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EVOLUTION OF THE BIG TEN BRAND

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of a brand is essential in order for the brand to remain competitive, especially for intercollegiate athletic conferences. Specifically, the Big Ten Conference was created in January of 1895 when leaders from eight universities met in Chicago to set regulations and standards for their institutions. The regulations, and ultimately the foundation for the Big Ten’s brand, were focused on the importance of academics and athletics. Over the years, the Big Ten established a set of common attributes between the members and became one of the power five conferences. Originally, the institutions were all large research universities located in the Midwest that emphasized the importance of athletics and academics. Through three rounds of expansion and the creation of brand extensions, such at the Big Ten Network (BTN), the Big Ten brand has evolved over time and created a new set of attributes. The Big Ten currently has 14 member institutions and has expanded outside of the Midwestern region and towards the East coast to gain market share and expand their footprint. With these changes, it seems the Big Ten’s focus has shifted away from academics and more towards generating revenue for the athletic programs through media contracts and the BTN. It is clear that the Big Ten has evolved to remain competitive, but it is important that the conference continues to consider its fans’ perception of the brand with all these changes.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In January of 1895, representatives from seven universities met to create and establish standards that would become the first set of principles for intercollegiate athletics which previously had little or no regulation. Since that meeting, universities throughout the United States have been filtered into various conferences. Some of the most notable and valuable conferences are The Big Ten, Pac-12, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), The Big 12, and The Big East (Forbes, 2013).

Each conference has a unique set of values and attributes, but they have one similar goal: to strengthen the conference and build their brand. There are many different ways to build a brand. Recently, some conferences are participating in realignment where they add or remove universities from their conferences in a way that they see fit. The differentiating factors of each conference could boil down to specific location, academic standards, athletic standards, or other attributes. For example, the SEC is more focused on their athletic programs than its academic excellence because universities in the SEC hold athletes to a lower academic standard than some of the universities (HERO Sports, 2016). On the other hand, other conferences such as the Big Ten conference and the Ivy League tend to focus on a balance between academics and athletic excellence.

As time has evolved, there have been many shifts among the conferences. Many are expanding to create a larger, stronger brand by reaching more people and markets. Certain universities have switched conferences as well. This thesis will specifically look at the Big Ten
Conference in regards to branding. The Big Ten Conference has a long history since 1895 that has turned it into the brand it is today. Universities have joined and seceded, but most of the adjustments have occurred since the expansion beyond the original 10 universities. Some of the additional universities share the same values and attributes as the original universities, while others potentially stray from those values and attributes. Other changes include the introduction of Friday Night football games and the Big Ten Network (BTN).

Through primary research and secondary research, I plan to set the framework for understanding the Big Ten brand, explain the history, and address how the changes throughout the conference’s existence have affected the brand. Information will also be gathered about the SEC. Both are seen as highly developed conferences and are part of the power five conferences in intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, I conducted interviews with various people associated with the Big Ten to further grasp the values of the Big Ten. I also interviewed multiple alumni of each Big Ten University to understand the fans’ current perception. Overall, the main focus of this thesis is to look specifically at how that meeting in January of 1895 eventually became the Big Ten conference; subsequently how the Big Ten brand evolved, and finally how fans’ perception of the brand has evolved along with it.
Chapter 2

Branding

Developing an effective brand is one of the most powerful tools a business can utilize in order to solidify its positioning among competitors. Brand is defined as the creation of a name, symbol, or design that differentiates and identifies one product from another (Williams, 2005). It takes time and research to develop a brand because competitors are always changing their brand to evolve with consumers wants and needs. A brand is a relationship between the business and the consumer. Within a relationship, there are many different elements that draw the two parties together. Over time, like all relationships, this connection either strengthens or weakens due to how the business or consumer reacts to the investment of each party. As Williams (2005) states, “Simply put, your brand is your promise to your customer. It tells them what they can expect from your products and services, and it differentiates your offering from your competitors’. Your brand is derived from who you are, who you want to be and who people perceive you to be.”

There are many details and elements that fall under the brand umbrella. Brand equity is a key aspect to a brand because brand equity explains what consumers understand and feel about the brand. Raggio and Leone (2005) define it as, “a consumer’s attitude, perception, belief, or desire that a brand will meet its promise of value (value to the consumer, not brand value).” There are many ways to understand brand equity through various frameworks. Figure 1 is a brand equity framework that was created by David Aaker, a former UC-Berkley marketing professor, in 1991. Aaker (1991) created this framework with the understanding that brand equity is “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/or to that firm’s customers.”
Aaker’s framework separates brand equity into five segments. These five segments include Brand loyalty, Brand awareness, Perceived quality, Brand associations, and other assets to the brand such as trademarks and patents. “According to Aaker, a particularly important concept for building brand equity is brand identity” (Srivastava, 2015) because brand identity is a unique set of brand associations that differentiates a brand’s significance from their competitors (Srivastava, 2015). Within these five segments, Aaker breaks it down further to understand how to develop the segments to eventually strengthen the brand. In order to have a strong brand, it’s important to invest and develop these five segments. Looking at these elements in regards to the Big Ten is critical in order to analyze and understand the strength of the brand.

Brand loyalty can be defined as “a measure of attachment that a customer has to a brand” (Leahy, 2009). Due to our constantly changing world, it’s crucial for brands to stay up to date and adapt to what’s going on to ensure that their customers won’t switch to other brands. In regards to the Big Ten brand, brand loyalty must focus on remaining a unified brand, but also differentiate their fourteen universities from universities in other conferences. The Big Ten brand and experience is built around the concept of a community, which helps generate positive experiences and brand loyalty.

