From Image to Loyalty: Unraveling the Role of Identification and Engagement in Sports Fan Behavior

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Abstract:

Customer engagement has emerged as a vital focus in marketing, offering organizations various benefits. In the sports industry, the unique emotional bonds fans form with their teams may drive engagement behaviors that can benefit both the organization and its community. However, its antecedents and consequences remain insufficiently researched. In this study, the relationship between club image, team identification, fan engagement, and fan loyalty is explored in a serial mediation model. Based on an online survey among fans of a professional handball club (N = 577), results show that the positive effects of the club image dimensions (image attitude and attributes) on fan loyalty are (partially) mediated by team identification and fan engagement (proactive support and performance tolerance). By addressing the identified gaps, the study provides theoretical insights into sports fan behavior and offers practical recommendations for sports clubs to understand fan engagement and enhance fan loyalty.