

Assesing the value of sport licensed products though their meanings and exploring the impact on sport consumer behavior

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Aim of paper

The aim of this work is to develop and test a scale intended to measure the meanings embedded in sport licensed products in an effort to capture the value those items have for their owners. The research also explores the dimensional structure of such a scale and investigates relationships between the meanings of licensed products and other aspects of sport consumer behavior.

Theoretical background

Licensing has been defined as "a value-adding process that provides revenue-generating opportunities via the conveyance of the right to use another organization's intellectual properties for commercial purposes" (Fullerton, 2010, p. 345). Licensing agreements are significant revenue sources for sport properties, particularly for those based in North America (Sports Business Resource Guide & Fact Book, 2009; 2012). The popularity of sport licensed products extends beyond any utilitarian purpose as these items can assist fans in displaying their affiliation with and expressing their loyalty toward a team or athlete, connecting with other team supporters, or making a fashion statement (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007).

In the sport literature, consumption of sport licensed products has been included in investigations on fan behavior, fan identification and loyalty, even branding (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976; Funk & Pastore, 2000; Gladden & Milne, 1999; Kwon & Trail, 2005; Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2005; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). More directly, researchers have looked at how purchase of licensed products is influenced by impulse buying tendencies and fan identification (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; 2006), consumers' perceptions of value of the licensed products (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007), and perceived value of the manufacturer (Kwon, Kim, & Mondello, 2008). However, the value of those items as captured through the meanings they hold for their owners is rather unexplored. Furthermore, the review of literature revealed lack of standardized measures for the variable of 'meaning of licensed products' as well as inadequate understanding of its conceptualization.

Inspired by a rich consumer behavior literature that has extensively investigated the topic of meanings in possessions (e.g., Belk, 1988; Ligas, 2000; Richins, 1994; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991), there have been a few efforts to

expand the scope of sport licensing studies by exploring the meanings embedded in those products. Most notably, Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou and Damtsiou (2010) uncovered a variety of symbolic meanings reflected in Olympic licensed products, including notions of national identity and political history and achievement. That study offered evidence that sport licensed products carry symbolic meanings for their owners as well as meanings of experiential or functional/utilitarian nature, albeit at a much lower degree.

Research design

Study 1

The goal of *Study 1* was to provide an in-depth understanding about the meanings attached to the display of sport licensed products. Attendees at a National Football League event (USA) ($N=135$) were asked what it meant to wear team licensed items on game day and on other occasions. Their responses unveiled various public-symbolic and private-symbolic meanings expressing values of social relationships and connectedness and personal values and identity, respectively.

Study 2

Building on *Study 1*, another set of qualitative data was collected in order to capture additional personal and social meanings attached to sport licensed items. One hundred four ($N=104$) undergraduate students (USA), who were in their majority Caucasian young males and avid sport fans, were asked to record what they considered to be their most prized team licensed item and to explain why that item was important to them. Responses revealed six sources of meaning coded as (1) Connection with favorite team or player — Expression of support, pride, passion, (2) Unique event in team's history — Celebration of success, accomplishments, (3) Display of tie with team or region to others, (4) Relationship with event in one's personal history, (5) Gift — Importance of gift giver, and (6) Rare item — Hard to obtain — Financial value.

Study 3

In *Study 3*, a Scale for the Value of Sport Licensed Products (SVSLP) was developed to enable a quantitative analysis of the meanings of those products. In addition to the psychometric testing of the scale and the exploration of its dimensional structure, this study (in progress) will also explore relationships of the dimensions of this scale with three sport consumption variables: intention to buy sport licensed products in the future, intention to wear sport licensed products in the future, and willingness to pay more for official sport licensed products. These variables were selected as they represent influential constructs in sport consumer behavior literature (e.g., Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2006).

Intended contributions

The results of this study are expected to enhance existing theory by offering a more comprehensive understanding of the sources of meaning that give value to sport licensed products. Furthermore, sport organizations and their

marketing departments can benefit by a more informed and more strategic approach to their licensing programs.

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