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Raquel Theobald, Mirela Santos and Flávio Brambilla

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SPORTS MARKETING: FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS OF SOCCER FANS IN BRAZIL (AN ABSTRACT)

Raquel Rejane Theobald (raquelrtheobald@gmail.com)

Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul (UNISC), Brasil.

Mirela Jeffman dos Santos (mirelajs@unisc.br)

Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul (UNISC), Brasil.

Flávio Régio Brambilla (flaviobrambilla@terra.com.br / flaviobr@unisc.br)

Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul (UNISC), Brasil.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport is an exponent in the society, providing opportunities for leisure, health and integration, also providing group identity (AYROSA; SAUERBRONN, 2004), especially soccer, which is the sport that receives the most attention from Brazilians (PLASTINA, 2007). Brazil is the fifth largest sports market, standing out among the other countries for having already held the biggest sporting events such as FIFA World Cup in 2014 and Olympics in 2016 (UFRJ, 2016). Soccer allows people to identify themselves with the team motivated by several factors (TOLEDO; ANDRADE, 2014). The product of a football club goes far beyond the entertainment provided to the fan; it involves the excitement and pleasure of belonging to a group (GARCIA et al., 2015).

Although this modality of sport is widespread in Brazil, scientific studies in the area are lacking in the literature, being limited to primary or descriptive approaches on the subject (MAZZEI et al., 2013). This gap has already been pointed out by authors such as Sauerbronn, Ayrosa and Barros (2009), De Lourdes and Bacha Neto (2014) and Flecha and Pontello (2015). From this perspective, it is necessary to investigate consumer behavior in the sportive context of soccer, as well as how feelings and emotions are involved in this context, as research on emotions and consumption can serve as guidance for managerial marketing decisions (SAUERBRONN, AYROSA, BARROS, 2009). The present study aimed to analyze the feelings and emotions of soccer fans in Brazil.

BACKGROUND

Consumption is a symbolic need that the individual has with society, through which social relationships and life experiences are expressed (ROCHA; BARROS, 2006). Consumption consists not only of utilitarian issues, but also of aspects that contribute to social relations themselves (McCRACKEN, 2003). In this sense, it is necessary to initially discuss the particularities of consumption, as this practice also corresponds to a social experience (AGUIAR; FARIAS, 2014). Emotions are fundamental to consumers' actions, especially in sports, because the characteristics of the sports product make the purchase more focused on sentimental rather than rational characteristics (FAGUNDES; VEIGA, 2013).

The sport has the ability to express various emotions such as love, hate, anger, joy, tranquility, expectation, anguish, relief, among others that are expressed during the match, in a certain play, movement or result (ZUNINO, 2006). Manifestations such as these are present in the range of consumer judgments that wait, wait and see the sport, interspersing feelings of pain and pleasure through their sensitive perceptions (HOLLANDA, 2009).

In this study, the feeling is understood as an affective state or a reaction in certain situations, involving the individual and the consumption. Emotion refers to one or many feelings and thoughts, psychological and biological states, enabling numerous action trends, and their main feelings are: anger, sadness, fear, pleasure, love, surprise, disgust and shame (GOLEMAN, 1995). Fans are individuals who identify themselves as sympathizers, spectators or supporters of any sport regardless of the way that person exercises such identification (ZUNINO, 2006).

Cheering is an unquestioned activity, often characterized as alienating, giving the fan a winning condition (HRYNIEWICZ, 2008). In this sense, the fans are highly susceptible to alienation, are irrational and emotionally unstable, making sports an escape from reality and their personal frustrations (HOLLANDA, 2009). In the practice of cheering “multiple and negotiated forms of symbolic appropriation are at stake if taken from the solitary point of view of the wills that inhabit each fan”, as it adheres to the team unconditionally until the mortal hatred for a given opponent, and the circumstances vary according to historical recollections (TOLEDO, 2010, p. 183). This audience belongs to a psychographic rather than geographical segmentation because there are fans of the same team in different regions and the division is based on interests and how people lead their lives (CHURCHILL; PETER, 2005). However, it should be noted how much the geographical location of the individual contributes to a choice of a team, as fans will be more likely to choose teams in their region. Also noteworthy is the influence of parents and relatives on team selection, often materialized through an official object, for example t-shirts, mugs (MULLIN; HARDY; SUTTON, 2004).