Once someone attends a Big Ten university, it could be said that brand loyalty is easier to achieve because they have a lifelong connection with the Big Ten brand. They associate the Big Ten with their college experience. Another major benefit of brand loyalty in relation to the Big Ten brand is legacy. If someone attends a Big Ten university, they’re likely to stay loyal to the Big Ten brand and community for the rest of their life because it’s what they know. They’re less likely to respond to competitive threats because they may not have experience with other conferences; such as the SEC, ACC, etc. In fact, once someone is loyal to the Big Ten brand,
they may be more likely to refer other people to one of the universities. This includes encouraging friends and family to become a fan of the Big Ten in general. It is important to emphasize the community experience that the Big Ten provides its students and fans because many people can relate to that and it brings a sense of brand loyalty.

In a way, brand awareness also relates to brand loyalty because it’s the initial step of allowing your brand to be considered in the consumer’s eyes. Brand awareness is about emphasizing the sense of familiarity a brand can have to people (Moisescu, 2005). As Moisescu (2005) states, “A brand that is familiar is probably reliable and of reasonable quality.” In order for a brand to even be considered, there must be brand awareness at the recall level. Ways to promote brand awareness for the Big Ten tend to be different from creating buzz around a product because Big Ten is associated with an intangible experience. The intangible experience is a university or a group that the fans are supporting as opposed to something the audience is using. One way that the Big Ten promotes brand awareness is through commercials during sports games. These commercials are standardized for the Big Ten by emphasizing some of the core values academically, but each university’s commercial highlights a core benefit of that specific school. For example, during a football game between two Big Ten universities such as Purdue University and Indiana University, a viewer may see a commercial regarding the strong engineering academic aspect of Purdue University. This allows the viewer to receive brand awareness about both Purdue’s athletic and academic opportunities and experiences.

The Big Ten brand has many ways to generate brand awareness because of the fourteen universities. This can be a blessing and a curse. Within the Big Ten, each individual university has a brand that they must protect and align with the overall Big Ten brand. Therefore, each and every action of the individual universities not only affects the university itself, but all the Big
Ten as a whole. Some of these actions positively benefit the brand, while others negatively impact it. For example, the scandal that broke in 2011 at Penn State regarding Jerry Sandusky and child abuse did not only tarnish Penn State’s reputation and brand, but it also affected the Big Ten brand. Although Penn State has taken action since 2011 to rebuild their reputation, some people have a negative perception of the university because of this scandal. This could have an affect on the brand association. On the other hand, in 2017, Penn State positively affected brand awareness for the university and the Big Ten brand by winning the Big Ten Championship and competing in the 2017 Rose Bowl against University of Southern California. The success for Penn State and other Big Ten football programs, such as Ohio State and Michigan, following the 2016 football season, brought more attention to the Big Ten name. The constant media attention and press releases about the various Big Ten universities allowed for the Big Ten to generate brand awareness and in this situation, it tended to be more positive.

The third segment of Aaker’s framework, perceived quality, provides a way for brands to differentiate themselves from competitors and is defined as a measure of belief (Di Somma, 2014). This is how people interpret the brand. No matter what a company does, it is all based on the consumer’s personal belief around a brand. As Moisescu (2005) notes, “Building a strong, durable brand implies nevertheless an above average quality positioning or at least a minimum perceived quality when considering brands positioned as low market competitors.” Due to the many elements that make up the Big Ten brand, there are many different characteristics people can evaluate quality on. Since it’s an academic and athletic conference, each university can be measured on their quality of both athletics and academics. In regards to athletics, some people may recognize the Big Ten brand based on how well their team is doing that year or how well the conference is doing in general. Brand loyalty and brand awareness may also affect perceived
quality of the brand. There are some things the Big Ten and other brands can control, but perceived quality is very difficult to manipulate.

Brand associations, the fourth element in Aaker’s brand equity framework, are the attributes that come to mind when someone thinks of a brand. As Gill and Dawra (2010) state, “These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members.” Aaker further breaks down his definition of brand associations by classifying three types of associations: brand as a personality, brand as an organization, and brand as a product. Brand as a product and brand as an organization tend to focus on the attributes of the product and organization whereas brand as a personality tends to refer to the brand-consumer relationship (Srivastava, 2015). Brand associations are very important because they could affect whether a consumer positively or negatively thinks of a brand. They also may create competitive advantage if the brand is the one that comes to mind first.

The Big Ten brand has many brand associations. A portion of the brand associations comes from the universities themselves. If a student attends one of the 14 universities in the Big Ten, they’re not alone attending that university but they’re part of the Big Ten community. The 14 institutions create a conference that represents a sense of community. Even though they are associated as a unified brand, they are in constant athletic competition with one another. Another way the Big Ten generates brand associations is through their licensing, sponsorship, and advertising. The Big Ten has partnered with major corporations such as Gatorade, Nike, and AllState. The companies that the Big Ten partners with have high brand awareness, so this generates positive brand associations for the Big Ten. Through partnerships and just the awareness around the universities, the Big Ten brand has formulated many brand associations.
There are many aspects that fall under brand assets in the final segment of the framework. The brand assets help companies and brands create competitive advantage. Some of these assets include trademarks, patents, and channel relationships (Srivastava, 2015). Some people believe that a trademark and a brand are the same thing, but they’re different. As Truex (2010) notes, “A trademark is a registered brand or trade name. It can include any combination of a name, slogan, logo, sounds or colors that identify the company or its products or services.” Trademarks can be updated over time to evolve with the company and ensure a strong brand identity. Companies normally use trademarks in order to protect their brands because it keeps competitors from using the same unique words, symbols, names, etc. Trademarks also tend to build brand loyalty because it increases brand awareness and brand association. The trademark is unique to a brand, so consumers remember said brand.

