

Using SWOT Analysis to Solve The Problem of Losing Fans in Boston Celtics

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Abstract. The Boston Celtics is one of the basketball teams in the national basketball association (the NBA). But they encounter a lethal problem after they lose the championship in 2022, which is the loss of fans. Moreover, fans' loyalty is an important indicator of whether the brand is perfect. If most people are satisfied with many products of this brand, that means more and more consumers will come in and recommend this brand to another person. This paper aimed to research how can Boston Celtics deal with the problem of losing fans. The strengths and weaknesses of the Celtics team and measures to be adopted were performed by SWOT analysis. On the other hand, this research concludes that the advantages of the Celtics are their great brand image. In contrast, the disadvantages are little brand association. Thus, modeling an appropriate image of the brand and improving the popularity of Celtics on the Internet can catch people's attention. In the future study, the adoption that this paper can also apply in different realms rather than being used in sports.

Keywords: Celtics, Fans' loyalty, SWOT.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Boston Celtics is one of the basketball teams in the national basketball association, which was established in 1946 [1]. In these years, Celtics brought in many potential players and won seventeen NBA final championships [1]. In this case, their successful experience was attractive to many people. Especially in 1979-1992, legend star who was Larry bird in the NBA history [1]. His personal performance in the games brought many fans to the Celtics. But in recent years, the Celtics started to lose many followers. That's mainly because the Celtics entered the playoffs for eight consecutive years but stopped at the finals. It is undoubtedly that Boston Celtics is a powerful team, and it has a large fan base. However, continuous failure in playoffs shows that they are not more competitive than other teams, which disappoints its fans. In this case, more and more Celtics fans are prone to be fans of other strong teams, such as the Lakers, and the Golden State Warriors. Previous studies have reported that the competition in the regular season reflects the team performance, which in turn is related to the business performance of the company [2]. They also analyzed a sample of game results from January 1, 1987, to May 31, 1998 [2]. When the Boston Celtics won the games in the playoffs, the trading volume and volatility increased [2]. In general, team performance relates to the currency of fans. In 2022, the Celtics had a chance to enter the finals. But the gap between Celtic and another team was exposed. They lost the game, and many fans didn't have any motivation to support the Celtics. As a result, many fans rejected to be the fans of the Celtics and they were disappointed in the leading star of the team. Some extreme fans even burned their jersey for venting anger. In addition, it also hindered the data of tickets, so the Boston Celtics is facing serious problems. The research plan wants to provide a conceptual framework based on the loss of Celtic fans and investigates how they can increase or maintain their followers.

1.2 Research Gap

However, as technology rapidly increases and the information age expands, the internet and media play a more and more important role in marketing a sports team, which is a shortage for the Boston Celtics since the team is losing recognition on many websites and media. For example, on the application Twitter, the Boston Celtics only owns 3986243 fans [3]. By sharp contrast, other famous teams like the Los Angeles Lakers owns 10887987 fans which is about three times as much as the Celtics owns [4]. Although the Celtics is one of the dark horses of the championship, it still holds a relatively small number of fans. Thus, a conclusion can be naturally drawn that the Celtics face the situation that the recognition and attention are lost severely on the internet and media. Because of this lack of attention and recognition, the Boston Celtics loses fans' loyalty increasingly. This negative situation indicates that if the Celtics pay more attention and devote more energy and finance to using effective and efficient strategies and ways of increasing the attraction and recognition on the internet and media, the loyalty of fans may be enhanced and improved. However, unexpectedly, the internet and the media never have been thought of as influential and critical factors in the improvement of consumer loyalty to the Celtics. Thus, to improve the consumer loyalty of the Celtics and because of the occurrence of the research gap, this paper will focus on this issue to fill the gap: How can the Celtics find effective and efficient ways and methods to improve consumer loyalty?