The intensity of the fan's involvement with his team defines his commitment and can be reflected in three ways: (I) Behavioral, which includes the fans' activities when cheering; (II) Cognitive, which refers to the search for information about your team by the media in order to know more about your team; and (III) Affective, which corresponds to the attitudes, feelings and emotions that a consumer has with a particular sport (MULLIN, HARDY; SUTTON, 2004). When a fan identifies strongly with a team, it will influence their behavior and beliefs, being responsible for their main social afflictions in various activities of their daily lives (GIBSON, WILLMIG; HOLDNAK, 2002). The aspects that constitute a fan are what define their involvement and commitment, determining their consumption habits (HATZIDAKIS, 2007). Fans that have a well-defined relationship with a team will support it, regardless of wins and losses (FISHER; WAKEFIELD, 1998).

Fans that have more peaceful and friendly behavior towards other fans tend to play more games, acquire more team items, and spend more substantial values with the team (DOS REIS ALBA; LIONELLO, 2015). This audience joins the team club “aiming to share the sense of belonging, supremacy, emotions and other sensations provided by the performance of their team” (PASSION; KOWALSKI, 2015, p.59). Social relations that happen in the group of fans produce emotions (KEMPER, 2000). This emotion involves the Brazilian soccer fan in order to enable “creation of emotional bonds with their clubs and enables sports brands to perform actions that transfer the emotional bond to the brand” (BENAZZI; BORGES, 2009, p.12). Sports in business starts from a premise that humans put sport in a special place in life and for this reason invest financially in activities that surround it (BENAZZI; BORGES, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Given the extent of feelings and emotions that can influence the behavior of soccer fans and the need to understand the phenomenon studied in depth, we decided to conduct a qualitative exploratory research, following Gibbs (2009) precepts, with interpretative approach (PRODANOV; FREITAS, 2013). Data collection involved in-depth interviews supported by a semi-structured script (FISCHER, CASTILHOS; FONSECA, 2014) with male Brazilian soccer fans, who consider themselves fans for at least 10 years. The response saturation criterion indicated that eight informants were enough to understand the phenomenon (THIRY-CHERQUES, 2009; GASKELL, 2010).

Interviews were conducted at each respondent's residence to provide an environment in which they were comfortable. The reports were recorded using an audio recorder and a notebook (GIBBS, 2009). After data collection, interviews were transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis, following recommendations from Gil (2010) and from Caregnato and Mutti (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research were interviewed eight soccer fans, aged 25 to 52 years old, residing in Brazil, with a minimum level of higher education, and who declared themselves soccer fans since childhood. The fans reported proximity to their soccer team, being possible to realize the importance that it has in the daily life and in the lives of the interviewees. This relationship brings aspects of loyalty, with the search for information and game monitoring as evidence. Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007) point out that the consumption of sports implies several types of involvement such as playing, watching, listening, reading and buying. Among the many attitudes of fans can be highlighted how much this audience is also dedicated to watching television broadcasts, listening to radio comments, reading sports pages of newspapers and specialized websites (HORNE, 2006). It is possible to perceive different types of involvement and intensity in the relationship between the fans and their team, part of the interviewees only stops watching and listening to matches, some go to the match and follow daily news in different sources of communication and others, share and experience several moments with friends, supporting the relationship established with the soccer team.

Behavioral characteristics of fans result in a constant oscillation of feelings and emotions. According to Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw (1999), devoted fans have a very strong emotional connection with their teams developing a high emotional bond to the point of overcoming geographical barriers and momentary outcomes. This fact, in particular, can be noticed in the fan's speech when highlight that interrupts the activity that is doing to accompany the soccer team, even if it does not reside in the state/place to which the team refers.