A logo is a good candidate for a trademark because it’s a unique way to differentiate a brand from competitors by using specific colors, letters, or shapes as a symbol of the company. The Big Ten’s logo has evolved over time with the expansion and realignment of the conferences. The four Big Ten logos can be seen below in Figure 2. It’s unknown when the first logo was created. With the return of The University of Michigan to conference in 1917, the Big Ten officially had ten universities. The first logo appears to look historic and traditional. The names of the universities are linked together in a circle around the logo. In the center, there are seven states with red dots representing where the ten universities are located. It represents the mid-western region that the Big Ten was founded in. This is also a good example of informative advertising. When a brand or product is new and not well understood, including a lot of descriptive information is important (Armstrong and Kolter, 2012). As brands become more
well known, messaging moves from informative to more reminder advertising, like the newer logo.

Michael Bierut and Michael Gerick, two employees of the design studio Pentagram, created the second logo in 1990. The logo was updated to reflect the Big Ten’s addition of an 11th institution, Penn State. This particular logo included the same text “Big Ten Conference” that the first one did, but Gericke and Bierut got creative by inserting a hidden “11” in the negative space near the T in “Ten” (Famous Logos, 2012). This allowed for the conference name to remain the Big Ten Conference, but it also attributed to the actual number of institutions. There was a lukewarm response to this logo design, but it remained in affect until 2011 when the Big Ten expanded to 12 universities with the addition of Nebraska.

In 2011, Michael Gericke was contacted again to create the most recent logo design. There was speculation around whether there would be a hidden 12 in the logo, but this new design went more towards emphasizing the word “big” and the number “10”. As Gerick (Eisenband, 2010) explains, “The new Big Ten logo was developed to symbolize the conference’s future, as well as its rich heritage, strong tradition of competition, academic leadership, and passionate alumni. Its contemporary collegiate lettering includes an embedded numeral ‘10’ in the word ‘BIG’, which allows fans to see both in a single word.” Gericke used the negative space once again, but instead of just giving credit to the number of universities, it was an opportunity to build on the iconic name. The colors in the current logo also have significance. The black signifies strength and will power of participants while the blue represents unity, success, and excellence (Famous Logos, 2012). This logo has remained in affect even with the addition of two more institutions, Rutgers University and University of Maryland.
Trademarks, as well as other brand assets, are essential to differentiating a brand to gain competitive advantage. These aspects allow a company to protect its brand and continue to strengthen the brand identity. The Big Ten’s example of logo evolution clearly demonstrates how crucial it is to constantly update trademarks to maintain a certain brand image. The logo remained representative of the universities joining the conference. It utilized symbolism in the miniscule details of the logos, such as the colors. It’s a strategic way to enhance brand identity because it’s a unique aspect of the brand.

Overall, building a brand is a very tedious and important because it provides a way to differentiate from competitors and become powerful. It’s essential to develop all aspects of a brand in order to stay strong and relevant against competition. The five segments that Aaker included in his framework are interdependent and each needs to be developed in order to establish a brand identity and eventually, brand equity. In order to create brand loyalty and high-perceived quality, one must create strong and positive brand awareness through brand associations. This can be done in many ways, but it’s crucial to constantly update these ideas because consumer wants and needs are always changing. The Big Ten brand is an interesting concept to look at because it’s been evolving since its creation in 1896. After discussing the different elements of Aaker’s framework in terms of the Big Ten brand, it’s important to understand more about the history and changes of the Big Ten brand before understanding how people perceive the brand.
Figure 1: David Aaker's Brand Equity Model

Figure 2 Evolution of the Big Ten Logo

Unknown date – 1990

1990 – 2011

2011 – present
2011 – present (A secondary logo with the full name)

Link: http://logos.wikia.com/wiki/Big_Ten_Conference
Chapter 3

History of the Big Ten

The Big Ten’s journey to reaching 14 universities and maintaining a strong tradition originally started with fewer teams in 1895 when James H. Smart, the President of Purdue University, gathered together presidents from seven other universities to develop what would eventually become the Big Ten conference. During this meeting on January 11, 1895 in the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, Smart and the other representatives from University of Chicago, University of Illinois, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, Northwestern University, and University of Wisconsin, met to discuss how they could regulate the athletic programs of the universities while simultaneously holding student athletes to a high academic and ethical standard.

On February 8, 1896, the Presidents gathered again to collaborate and officially establish the foundation of the conference by creating a list of rules. One of the key insights the Presidents wanted to emphasize was “restricted eligibility for athletics to bona fide, full-time students who were not delinquents in their studies” (Big Ten Conference, 2015). This set the groundwork for a strong athletic, academic, and ethical conference that would eventually develop into the Big Ten and would affect other intercollegiate athletic conferences.

From that meeting, twelve rules were created and instated to emphasize the importance of academics and ethics for the student athletes. These regulations intended to make the athletics programs more responsible and not just focusing on winning without regard for ethical standard. There were reports of some universities allowing athletes to participate in athletics even though
they weren’t even enrolled in the universities or they were enrolled under false information. Other rules are still in place today and focused on monitoring unethical behavior such as accepting payment for participating in collegiate athletics and avoiding delinquent behavior. To maintain the ethical standard, Ethics Centers or Ethics programs have been installed at all Big Ten universities except for University of Iowa. The ethical programs focus on the importance of integrity and ensuring all students, especially student athletes, are responsible for their actions and represent the university and the conference well.