1.3 Fill The Gap

This paper will make research whether the Boston Celtics can be an effective influence and key factor to increase the loyalty of the Celtics consumers if they get enough attention and promotion from the media on the Internet. Due to the lack of network marketing and media attention and recognition in this era of rapid development of the Internet, it will be a fatal blow to a team, followed by a large loss of fans. Demonstrate whether such a hypothesis holds by comparing other teams with multiple media attention and communication. This paper will first review the theories of loyalty, summarize the definition of loyalty through literature references, what are the criteria for loyalty, and what are the factors that affect loyalty. Secondly, the paper conducted a comprehensive analysis of the research object, the Boston Celtics, using the SWOT method, and finally drew a corresponding conclusion. After that conclusion, at the end of the essay, this paper will mainly discuss detecting why the Celtics are facing massive fan loss and how to grow fans and gain their loyalty and provide a summary of the entire paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition

The loyalty of the fans (consumer loyalty) had been an aspect of interests for a period in a particular range of fields covering consumer behavior, sociology, and marketing [5, 6]. The first serious discussions and analyses of the notion of fans' loyalty emerged in 1923 considered by Copeland in a study of "brand insistence", the first definition of the term was that as the brand has been favorable, the recognized brand would be chosen from among other unrecognized brands, and the force which makes this relationship happen is fan loyalty [7]. The original reason for this term was to research how to make more sales of the products. Although research on loyalty has a long tradition dating back almost a hundred years (Copeland, 1923), the loyalty of fans remains a very current line of research. The concept of loyalty comes from the literature about customer behavior [8].

2.2 Important Results

One of the earliest research projects on consumer loyalty looked at the area of loyalty segmentation in 1988 which is a theory applied to find different fan groups relating to different kinds of products by dividing the whole big market into specifically distinctive groups of buyers based on their special characteristics [9]. Consumer loyalty also looked at the point of the area of brand loyalty in 1989,

regarding the repeat purchase as an influential factor, which emphasizes the significance of using different ways and methods to increase purchases and sales [6]. However, as society developed, there was a more complete aspect, incorporating not only the behavior but also the cognitive and attitudinal component, which was presented by Pritchard in 1991 [10]. Then, in 1997, a study concluded that fan loyalty is related to an individual's behavior and commitment to a sport, team, or player and commitment is related to three factors: cognitive complexity, spirit, and resistance to change [11]. Subsequently, in 2008, Heere and Dickson applied Attitudinal Loyalty to Team Scale (ALTS) in some studies as a measure of team loyalty [12]. ALTS is a four-point measurement of the psychological relationship between a person and a particular team. As such, the scale is a one-dimensional measure that separates the inner psychological connections from the behavioral responses to measure attitudinal loyalty [12, 13]. Moreover, as of 2010, Worthington et al. devised a three-dimensional approach, breaking attitudinal loyalty into two subcomponents of emotional and cognitive loyalty [14]. With a sequence of development in this field and the advancement in psychology and neurology, the researchers are allowed to measure and excavate fan loyalty deeper.

Chen established in 2001 that brand loyalty is characterized as a strong commitment to continue making recurrent purchases of a product or preferential use of a service in the face of contextual factors and initiatives that could modify consumer behavior [15]. Meanwhile, it's also relevant to the definition of consumer loyalty: customer loyalty is the term used to define an ongoing emotional connection between a company and its customers, as shown by the willingness of consumers to interact with producers and make repeat purchases as opposed to doing business with rivals. A customer's pleasant interaction with a business result in loyalty, which contributes to the development of trust. Customers' purchase decisions and brand loyalty are explained by brand associations and brand recollections [15]. For instance, in a large-scale study, Gladden and Funk investigated at how 929 fans of professional sports related to brand associations and brand loyalty. They created a prototype and showed that among fans, brand-related elements (attributes, attitudes, and rewards) and brand loyalty are related [16]. Another study examined the function of brands in the German professional sports team sector by Bauer et al. and Bauer et al. The results of the study show that the image of the brand association dimension generates brand equity and is a key factor in successfully attracting fan loyalty [17, 18]. Moreover, in a study, they examined the connection between brand associations and fan loyalty in professional sports and found that there was a positive correlation between brand association characteristics and supporters' brand loyalty [19, 20]. Rio et al. regarded brand association as the key to obtaining brand equity creation and management. Strong brand equity therefore denotes satisfied customers with pleasant memories and feelings that are vigorous about the brand in their minds. Examining brand correlations among sports team fans is important to provide an established framework. Brand association is a considerable factor in building brand loyalty and brand equity [21].

