel out me completely, it happens only during the match. I think only about it”

“The emotion I feel on a goal is comparable with nothing”

“With it I forget my others problems”

“When we play, I feel the same emotions I experienced when I was in love (Warm fuzzies or Butterflies in the stomach, in Italian)”

“Only when I watch my football club I feel these emotions, no other team can give me that.”

“I left everything behind, the only aim was buying the ticket”

“The priority is my football club, it comes first of all”

Club Brand Identification.

Fans interviewed feel a sense of belonging to the club, it is more than affective attachment, it is an extension of themselves.

From interviewees:

“My team is my family. It is like my mother. It is not only football club, it is a thing I belong and it belong to me. It is part of my soul.”

“It is part of me”

“It is my religion. It is like the mom.”

“It is in my blood. It is part of my loved ones.”

The performance of club are like personal performance; personal pride and self-esteem enhance after a good result, engendering arousal and happiness, as well as negative results put fans in dejection and anger state. They respond to and get direct emotional benefit from club brand performance. Fans and club brand are one thing.

From interviewees:

“During the Sunday family lunch, I was closed alone in my room to follow the match, and if my team lost, I cried and I didn’t eat for all the day.”

“When we won the championship, I wore my football club shirt for a week”

But in our case we go beyond sport team identification cited in literature, indeed fans interviewed overpass identification with sport results of their team of heart, they identify

themselves with club economic performance too, as if the outcomes of players transfer market were theirs. The interviewees describe the club brand performance in terms of what “we” did, this is a clear evidence of identification with club brand.

From interviewees:

“I follow news about players’ negotiations as if the outcome were mine. I become angry if we sell our players for few money or we overpay new ones.”

“I feel part of a project.”

Furthermore, club brand identification has another meaning: it permits a *social revenge* for fans. In our case a common or territorial inferiority complex is beaten thanks to good winning performance of club. Beating prestigious club from richer town or country is elating for fans, they can feel superior to opposing for once, they receive an emotional and moral reward towards who is recognized superior. Identified fans enhance their self-esteem and are proud for great results, they are more satisfied with life.

From interviewees:

“To win against the team of the most important Italian person is a different thing. It goes beyond football match”

“When we play against a northern club, against hostile city, it sounds like a political dispute”

Local pride.

Fans feel a strong link between club brand and city of origin. The club brand is an ambassador of the city of origin, the attachment towards it is expression of local pride, of belonging to the territory of origin. Fans are proud to be from their city. The club brand represents the city and its population, therefore the identification in it is a “must” for fans. Club brand belong to city, the identification in it empower link with city of origin, therefore fans feel represented like home city person. More fans are away from town of origin, more the sense of belonging and the will of show it enhance.

The match appeals to fans local pride, their sense of belonging to a city, the pleasure to feel coming from a territory and to be a part of a population with their values and believes. It strengthens sense of identity. Fans state their territorial identity by football club.

Local pride endures and reinforces itself when fans are away from home city, following club brand match make them feel at home.

From interviewees:

“The club is my town ambassador in the world”

“It represents my city”

“The club unites souls of citizens. It is ours”

“If you follow your club everywhere, you have to feel strong love for your city”

“When we go to away match I feel hate towards my city, and my sense of belonging increases [...] it strengthens the link with club”

“When I saw the match in a bar in London (I was there for work) with other people from my city, it was like to be in my city, I felt my city”

“I was born in my city and fan of my city football club”

“I support the shirt, the city, being from my city, I defend my identity”

Linking emotions.

The emotions felt by football fans permit and support social interaction of the communal type. The fans of a football club are joint by the same emotions towards the club, these ones permit to start new friendships, to have support from others, to share opinions, tales and emotions felt, thanks to their football club. These shared emotions are social glue that keep together different people coming from heterogeneous social tiers. They are the glue of long-lasting relationships, in some cases the only friendship factor. Unknown people come together and spend time together only for the same emotions felt for their football club.

Therefore, emotions caused by football club brand are an important means for people to form and maintain strong friendships that might otherwise not exist.

The fan is part of community, he feels a *shared emotional link* that is the mutual commitment to nurture and to achieve the common objectives and values. Fans are reciprocally important inside the community, they have shared trust that the needs and objectives will be achieved with the commitment of the union.

Fans recognize the stadium like community cult place, where gathering together and to maximize the expression of their love connecting each other and with the team. The place where to meet people with same values, same objectives, same love for the football club. A shared winning experience impact on satisfaction and intensity of emotions felt.

The elation felt by fans is viral, it spread inside the community and outside engaging people not so involved like them. Indeed, interviewed fans state that when the championship was won all the city went to celebrate, a sense of joy infected everyone around, everyone became fan of the football club. It is an emotional contagion, a collective emotion.

From interviewees:

“It is a shared experience to do with friends and other fan like you.”