Academics are a very important aspect of the Big Ten conference. As John Powell, Marketing Instructor at Penn State, says, “The Big Ten and the Ivy League are the only major collegiate conferences that focus on education and research in addition to athletics.” Because of this academic focus, Herman B. Wells, the Indiana University President from 1938 to 1962, formed the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) in 1958 to maintain an academic standard. As Hovious (2016) notes, “The CIC’s mission is to advance academic excellence through collaboration across the member universities.” Each Big Ten University is a member of the CIC, resulting in a high academic standard. The athletes must maintain a certain GPA to be eligible based on NCAA rules. The CIC provides a way to regulate and uphold these rules. In order for the consortium’s name to better reflect the members, the name of the CIC was changed to the Big Ten Academic Alliance in 2016 (Big Ten Academic Alliance, 2016). This alliance was established to set and maintain a high academic standard for the universities to ensure that the conference was academically successful.

Additions to the conference started in 1899 when membership expanded to Indiana University and State University of Iowa, which would later change its name to University of Iowa. At this point, the conference had 9 members, but in 1908, the University of Michigan
withdrew its membership due to rule violations (Gall, 2012) taking the number of universities in
the conference back down to 8. In 1912, the conference returned to 9 members when Ohio State
University accepted an invitation to join the conference (Big Ten Conference, 2015). The
University of Michigan was given the opportunity to rejoin the conference in 1917 and Gall
(2012) states, “the term Big Ten became an instantly popular way to refer to the conference.” As
of 1917 The Big Ten Conference now had its name and a continued desire to be strong
academically and athletically.

In 1946, University of Chicago, one of the original members, felt the need to withdraw
from the conference. The University of Chicago shifted their focus away from athletics when
they discontinued their football program in 1939 because of the events of World War II (Braden
Gall 2012). Although this brought the membership number back down to nine universities, it
actually opened up the invitation for Michigan State College (now known as Michigan State
University) to join the conference in 1950, causing the Big Ten name to be reinstated.

The next major shift in expansion did not occur until 1990 when The Pennsylvania State
University was invited to join the Big Ten. Penn State did not start participating in athletic
competition until 1993 (Gall, 2012). The Big Ten was then at 11 members, but the name did not
change because the members wanted to retain the strong brand recognition that the Big Ten
Conference name had. University of Nebraska officially joined the Big Ten as the 12th member
on July 1, 2011 after the Big Ten Council of Presidents/Chancellors approved their application
(Big Ten Conference, 2015). This was not the first time Nebraska attempted to join the Big Ten.
In 1900 and 1911 they requested to join the league, but were rejected (Gall 2012). The most
recent round of expansion started in 2012 and was finalized on July 1, 2014, when University of
Maryland and Rutgers University both officially became members.
The Big Ten now currently has 14 members: University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, University of Rutgers, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. A timeline of the Big Ten conference can be seen in Figure 3. Within these 14 universities, there are 9,500 student-athletes participating on about 350 teams (Big Ten Conference, 2015).

Throughout the years there have been numerous milestones and achievements for the Big Ten conference including the introduction of the Big Ten Medal of Honor. As discussed previously, the foundation of the Big Ten was focused around creating a strong ethical, academic, and athletic conference that provided student athletes with the keys to a successful experience. The Big Ten Medal of Honor is a brand extension that enhances the perceived quality of the brand. It promotes and highlights the academic excellence of student athletes, generated a positive brand association for the conference. The Big Ten Conference (2014) explains, “The Big Ten Medal of Honor is awarded to one male and one female student athlete from the graduating class of each member institution who has demonstrated excellence on and off the field throughout their college career.” The first time it was awarded was in 1915. It is a continued tradition because the Big Ten is able to recognize proficient academic work of the student athletes during their time at their respective institutions. The Big Ten Medal of Honor was introduced to ensure the student athletes continuously strived for their academic excellence and insures that the standard James H. Smart set with his fellow colleagues in the early of the years of the conference remain at the forefront of the Big Ten’s values.
A key aspect of the Big Ten’s leadership success was the introduction of the Commissioner of Athletics role. The first Commissioner was Major John L. Griffith when he took the role in 1922. From there, Kenneth L Wilson assumed the role in 1945, with Bill Reed following him in 1961, and Wayne Duke in 1971. The most recent and current Commissioner of Athletics is James E Delany. He assumed this role in 1989 and has led the conference through many accomplishment including expansion and introduction and implementation of the Big Ten Network (BTN).

The idea for the BTN was introduced in 2006, but was not officially launched until August 30, 2007. It was an agreement with FOX networks that would last 20 years. It now reaches more than 60 million homes across the United States and Canada via various cable and satellite providers (Big Ten Website, 2015). Commissioner Delany was at the forefront with this groundbreaking idea, which was the “first conference-owned television network.” It has further developed to include a digital extension called BTN2Go (Big Ten Conference, 2015). The BTN2Go was created to keep up with technological advancements and provide fans of the Big Ten conference ways to still view their beloved sports team even on the go. The creation of the BTN was also very beneficial to the revenue sharing model the Big Ten implemented in 1955 which pools all proceeds from the football and BTN contracts and split the revenue equally among the institutions.