To determine the effects of consumer brand loyalty is significantly influenced by a strong brand image. According to Fortunato, the firm can boost overall value by using consistent brand management tactics [22]. These values translate into revenue for the team or organization. In 2005, a paper published and research on fan loyalty in Germany: Does a team's brand image matter? It's a great case. In the thesis, it mentioned that brand image is considered an important prerequisite for loyal fans. Therefore, Bauer's study employed a sample of 1300 fans of the German Bundesliga football team to investigate the relationship between these constructs. In addition to validating this link, the causal model also demonstrates the link between the club's primary brand image constituents, namely characteristics and income. Fan loyalty is more influenced by a brand's non-product features than by its product-related attributes [23]. For another, the drivers of football fan loyalty in Australia have evidence of impact on team brand image, fan engagement, satisfaction and lasting engagement. To evaluate the central structure of their teams, a convenience sample of Australian League football supporters filled out a self-administered survey on paper and a pen. 207 participants throughout all were drawn from a significant institution on Australia's east coast. The findings demonstrate that cumulative fan satisfaction and team brand image are both impacted by fan participation, as well as the other way around. Each of these factors has an impact on both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty [24]. "Testing

the impact of athlete brand image qualities on fan loyalty," according to the study. Sports marketing academics are currently conducting extensive research on managing athlete brand perception. The purpose of this study is to investigate how athlete brand image characteristics affect fan loyalty. An efficient marketing plan can be created to establish favorable perception of the athlete in order to boost fan loyalty, including the athlete's performance on the field such as athletic skills, playing style and excellent sports and off-field performance. Moreover, the interaction with fans, community engagement, public relations and philanthropy [25]. Therefore, according to the above various studies, it is shown that no matter whether it is the soccer fans or athletes, brand image is closely associated with fan loyalty, and they are developing in a positive direction, just like the relationship between dependent variables and independent variables.

2.3 Summary

Collectively, the previous studies mentioned above outline a critical role for brand association, brand recall and brand image, these played a crucial role in consumer loyalty, especially in terms of fan loyalty. They are highly correlated and can be the primary factors in consumer loyalty, and it is a particularly hot topic in the sports world. This is because the businesses know the importance of consumer loyalty and these consumers can not only create higher profits for the company or brand but also enhance the competitiveness of the brand. The injection of customers will enhance the brand image and attract more visitors. To boost the brand's competitive advantage and take it to a heightened level. However, the influencing factors of sports team fan brand loyalty were examined. Unfortunately, unlike many studies abroad programs, this field has not received the attention it deserves in Iran. As a result, the purpose of this survey is to explore how brand association factors and fan brand loyalty interact in the professional football leagues of Iran. Club managers may find it to be a beneficial tool for making strategic decisions [26].

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The utilization of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach to fan loyalty to the Boston Celtics. A SWOT analysis is primarily used in this topic. SWOT analysis is a market strategy tool to compare the competition of two groups. This analysis comprises internal and external considerations [27]. "Strength" and "weakness" are internal factors, "strength" means the advantages that an organization possesses when they are competing with others [27]. In this case, organizations can utilize goodness to win against their rival. In contrast, "weakness" indicates the drawback of an organization [27]. These shortcomings may lead to team failure [27]. Therefore, it's significant to comprehend the disadvantages of content. Regarding external factors, "opportunities" are facts that the entity benefits [27]. On the other hand, "threaten" are problems that the entity suffers [27]. Meanwhile, a SWOT analysis of a business and its rivals may focus on forming a logical framework to be successful. This analytic technique can assess the feasibility of methods and integrate them [28]. And provide some ideas for theory building [28]. These elements are related to the topic—Boston Celtics. Because the management of the team is the absolute factor of success.

3.2 Boston Celtics

Boston Celtics was established in 1946 and located in TD garden. In the 20th century, it experienced the glory of the Dynasty since it had many famous superstars. Especially in the period of Larry Bird, his talent and skill made him win many championships and attract many fans [1]. Moreover, Ray Allen, Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce promoted the three giants to compete with Kobe Bryant on the same stage in 2007 [1]. This performance brought many fans to the Celtics and set a foundation for their long-standing culture. But many problems are exposed for now, which is the loss of fans. The first reason is Celtics didn't have a superstar in recent years. That means Celtic didn't pay more attention to modeling the personal image of the star. In this case, many NBA fans are not motivated. Besides,

the Celtics did not have an excellent record in games. They have always stopped in the playoffs, but never beyond themselves, which made fans more and more disappointed. In addition, the Celtics had many young players. That means no leader can conduct them and it's hard for them to advance. In general, fandom would not be interested in a fresh team.

