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Exploring sport brand double jeopardy: The link between team market share and attitudinal loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Marketers are charged with the responsibility of attracting consumers and encouraging loyalty for their brands. Double jeopardy, a marketing law observed across numerous product and service settings, contends that loyalty is largely influenced by a brand's market share. There have been suggestions that sport may be one of the few areas immune to such effects, providing researchers with an opportunity to test how sport brand loyalty may be impacted by market share. The current research capitalises on this opportunity by assessing the effects of market share on attitudinal loyalty reported by a sample of 794 Australian sport fans. ANOVA tests revealed that fans of high market share brands displayed higher levels of attitudinal loyalty towards their favourite teams in comparison to small market share team fans. Further tests revealed that differences existed in terms of the brand association perceptions held by high and small market share team fans, and how these contributed to predicting attitudinal loyalty. Consequently, sport marketers should be cognisant of double jeopardy effects when evaluating sport brands and formulating marketing strategies, though future research is needed to determine the full applicability of double jeopardy within the sport context.

1. Introduction

In order to better assess brand performance and to build relationships with consumers, marketers must understand the factors that shape consumer behaviour. Established empirical generalisations, or laws, are based on a phenomenon being observed across a number of contexts and provide marketers with a base to formulate effective marketing strategies (Dawes, 2008; Hand, 2011). One of these laws, double jeopardy, proposes that small market share brands not only have fewer buyers than their larger competitors, but that the few buyers they do have are also slightly less loyal (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt, & Barwise, 1990). This effect results from small share brands typically having lower levels of distribution and awareness, meaning that their buyers find other brands easier to buy and easier to recall, leading to the observed lower loyalty (Sharp, 2010).

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Researchers have theorised that sport may be one of the few areas where double jeopardy does not apply (Gladden & Funk, 2001; Sharp, 2010), but it is not a context that has been investigated in detail. Sport has been described as a unique consumer setting given the highly emotional relationship that exists between fans and their preferred teams (Shank & Beasley, 1998). From a theoretical perspective this emotional connection may explain why sport might resist double jeopardy effects; however no existing research has yet tested this claim. Therefore, opportunities to extend understandings of the sport consumer exist. This paper acknowledges Chalip's (2006) and Fink's (2012) suggestion that sport management research that contributes most strongly to the theoretical development of the discipline is that which has the sport context at the core of its application. Specifically, we explored potential differences in the brand association perceptions and attitudinal loyalty exhibited by fans of small and high market share teams within a single market. Although not an exhaustive double jeopardy test, the current research offers a starting point to explore the validity of sport brand double jeopardy and provides advancements to sport management theory and practice.

This manuscript is presented in the following format. First, a literature review discussing double jeopardy, loyalty, and brand associations is provided. Second, an overview of the research context is presented where high market share and small market share sport teams are conceptualised. Third, the methods chosen to guide the research are described. Finally, the results, discussion and implications are included along with an acknowledgement of limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Double jeopardy

The term double jeopardy refers to the multiple challenges faced by small brands in comparison to their larger competitors. Specifically, double jeopardy contends that a small brand is at a disadvantage to a larger competitor in terms of their smaller number of buyers and the fact that its buyers tend to be less loyal (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Hand, 2011). The two effects are related in that purchasers of the popular brand will be more likely to find their preferred brand at the time of purchase due to wider distribution channels, whereas those who buy a lesser known brand may be forced to choose the popular brand if they cannot locate their usual choice (Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Sharp, 2010).

Double jeopardy effects have been observed across a number of diverse consumption settings extending back to the early 1960s. Some industries found to experience double jeopardy effects include: comic strip and radio announcer preference, instant coffee choice, television series viewership, newspaper readership, sanitary product buying, soap purchasing and airline gasoline contracts (c.f., Chaudhuri, 1995; Donthu, 1994; Ehrenberg et al., 1990; Martin Jnr, 1973; McPhee, 1963). More recent validation has been provided in unique settings such as: Chinese groceries and hair products (Uncles & Kwok, 2008; Yang, Bi, & Zhou, 2005), Australian beer (Dawes, 2008), Thailand car brand choice (Bennett & Graham, 2010) and the UK performing arts industry (Hand, 2011). This replication and validation across a variety of contexts indicates double jeopardy would likely apply across most consumer settings. However, researchers have speculated there may remain contexts which are immune to double jeopardy (Dowling & Uncles, 1997; Sharp, 2010). Thus, researching previously unexplored contexts further tests the generalisability of double jeopardy (e.g., Dawes, 2008).

2.1.1. Double jeopardy exceptions

Dowling and Uncles (1997) proposed that whilst the repeat purchasing of most brands may be predicted in accordance with double jeopardy, certain brands may be immune due to environmental influences. Such brands have been described as those occupying a niche in the marketplace, those with unusually high loyalty and those with situation specific use; termed niche, super-loyalty and change-of-pace brands respectively (Dowling & Uncles, 1997).

Niche brands are those which are small but possess a higher number of buyers who are more loyal than expected (e.g., early versions of subculture influenced brands like Monster Energy drink). Super-loyalty brands represent popular brands with higher than expected purchase rates (e.g., Apple's focus on design and functionality has created cult-like following amongst buyers, although data suggest that they deviate only slightly from expected repurchase rates (Sharp, 2010)). Change-of-pace brands are those which report high market share but are purchased less frequently than double jeopardy would suggest due to situational confounds (e.g., a person who would ordinarily bull full strength alcoholic drinks may buy a low alcohol brand in situations where they are required to drive) (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). For a diagrammatical representation of the interaction between the loyalty and market share enjoyed by these brands in relation to double jeopardy brands, please see Fig. 1.

Although the uniqueness of niche, super-loyalty and change-of-pace brands may make them immune to double jeopardy effects they are far less prevalent than the brands which are governed by the double jeopardy law (Dowling & Uncles, 1997). However, the sport context may be exceptional in this respect.

2.1.2. Sport brand double jeopardy

Sport leagues typically contain both "Star" and "Underdog" teams with varying levels of success, popularity and subsequent market share (Koenigstorfer, Groeppel-Klein, & Kunkel, 2010). The English Premier League for example contains high market share teams such as Manchester United and Arsenal, along with small market share teams such as Wigan Athletic. Despite the disparity of market share present in sport leagues, anecdotal evidence suggests that underdog teams