From the beginning, the Big Ten conference has emphasized the importance of maintaining a high standard of academic, athletics, and ethics throughout all their institutions. There have been a multitude of historical moments including the introduction of the Big Ten Medal of Honor and the Big Ten Network. Under the leadership of Commissioner Delany, and other commissioners, the Big Ten started with seven universities and has developed into a
conference with 14 members that all hold similar values and goals. Throughout the history of the Big Ten conference the tradition of upholding a high academic, athletic, and ethical standard has remained true.

Figure 3 Big Ten Membership History
For over 120 years, the Big Ten conference has excelled due to their ability to constantly adapt to the changes in intercollegiate athletics. It is known as a historic conference that prides itself on tradition and excellence: “Even in its infancy, the conference established itself as the preeminent collection of institutions in the nation, where the pursuit of academic excellence prevailed as the definitive goal” (Big Ten Organization). Over the years, the Big Ten has invested time, money, and energy into building a brand that people can identify with, that’s centered on powerful academics and athletics. Recently, certain changes have occurred especially with the conference expanding. Some of these changes, due to expansion, have caused speculation over the true intentions of the Big Ten brand. Change is inevitable if a brand wants to stay relevant and competitive, but the changes could affect the brand one way or the other.

The most recent and prevalent shift for the Big Ten conference started in 1990 when the conference started expanding outside the original ten universities. These original institutions had common characteristics that reflected the Big Ten brand image, so it was crucial that the candidates for expansion upheld similar characteristics. As discussed previously, Penn State was the first to receive an invitation to the Big Ten. Although Penn State became a member of the Big Ten in 1990, they did not compete athletically until 1993. Before joining the Big Ten, Penn State was independent for football, but was a member of the Atlantic 10 Conference for basketball and other sports (Thomas, 1989, NY Times).

The addition of Penn State provided benefits for both parties. Penn State gained monetary benefit from the revenue sharing model of the Big Ten. The athletic programs no longer relied solely on the football program to fund the other 28 varsity sports (Thomas 1989). Also,
becoming a member of the Big Ten allowed for Penn State to participate in the Rose Bowl. Before joining the Big Ten, Penn State had created its own brand recognition. Because of this, the addition of Penn State created a positive brand association for the Big Ten and enhanced its perceived quality. Penn State was joining a larger community and bringing its loyal fans and brand recognition with it.

For the Big Ten, this started their movement towards the East. The *New York Times* (1989) reported, “In joining what was known as the Western Conference when it was formed in Chicago by seven colleges in 1895, Penn State, in State College, PA, will become the league’s Eastern outpost, displacing Ohio State about 275 miles to the west.” According to reports, there were intentions to invite Penn State to join the conference for a long time. It finally occurred in 1990 and was quickly implemented. In hindsight, it has been said that Penn State becoming the 11th member of the Big Ten conference opened up opportunities for more expansion. Since there was ample time before the second round of expansion, it allowed the Big Ten to fully incorporate Penn State into their brand. There was speculation that the name may change to the Big Eleven, but the conference knew that it had established a brand. Changing the name would be too detrimental to the brand recognition and brand awareness. It was obvious that a name change would cause the Big Ten to lose familiarity, which would reduce likability and negatively impact brand associations.

The Big Ten remained unchanged for two decades. Between 2010 and 2011, the conference announced they were looking to expand and the University of Nebraska applied to become a member. As Hine (2010) explains, “The passionate fan base, storied football program and geographic proximity to the rest of the conference – all these factors helped make Nebraska an attractive candidate for the Big Ten’s expansion plans.” The application was approved and
Nebraska left the Big 12 to become the 12th member of the Big Ten. This became the catalyst for not only Big Ten conference expansion, but also for conference realignment as a whole.

Harvey Perlman, the Nebraska chancellor, said, “the Big Ten offered stability that the Big 12 simply cannot offer” (ESPN, 2010). Nebraska contained three of the major qualities to qualify for a Big Ten member. They had strong tradition, academics, and athletics. Nebraska’s decision to leave the Big 12 caused a lot of tension, but the university received support from other Big Ten institutions. During the transition a Penn State coach stated, “It’s just the tip of the iceberg right now. Unbelievable tradition, the things they’ve done in that program; academically as well” (ESPN, 2010). It was clear that the conference’s decision to expand was supported.

The benefits for Nebraska and the conference were similar to the rewards of adding Penn State. Nebraska was guaranteed to receive more money than they did from the Big 12. The Big Ten would also gain profit from incorporating Nebraska into their revenue sharing system and Big Ten Network. Also, Nebraska brought the Big Ten to 12 members, allowing them to have a Championship game according to NCAA rules. Although there were benefits, there was a problem when Nebraska was removed from the Association of American Universities (AAU). The AAU is an organization made up of 62 research universities. These universities benefit the nation’s economy, security, and well being by being leaders in innovation, scholarship, and solutions (AAU, 2016). Every Big Ten university is a member of the AAU. This has created a strong brand association that generates positive attitude towards the academic excellence of the conference. It is a critical aspect of the Big Ten membership because membership to the AAU aligns with the Big Ten’s emphasis on academic excellence. One of the major benefits of the Big Ten is the ability to share academic resources among the members. The universities need to be held to the same academic standard to make sure the resources will constantly benefit the
students. One university cannot have it all, so collaborating academically benefits the
conference, students, and universities.