The feelings and emotions of the fans surfaced throughout the interview. Notable was the excitement, the sparkle in the eyes, the flutter in the chair, the trembling of the legs and the excitement of the fans when reporting experience with the team, as well as talking about their relationship with the club and football. These feelings were as positive as joy, love, pleasure, victory, excitement; as negative, as fear, disappointment, sadness, anger. To better understand these differences in feelings, respondents were asked to report a positive experience they had with their team, some remarkable episode that caused them joy and pleasure. And later, some negative situation, which represented sadness or frustration. During the rescue of the positive moments, the fans brought numerous clearly satisfying situations to themselves.

Specific trips to the stadium, the first time met or important decisions were often brought as moments of strong adrenaline, euphoria and excitement. Opportunities like these also allowed the interviewee to identify with other fans of the same team and together share the same feeling while cheering and supporting their team. The reported episodes refer to different moments of the interviewee's life, some dealing with childhood rescues, others important achievements of his team during adolescence and others about more recent moments. Importantly, regardless of the phase in which the interviewee was, the feelings and emotions were present enough to represent that moment as an important and intense experience. Feelings and emotions were manifested in various ways, sometimes from panic to happiness and from desperation to adrenaline. As it was an exclusively positive moment, the opportunity to feel euphoria through a goal was present, allowing the fan to vent their feelings and emotions in the face of that episode. Feelings of suppression with a certain victory, in turn, resulted in an explosion of emotions, specifically pride.

When fans were asked about a negative moment they experienced about their team and their feelings at the moment, closed and sad appearances prevailed. The reports provided rescues of moments such as losses, the team's fall in championship rankings and poor performance, which are represented by various emotions. Goleman (1995) clarifies that emotion refers to one or many feelings and thoughts, psychological and biological states, enabling numerous action trends. Emotions are also considered as processes that involve an assessment of the individual around a lived situation, implying acceptance or not by the individual. Several individual manifestations could be perceived in both contexts in the interviews; both in the positive and negative moments, and the distinction of feelings and emotions in both moments became evident. Emotion is precisely these variables behaviors, joy, love, fear, fury, sadness, shame and embarrassment (FINEMAN, 2001). Discussing specifically about sport, it has the ability to allow the manifestation of several emotions. These can be expressed in the face of the fans involvement with their team, during the match, in a certain play, movement or result (ZUNINO, 2006).

The types of emotion oscillated between positive and negative aspects, but regardless of the moment that aroused the feeling, prevailed positive emotion, love, passion and feeling of reciprocity, which were the most present in the speeches of the fans. The emotion present in the interviewee's life involves the soccer fan in order to enable the creation of emotional bonds with their clubs (BENZAZZI; BORGES, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

This study aimed to analyze the feelings and emotions of soccer fans. Through the interpretative qualitative research, it was possible to notice how much soccer is present in society, how enthusiastic and devoted are the fans, supporters or simply viewers. It is noticed that the fan's involvement with the team is supported by different feelings such as love, hate and happiness, from the important practices adopted in daily life and the certain loyalty that exists between the fans before the team. Such emotions eventually involve the Brazilian soccer fan, enabling the creation of emotional bonds with his team. Identifying the importance of sport as an economic sector, it became evident how the fans were loyal consumers of sports products and services. Combining this reality with the discovery of the influence of feelings and emotions on the behavior of soccer fans, clubs are encouraged to reflect on possible ways and alternatives to engage fans in actions, team events, matches, products and service offerings. Since these fans are driven by feelings and emotions, they tend not to leave the team making it an integral part of their lives.

It is suggested for further studies to interview more fans, as it is believed that the greater representativeness of respondents could enrich the study, adding new stories and sharing feelings and emotions. It is also suggested to consider the female audience in order to make a comparison with the results of this study. In order to continue the studies of sports marketing, it is advisable to perform an analysis of the results of this study with the service marketing initiatives and relationship of soccer clubs with their fans.

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