

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

The Relationship between Regional Identification and Collegiate Athletic Apparel Brand Preference

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50-minute poster presentation

(including questions)

Overview

In the competitive worlds of college athletic sponsorship and brand recognition, geography continues to play an ever-increasing role in determining consumers' brand awareness, preference, and consumption (Barker, 2017). The three largest players in American college athletic apparel (Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour) continue to wage turf wars on securing "Power 5" conference school sponsorship deals, which has led to over-spending and an increased focus on regional brand presence (Jensen, Wakefield, Cobbs, & Turner, 2016). This shift to regional target marketing has resulted largely from a greater understanding that geographic regions develop their own brand personalities and preferences and lead to specific team, apparel, and even player loyalty segmented by region (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008, Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). In addition, research has shown that sponsors' proximity to target markets is only somewhat positively correlated to brand positioning, thus there is more urgency for college athletic apparel brands to target other regions of the United States in an effort to expand their brand recognition and sales (Murphy, Moscardo, & Benckendorff, 2007). As a result, the three largest college athletic apparel brands (Nike, Adidas, and Under Armour) have had to enhance their marketing strategies by being more relatable to consumers through human characteristics and preferences such as devotion to their favorite schools and identification with regions of the United States (Braunstein & Ross, 2010).

These new ways of identifying, relating, and marketing to consumers has changed the business model of college athletic sponsorship and led to escalating sponsorship deals with a geographic-specific intention as the foundation. In the summer of 2016, Under Armour (hoping to expand their brand presence in California) secured a record-setting athletic apparel sponsorship deal with UCLA for \$280 million over fifteen years and at the same time pried the Pac-12 school away from Adidas (Barrabi, 2016). This type of aggressive spending and geographic marketing in college athletic sponsorship deals is the background for this study. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to research whether region of the United States of America impacts consumer brand preferences and identification with the athletic apparel brand. This study was pertinent from a sport marketing and sponsorship perspective given this current business trend (amongst college athletic apparel brands) of targeting new markets based on geographic region, and whether this model of cluster marketing (by state or region) bolsters brand success amongst consumers.

Theoretical Framework

Social identity theory (SIT) posits that people tend to classify themselves and others into social categories, such as religious affiliation, age group, or gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). The sport industry in particular represents a business sector with high levels of social identification between consumers, apparel brands, and their products (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2015). Accordingly, we predict that collegiate athletic apparel brand preferences will be influenced by geographic region and regional identification.

Method

To assess our prediction, we will obtain a convenience sample of 400 U.S. college sport fans using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in April of 2017. Respondents will be paid \$0.75 for a complete and accurate survey submission. This descriptive study will rely heavily on ANOVA, and data will be analyzed using SPSS. Analyses will be completed in May, 2017.

Anticipated Contribution

Boston, MA

November 1-3, 2017

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This research will evaluate the extent to which the region in which a fan lives influences brand preferences through the lens of social identification. These results will be meaningful from a practitioner perspective, as athletic apparel brands are increasingly relying on region or clustering strategies. In addition, this study will provide a new and clear academic connection between regional identification and brand preference within the context of collegiate athletic apparel sponsorship research. The research will also bolster our understanding of the applicability of social identity theory to the context of geographic region and collegiate sport.

References

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