Nebraska’s AAU membership had been at risk in 2000, but the university had successfully proven they should remain in the AAU. From then on, the university made efforts to stay in the organization, but Harvey Perlman, the university’s chancellor, knew the AAU’s decision was inevitable in 2011 (Lewin, 2011). As of 2011, Nebraska had officially lost its membership to the AAU. Knowledgeable of their academic vulnerability, Nebraska still applied for Big Ten membership in 2010 thinking they had made enough progress to stay in the AAU. Harvey Perlman even said, “All the Big Ten schools are AAU members. I doubt that our application would’ve been accepted had we not been a member of the organization” (Hine, 2010). The Big Ten Commissioner, James Delany, was quoted as saying, “AAU membership is part of who we are. It’s an important part of who we are” (Rittenberg, 2011). Therefore, with Nebraska losing its membership it was losing a key attribute of the Big Ten conference. Due to the Big Ten’s strong emphasis on academic excellence, one could assume that Nebraska’s membership could be challenged. Instead, Nebraska’s membership in the Big Ten remained intact and reports speculated that the situation wouldn’t impact Nebraska’s transition to the league. It was said that the situation would “be an embarrassment in the short term” (Rittenberg, 2011). Since Nebraska lost its membership to the AAU, a major identity to the Big Ten, it was questionable how the Big Ten would evaluate possible candidates for expansion moving forward.

For the next major round of expansion that fostered change, the Big Ten did not wait two decades like they did between Penn State and Nebraska. In November of 2012, it was announced that both the University of Maryland and Rutgers University would become the newest members
of the Big Ten Conference (Big Ten Organization, 2014). As of July 2014, the University of Maryland officially left the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) and became a member of the Big Ten. University of Maryland has a high academic standard that aligns with the Big Ten’s. Maryland also provides the Big Ten with fans in a different channel, creating the opportunity to build more brand loyalty to the Big Ten. This was also a very strategic move for Maryland, especially financially. Wallace Loh, the President of the university, said, “We will be able to insure the financial sustainability of Maryland athletics for decades to come” (Mihoces, 2012). The financial benefits would greatly benefit Maryland who had to cut seven of its sports programs in 2012 due to budget deficits (Mihoces, 2012).

Simultaneously, Rutgers University left the Big East to officially become the 14th member of the Big Ten conference in July of 2014. The President of Rutgers, Robert Barchi, felt it was a perfect fit for both parties. Barchi stated, “The Big Ten includes America’s most highly regarded academic institutions, known for both their athletic success and academic achievement. This is exactly the right conference for Rutgers. Our university is one of the nation’s leading research universities and our student-athletes excel in the classroom and on the playing field” (Big Ten Organization, 2012). By switching into the Big Ten conference, Rutgers gained the financial security to support their institution. Rutgers’ athletic director, Tim Pernetti, also emphasized Rutgers’ exposure opportunity gained from joining the Big Ten. Not only would their football program receive more exposure, but also the other athletic programs at Rutgers would be positively affected (Sargeant, 2012).

With the most recent round of expansion, it’s evident that the Big Ten branched out of the Midwest, but still focused on strong academic and athletic institutions. The addition of Maryland and Rutgers positively affected the conference, especially because both are members
of the AAU. Although Maryland and Rutgers aren’t located in the Midwest, a common trait among the original Big Ten universities, their locations prove to be beneficial for the conference. Expanding to Rutgers and Maryland opened up the opportunity to reach the East Coast and Mid-Atlantic region. The major benefit that stems from location is the television opportunities. According to Aaker, new location provides the opportunity to build new brand associations and benefit perceived quality. Adding New York, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. to the Big Ten media markets increases the Big Ten’s footprint. This could result in an increase in brand loyalty because of the new consumer market being reached. Having a strong footprint in these media markets ultimately increased revenue and fan base, allowing the Big Ten to remain competitive with its brand. Overall, accepting Maryland and Rutgers into the Big Ten opened many doors for the conference and both institutions still upheld the important academic focus of the conference. The Big Ten’s recruitment was also benefitted because they gained access to fertile recruiting areas such as the Beltway area (Dienhart, 2013). Strong recruiting keeps the Big Ten competitive against other conferences.

Although the latest additions affected the conference positively, there were also some downsides. Since the location of the conference expanded, the travel time between some universities increased. Longer travel time is more expensive and time consuming. This takes student athletes out of the classroom longer, which potentially jeopardizes their academics. Also, some rivalries were affected by the expansion because now there were more teams to compete with. This meant that some historic rivalries were going to be compromised because schedules had to adjust to a larger conference. The most affected aspect of expansion was the Big Ten’s tradition. The Big Ten was founded in the Midwest, but the conference slowly pushed their
boundaries east and west. This causes people to question whether or not the Big Ten identity was at stake (Dienhart, 2013).

Through several rounds of expansion, the Big Ten conference proved that it was evolving, whether people approved or not. Some traits and qualities of the Big Ten brand identity have shifted, so it will be interesting to see where the brand continues to go. Expansion, however, was not the only change to the Big Ten. In 2007, Commissioner James Delany launched the Big Ten Network (BTN). James Delany demonstrated leadership once again because the BTN was the first conference television channel. The Big Ten (2007-2017) explains, “BTN was created to provide the conference more national exposure for Big Ten sports while enhancing its existing television agreements with its other television partners.” It is a joint venture between Fox Networks and the Big Ten Conference that was set to last 20 years. The creation of this network provided a way to increase brand exposure and revenue for the conference. Smith (2008) explains that the BTN was “a national television network created by the Big Ten, for the Big Ten, and its four million alumni nationwide.”