3.3 SWOT Analysis

The strength of the Celtics is that the team has a great brand image. When the topic comes to the Celtics team, people will always think of many classic and wonderful features. For example, one of the features is the matching color of white and green which often comes to people's minds in the first place because the color of white and green is good-looking, and many people prefer to wear clothes of this kind of color. What is more, the sports equipment and products of the Celtics are very favorable and popular among young people. Thus, the brand image is a great and high-level influential factor that can play an important role in increasing the fan loyalty of the Celtics. As a case in point, on many shopping applications, although the sneakers of the Celtics match color are in very high prices and even are times over the debut price, there are always a big number of consumers who are fans of the Celtics are willing to buy the products as collections. For the fans of the Celtics are glad to pay a large proportion of the revenue to afford the products of the Celtics, the brand image can be demonstrated as an important factor in increasing fan loyalty.

3.3.2 Weakness

The weakness of the Celtics is that they have little brand association. The Celtics haven't had a superstar in recent years. That means the Celtics aren't paying more attention to the star's personal image. In this case, many NBA fans are not motivated. Besides, the Celtics don't have a great record in the tournament, causing fans more and more disappointment. These years, when talking about the Celtics, there are no superstars or even a single good play occurring in people's minds. Therefore, the lack of brand association is a critical and high-degree element that is causing the loss of fans for the Celtics. Here are an instance that fewer and fewer people pay attention to the Celtics and their plays than decades before. In addition, the number of spectators who watch the plays of the Celtics is also decreased sharply.

3.3.3 Opportunity

The profound history of the Celtics team can be an opportunity. The Boston Celtics is a team of the National Basketball Association founded in 1947. The Boston Celtics have won the NBA championship 17 times (1957, 1959-1966, 1968-1969, 1974, 1976, 1981, 1984, 1986, 2008), making them one of the most winning NBA teams in history. Moreover, the Celtics is also one of the earliest teams who played in the NBA. By contrast, many other teams in the NBA do not have such a long history that they are not as time-honored as the Celtics. However, the factor of the long history does not play a significant role in the increase of fan loyalty because many young people do not know a lot of the history of the Celtics and the older people who do know the history well are losing passion because the team is playing worse and worse.

3.3.4 Threaten

The Celtics faces the threat that the team is losing recognition and attention on many websites and media. In that case, when the team publishes important information online, fewer people will know and pay attention to learning. As a result, the loss of recognition and attention is a crucial factor influencing fan loyalty, which makes the fans not capable of knowing the news quicker. For example, on the application Twitter, the Boston Celtics only owns 3986243 fans [3]. By sharp contrast, other famous teams like the Los Angeles Lakers owns 10887987 fans which is about three times as much as the Celtics owns [4]. When the Los Angeles Lakers publish new information on the internet, their fans can see the post for the first time. Nevertheless, when the Boston Celtics send posts online, because of the less attention and the recognition in the media, the fans cannot see the posts the first time, which will disappoint the fans and reduce fan loyalty.

4. Results & Discussion

The Celtics, its overall strength is that it has a magnificent brand image which is the classic color the white and green. So that even though the jerseys or sneakers are quite expensive, there are still plenty of fans who will buy them and treasure them. Moreover, the Celtics is a team with a fairly long history and had won 17 championships in the NBA, which means everyone has a strong sense of identity with this team. The fans will conclude that even if they win the championship, they deserve it. Compared with other younger teams, the fans will not raise any doubts. However, the weakness of the Celtics is that it lacks brand association, it's hard to motivate the fans since there is no superstar to establish a great brand image.