“This emotions lived alone are not the same thing.”

“Living this emotions with others persons attaches yourself with those ones”

“To be with others persons who made sacrifices to be there (at the stadium), like me”

“It’s beautiful talking with unknown persons about the same passion, it is a linking thing”

“The only thing unites lawyers, worker, engineer”

Fans behavior driven by emotions

Emotional pressure to sacrifice.

The fans reveal willing to sacrifice to assist the matches of football club brand of their heart.

The sacrifice they bear is:

- *economic*, the fans pay to be present at the match, to reach the stadium, to see the match on satellite tv (pay per view events and/or satellite platform subscription), to buy official merchandising;

From interviewees:

“I spent 500 euro only to assist a 90 minutes match at the stadium, I had to work more than a week for that money. I was in London and team of my heart played in Holland”

“Paying an expensive price and going out early in the morning and come back late in the night, only attend 90 minutes match”

- *physical*, the fans are engaged in hard and time spending behavior: experiencing long journey to reach the stadium, waiting many hours in line to buy a ticket and to entrance at the stadium and to watch the match, staying in not comfortable place (very crowded terraces), being exposed to bad weather;

From interviewees:

“On one occasion I went to stadium with my broken arm and my head bandaged. But I could not stay at home.”

“It is more easy a workday than a match at the stadium: I have one hour trip to reach the stadium, then looking for park, three hours queue and standing room only.”

“After a match at the stadium, we stay all night long outdoor the ticket office to buy tickets for champions league match”

- *emotional*, before, during and after the matches the fans feel extreme emotions of joy, fear, distress. Furthermore, the fans that attend away matches in opposite stadium are exposed to unfriendly and intimidating stadium chants and visuals. In extreme cases, these experiences turn in fear for hostile climate and physical attacks threats.

From interviewees:

“When a full stadium supports against you, you feel a better belonging, you have to scream, you have to give your love”

“Staying at home during a match, it makes me feel like death”

“The pleasure to attend the match starts with the queue at ticket office”

“I organize my personal commitment according to our matches calendar. If I have to choose between a pizza with friends and my football club match, I choose the match”

The fans invest high levels of time, energy, money and emotions into loved football club brand, this highlights the deep and personal brand attachment. The emotional attachment felt by fans is motivating factor to personal investment. The emotional sacrifice toward the brand is the power that affects the fans way of life and how they personally are related to it.

From interviewees:

“Every kind of sacrifice to follow it”

“I feel the need of following the club everywhere”

“I follow every match of my football club, if I have to chose between the match and other I chose the match, and if there is no TV, I follow it by radio or pc too. I am sick for my football club.”

Emotional contribution to performance.

Fans are actively engaged during the match of football club brand of their heart, they want to make their presence (at the stadium) felt, because they think they are able to condition the result. They consider themselves as essential to the success of the team as the players and coach (“twelfth man on the pitch”). Therefore, in this way they feel to participate to football club brand outcomes. They feel a mutual exchange when their players run towards the terrace celebrating a goal. This is the immediate reward for their contribution.

At the end of the attended match, fans feel tired for devoted emotions. It is an emotional engagement, regardless the presence at the stadium. Indeed interviewed fans, that watch the game at TV, declare the same tiredness after the match.

Fans contribution is driven by their emotions, anxiety, fear to lose and will to win, pride and self-esteem.

From interviewees:

“A fan is fan when he gives his contribution to club at the stadium, creating the atmosphere to lead the team to win. It can change the way of the match”

“At the end of the match I feel tired as if the player were me”

“We support the team with chants and flags, with our presence. I go to the stadium, my only aim is support the team to win, I demand until the last breathe of voice from the others.”

“In that moment I understanding nothing more and I support only for my football club”

No match-day emotional behavior.

The relationship goes beyond sport event, the fans want frequent interactions with football club brand and others fans. They feel strong *desire* to interact continuously with it. The *everyday need* to research news about it, the frequent thinking about it, the long time spent talking about it are evidences of strong attachment sense and enduring presence in fans' mind. The interviewees talk about a (re)call by the brand, the will to stay informed to avoid the sense of exclusion and to respond to sense of missing. Fans are *hungry* of relationship with football club brand of their heart.

The continuous interactions with it fill the separation distress between two match-days or two championships.

From interviewees:

“Every Monday, and every Tuesday too, in every bar everyone speaks about the match and the team performance.”

“From the end of championship, everyday I search news about our players' negotiations”

“Even if I am engaged in other activities, I feel need to update me about news from my club”

“It is an everyday discussion topic with my friends.”

“All my week is based on my football club: thinking on the next match, talking about it with my friends, searching for news about the football club.”

Unconditioned loyalty

The relationship between fans and football club brand is not related with winning performance or superior team quality, as for other products or services.