The Big Ten Network has also changed since it was created in 2007 by becoming it’s own brand under the Big Ten conference. It has created a logo, web domain, and established branding to please its fans, viewers, and colleagues. BTN2Go, an extension of the network, was created in 2011. It allowed fans to live stream BTN telecasts from the Internet or a mobile app. This provided fans with the opportunity to stay up to date with their teams and what was going on with the Big Ten. BTN also revisited important Big Ten memories by replaying some of the “Greatest Games” over the years. This not only brings back old memories, but it plays into the idea that being a member of the Big Ten is a membership for life. It plays on the experience aspect of the Big Ten brand. With the development of the BTN and its extensions, the conference
has generated a lot of exposure for all their sports. The BTN is becoming stronger as the partnership progresses, and it has brought in a lot of revenue for the conference.

Since 2007, the revenue from the BTN has come from partnerships, advertising, and distribution. Originally, the network launched in 17 million homes, and has expanded its audience to more than 60 million homes across the US and Canada (BTN, 2007 – 2017). It has generated millions of dollars for the conference over the years, and there are reports that it will continue to skyrocket. Dienhart (2016) notes, “The Big Ten Conference is flush with cash. Except for the newest members Nebraska, Rutgers and Maryland, each Big Ten institution receives about $32.4 million annually from external sources under the league’s payout arrangement. Those external sources are from TV rights and bowl money.” In 2017, the Big Ten announced new television contracts that increased the revenue per university to around $54 million (Bennett, 2017). The BTN is a major portion of the revenue generated by the Big Ten conference. The money is distributed to the institutions based on a revenue sharing model to ensure each university is benefiting from their membership. The network has proven to be a successful business venture for the conference and has generated brand exposure as well as partnerships that build the brand.

Building the brand and generating revenue for the conference is beneficial, but the creation of the BTN has caused speculation in the Big Ten’s motives. Since the network’s creation in 2007, three universities have been added to the conference. Each of these institutions opened up the opportunity to reach a larger market, especially the New York and Washington D.C. areas. The Big Ten is growing their business, but it’s possible that this growth is causing the brand to evolve away from their core values. Nebraska, Maryland, and Rutgers all benefited financially when they joined the conference, and so did the Big Ten conference. It was a strategic
move for all parties involved. The geographic region and the BTN weren’t the only aspects of
the Big Ten that expanded. With all the changes that have occurred over the years, the Big Ten
has shifted its focus to a more national brand. Offices have been opened in New York City and
Washington D.C. to continue solidifying the footprint the conference created from expansion.
Strengthening athletics, growing the business, and maintaining leadership have moved to the
forefront of the Big Ten conference.

In November 2016, the Big Ten conference announced the introduction of Friday night
football games. The conference had entered into a TV deal that would broadcast five football
games on Friday nights starting in 2017 and ending in 2022. Some universities chose not to
participate due to the conflict with high school football. Several Big Ten assistant coaches felt
that Friday night games would negatively affect recruiting (Bennett, 2016). The Big Ten
addressed this issue in a news release that stated “the conference appreciates the significance of
high school football within the region and has worked to minimize the impact of this initiative by
limiting the number of Friday night games” (Bennett, 2016). In an interview conducted with
James Delany in December 2016, Delany explained that he did not think this would negatively
affect the brand or become a major issue. In his opinion, this opportunity was only five games
out of the hundreds of games that are televised for the Big Ten. It was an opportunity to give
more recognition to the brand and coverage of the talented Big Ten competition. Although the
brand exposure was a major benefit, there would also be a monetary benefit with the new
television deal. Adding a new night of college football meant new opportunities for advertising
and generating revenue, even if it jeopardized the tradition of Fridays being for high school
football. The introduction of Friday night games was just another change for the Big Ten
conference that broke away from tradition. Although the Big Ten has changed to remain
competitve against other conferences, this affects perceived quality. Breaking away from
tradition affects familiarity and likeness for a brand, so the Big Ten needs to ensure it’s not
affecting the brand too much by trying to be competitive.

Over the years, the Big Ten has changed in many ways. Four new universities have been
added to the Big Ten, a television network has been created, the conference expanded
geographically, and characteristics of the conference have shifted. The branding chapter
discussed the importance of building a brand. With the latest rounds of expansion, it is obvious
that the Big Ten was starting to move away from the brand image it had created for many years.
In order to be an effective brand, changes needed to be made in order to stay prevalent in
people's eyes. The brand evolved and expanded in many different ways. Universities moved
outside of the Midwest territory, the introduction of the BTN is generating enormous amounts of
revenue, and the focus is now more heavily on athletics, mainly football. It is questionable
whether or not the Big Ten's changes are too drastic and if they are taking away from the
conference’s main goal of being academically and athletically excellent. The Big Ten has a rich
history and has become a very dominant intercollegiate conference. It is possible that the Big
Ten's evolution and changes have caused the conference to shy away from their foundation and
instead, move more towards a revenue-generating business.
Chapter 5

Attributes: Original vs Current with Fan Perception

In the early years of the Big Ten conference it seemed as though there was an unspoken criteria or set of attributes that an institution needed in order to be part of the Big Ten conference. Based on the changes and evolution of the brand, discussed in the previous chapter, it is evident that the attributes have evolved along with the brand. In order to comprehend how fans’ perceive the brand it’s important to examine how the changes of the Big Ten conference may have affected the evolution of the Big Ten’s common attributes. Understanding the original attributes of the conference provides a foundation to compare where the conference is today.