All in all, the brand image and brand association have a considerable influence on fans' loyalty. Therefore, the Celtics can continue to launch and co-brand with other fashion brands, such as Stussy, Supreme and Off-White. Only by creating enough topics can the Celtics be guaranteed not to be overthrown by another team and also to keep the strength. Market the product as a fashion item so not only fans can buy it, but fashionistas, people who love fashion will buy it too. However, the Celtics have few brand associations since there is no superstar or event to create a topic. Thus, in order to make up for the flaw, the Celtics should sign someone who can boost the brand association. At present, signing Fanbo Zeng (a Chinese) is a great choice. Just this summer, he participated in the NBA trials. Although he was not selected, he has just graduated from high school. He is still young and has great potential, and he has a lot of time to cultivate in the later stage. Besides, he can also bring in a lot of attention, because, on the day he was acceding the NBA trial, a lot of Chinese people came to watch the audition whether he had entered the NBA or not, which greatly increased the ratings. Thus, if Celtics signs Fanbo Zeng, then it will probably attract lots of attention from the media, different teams and fans. Furthermore, the great thing is that the Celtics are a team with a long history, which means the fan base will be significantly stronger. This is because usually the local games are played at the home of the team and that means the local's people or fans will go to support it. Another benefit of historic teams is that the operation of the team will be more mature because the juniors can make corresponding adjustments based on the experience of the seniors. To retain the superior strategy or make some adjustments based on the current situation to strengthen the team. Apparently, these two advantages are based on the long history, then the team could grip attention on such an opportunity. Unfortunately, there is also a threat to the Celtics which is the team was losing recognition and attention on many websites and media. One plausible solution is to set something symbolic. Compared with the news media, the official media does not have such strong requirements for news objectivity. The social media platform is a two-way interaction with fans. If a full personality can be established, whether it is an editor or a mascot, it will greatly increase the intimacy of the official media, from aloof to approach. Most teams will have their own mascots, such as Arsenal's Lizard Rex, Bayern Munich's Bernie Bear, Dortmund's Emma the Bee, and use the mascot as the official media character design, while also consolidating fans' belief in the club's mascot design. Awareness and in-depth understanding of fan culture.

Additionally, through SWOT exhibits that brand association and brand image have a profound impact on consumer loyalty. That verifies the previous research. In the previous study, Chen affirmed that brand associations and brand recalls provide an explanation for why consumers choose certain brands and stick with them [15]. For another, Bauer et al. and Bauer et al.'s study result shows that the image of the brand association dimension generates brand equity and is a key factor in successfully attracting fan loyalty [17, 18]. In conclusion, in the study Rio states that brand association is a considerable factor in building brand loyalty and brand equity [21]. What's more, the brand image is also a key factor in consumer loyalty. Consumer brand loyalty is significantly influenced by a strong brand image. According to Fortunato, the company can boost overall value by utilizing consistent brand management tactics [22]. Additionally, according to Bauer's research, a brand's non-product features are more crucial to fan loyalty than its product-related attributes [23]. Ultimately, the "Drivers of Soccer Fan Loyalty" study confirmed that cumulative fan happiness is influenced by team brand image and team involvement, and vice versa. Each of these factors has an impact on both behavioral

and attitudinal loyalty [24]. Nevertheless, according to the SWOT analysis, there is one more additional chief element of consumer loyalty. That's the recognition and attention from the media. This is because social media has great commercial value for teams and players and its influence is immeasurable. Thus, if a team was lacking recognition or attention from social media, then it will be a fatal blow to the team.

5. Conclusion

In summary, in the period of Celtics lost in the finals and they couldn't achieve the records that satisfied fans. The paper investigates the solution to attract more fans for the Boston Celtics and the reason for losing fans. The SWOT analysis is being used to explain the relationship between consumer loyalty and fans. The advantages and disadvantages of the Boston Celtics are revealed. In general, the main analysis part included the impressive image of the Boston Celtics. The color of white and green leads to explosive sales of products around the team, even if not Celtic fans will be attracted. But the lack of brand association is the key and high-level factor leading to the loss of Celtic fans. Moreover, the Celtics has great potential in their team culture. But the Celtics should pay more attention to modeling their image on the internet.

As a result, research in ALTS can better elaborate fans' loyalty. Besides, having a consistent brand management strategy enables an organization to create overall value growth. Design effective marketing strategies to shape the positive image of athletes can get the sight of fans. Consequently, the paper illustrates the point that a powerful image of the brand can determine positive relationships with consumer loyalty. Because consumers will have deep memories and feelings that are vigorous about the brand in their minds. In this case, this sense of pride makes consumers believe in the brand.

There are still many limitations in this paper. To be more specific, the influence of Covid-19 also leads to the loss of fans of the Boston Celtics. That means the factor is not artificial control. Thus, each team in the national basketball association can't deal with this situation. And the government should adapt to control this incidence. But this is not within the scope of the discussion. In general, the loss of fans in the period of covid 19 is inevitable. Therefore, the result that this paper concluded will not be able to be adopted. Furthermore, this theory is also suitable for other realms, such as different brands of sports, clothing and luxury goods. Once these brands achieve a successful feat, the utility of this method will be verified. In this case, more brands will try to imitate the same method to make them more famous.

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