Fans are loyal in unwaveable manner for life. Fans are demanding, their expectations are high and they are sad for failures, however in case of strong unsatisfaction, they remain loyal with football club brand of their heart. They have hard resistance to change that effects cognitive involvement and individual behavior.

Therefore, this is the highest level of loyalty because the fans behavior is unconditioned by football club brand performance. The relationship is driven by deep emotions only the football club brand can give. This is an emotional based relationship.

The unconditioned loyalty of this relationship don't hypothesize *treason* for another football club brand.

From interviewees:

“It depends by heart not by head”.

“If we don’t win I am disappointed, but the emotions I have lived they remain, and I think to the next championship”

“I experienced the relegation in lower championship, but my love endures. My blood has the colors of my football club.”

“I continue to be fan of my football club in dark periods too”

“I will never support other club”

“The only thing will be with me for the rest of my life”

“Even if I had sold my soul to the devil / It is like a patch with the devil”

There are exogenous factors that can threaten the relationships too: violence and illegal betting. Interviewed fans declare that violence events at stadium or connected to football matches create aversion towards football and fear to attend the stadium. Furthermore, the illegal betting that involves players and clubs causes lack of trust and threats attachment towards football, in general. But the fans refuse the hypothesis its relationship with football club of their heart will finish up. They cannot be without it.

From interviewees:

“I cannot think I will not go to the stadium more or my life without my football club.”

“The illegal betting is a phenomenon inside football, I am aware, but I go on to support my football club.”

“Because of illegal betting scandal my passion went down, but after it came up stronger than before.”

Conclusions

The paper contributes to knowledge in emotions leading loyal consumer-brand relationship, as well as provides insights to football club brand managers to run forces to create passionate relationship with brand fans.

In particular:

- it confirms a rich body of literature on importance of emotional attachment towards a brand, as a motivating factor for long lasting relationship (Fournier, 1998; Funk, James, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007; Batra et al. 2012); but we argue fans-football club brand relationship is featured by unconditioned loyalty, thanks to strong and deep emotions felt by fans, that are pushing forces to extreme behavior. This is a kind of behavior, and brand engagement, desired by a lot of product brands.
- In our case, the antecedent of Brand Love construct (Batra et al., 2012), *brand superior quality and performance*, is not observed, indeed unconditioned loyalty is regardless superior club brand performance. The emotions felt by fans are the only basis for everlasting and stable relationship. They are so strong that fans leave

everything behind (Cayolla, Loureiro, 2014), bearing every kind of sacrifice (economic, physical, emotional) to nurture and live it.

This surprising result makes fans-football club brand relationship different to other ones in more mainstream sectors. In their long-lasting relationship fans have experienced poor and rich performances, changes of players, coaches and play quality, but they remain unconditioned loyal against the odds. The product-related attributes are not so relevant in this enduring relationship (Bauer et al., 2008; Bauer et al, 2004; Smith, Stewart, 2007; Tapp, 2004; Bristow, Sebastian, 2001; Park, Stuart, 1997).

- Sport Team Identification construct (Wann and Branscombe, 1993; Sutton, et al., 1997; Milne and McDonald, 1999; Van Leeuwen, Quick, and Daniel, 2002; Wakefield, 2007), is referred to identification with a sport team and its sport performance, but in our case fans feel *all kind of results* (sport-related and managerial-related) as if were their own goals. Therefore, we use *club brand identification* as a more broad and deep identifying behavior, not only related to self-esteem. Indeed, BASKing and CORFing attitude are not observed in our case, the fans are unconditioned loyal, they enjoy or despair for results but in case of strong unsatisfaction too, their relationship is not at issue.
- It explores consumer-brand relationship in the particular context of football fandom to understand motivations that create unwavering and permanent relation. The findings of this research could also give evidences for understanding the extremely loyal relationship basis between consumers and their preferred brands, in others product categories.

Furthermore, the paper has methodological contribution in application of phenomenology in marketing research. We argue the topic needs to be enriched, building on an understanding of how consumers actually experience this phenomenon in their lifeworld, returning to concrete and refraining from any pre-given framework (Groenewald, 2004). Adopting phenomenology, marketing can enlarge, deepen, build theory based around consumer lived experiences (Thompson, 1997; Goulding, 2005).

Limitations and further research

The research has some limitations having implications with future research.

Some limitations coming up from the methodology of our research (Thompson, 1997; Groenewald, 2004; Goulding, 2005). Phenomenology frames personal narrative experience in a context that involves an interplay of people, cultures, environments and objects. This research on consumer-brand relationship is conducted in the particular context of football fandom, therefore the enlargement of the results in more general context is a limitation. Some comparisons are needed in further research. Additional academic interests are pointed out on transferring fans emotions to brand sponsoring football club, and their managerial effects.

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