The original attributes seem to have been set when the Big Ten officially had ten members. One of the attributes was centered on geography. All the universities were located within the Midwest region, which caused the Big Ten to be known as the Midwest conference. Phil Esten, the Chief Operating Officer of Penn State Athletics, brought up an interesting point in an interview when he said, “The Big Ten is considered a Midwest conference. Along with being branded a Midwest conference comes alignment with Midwest values and Midwest work ethic. I think the brand has benefitted from that” (Esten, 2017). The “Midwest work ethic” is the understanding that “you are owed nothing in life, that you can get far with hard work, and that quiet and humble approach to this work will pay off in the long run” (Marks, 2016). It seems that the foundation of the Big Ten also aligned with Midwest values.

Another original attribute of the Big Ten was focused on research and academics. Tim Curley, former Athletic Director at Penn State, clearly understood the importance of Big Ten
academics. In an interview, he said, “It’s an athletic conference, but the collaboration and the connections of the Big Ten schools academically can never be underestimated. This has been a great connection for the academic side of the universities” (Curley, 2016). One of the benefits of this original attribute is the collaboration of research among the institutions. The Big Ten was able to continue it’s academic excellence by exchanging information and resources between all the members.

Some of the original members were land grant institutions. In 1862, the Land-Grant College Act, or the Morrill Act, was created. This act provided grants of land to states with the intention of establishing universities that would focus on agriculture and mechanic arts (NAP, 1995). Due to the vast amount of land available in the Midwest, many of these universities were established because of the grants. This allowed the universities to focus on agriculture and mechanics to give back to the economy. Many of the original Big Ten institutions wouldn’t have been created if it had not been for this act that focused on developing opportunities for education. The combination of the research and land grant attributes enhanced and developed the academic experience for the Big Ten.

Over the years, the Big Ten has gained the brand association of having large schools. In a survey conducted with 55 participants, 80.77% of the respondents associated “student body size” as a key attribute of the Big Ten (Survey, 2017). Every university has a student body over 21,000 students. Northwestern has the smallest student body with 21,500 students, while Ohio State has the largest with 58,300 students (College Raptor, 2016). A large student body leads to a larger alumni base. The Big Ten prides itself on its alumni because of the strong connections that the Big Ten has all over the world. The alumni and students help benefit the brand and conference because of their support and brand loyalty. The brand loyalty for the Big Ten is direct evidence
and reassurance for new fans looking to support the conference. Curley (2017) explained, “When you talk about the brand, you have a lot of people promoting that brand on a day-to-day basis whether it’s in the business world or wherever they may live. They’re carrying the Big Ten flag, so the best marketers are the people who actually live the brand. Having that large alumni network is pretty powerful.” The size perception of the Big Ten is very influential because there is strength in numbers, so the conference can be seen as very powerful.

The characteristics of the original Big Ten universities seemed to align, creating the original unspoken attributes of the conference. Each institution was located in the Midwest and had the academic and athletic drive to be successful. It could be said that Midwestern values, a strong brand association, and work ethic contributed to this determination. Also, with the introduction of the Morrill Act, many of the original institutions were established. All were large institutions with a large alumni base. The development and collaboration of each university’s research really emphasized the importance and success of the academic standard for the conference. The Big Ten was an academically and athletically strong conference that was located in the Midwest for over 70 years. With the recent changes to the conference, it is obvious the common attributes have changed and the conference has adapted along with the changes.

Due to expansion, the geographic region of the Big Ten conference has changed. The new attribute has moved away from Midwest location to a more Midwest to Northeast region. The addition of Penn State opened the door to the East Coast. Although Penn State is adjacent to the Midwest, once Maryland and Rutgers were added, the Big Ten had officially expanded outside of the Midwest and towards the East coast. The Big Ten grew with the expansion and became more dispersed. When asked if the Big Ten had common attributes and if they changed, Phil Esten said, “Definitely changed in that it’s grown, more geographically dispersed. It is
distributed different because of television. Attributes have changed, but at its core, from what I
glean, I don’t think it’s changed. The values are the same. The principles are the same. [The Big
Ten] still stands for the same things that it always has” (Esten, 2017). Although the Big Ten
isn’t located solely in the Midwest anymore, the conference is still finding universities with
similar core values to join the conference even though they’re in different geographic regions.
This strengthens the brand associations, but also provides the opportunity to reach a new
audience, which could benefit brand loyalty.

The major attribute changes were in regards to geography and size of the conference, but
there were some adjustments to the academic attributes of the conference. The Big Ten is still
recognized as an academic and athletic conference, so the academic standard of the institutions is
important. All of the Big Ten members are research institutions and still collaborate. The
research aspect of the Big Ten has and will always remain a core attribute of the conference.
When The Big Ten started expanding, they looked for universities who were members of the
AAU because it was an unspoken requirement. Each institution was a member of the AAU when
they joined the Big Ten, but in the last chapter we learned that Nebraska is no longer a member
of the AAU. The academic standards of the conference are still really high, but it will be
interesting to see what happens between the AAU and the Big Ten as time goes on. If the Big
Ten continues to expand, will being a member of the AAU be a requirement for potential new
members?

With 14 members, the Big Ten still has an unspoken set of criteria and brand
associations. These associations provide a competitive advantage for the brand because it
differentiates the conference from its competitors. Some of the common attributes among the
universities are the same, while others have changed along with the evolution of the conference.
Even with the changes, the Big Ten remains an athletic and academic conference striving for success. The conference’s attributes differ from most other conferences. For example, the other most prominent athletic conference, the Southeastern Conference (SEC) differs because they focus on athletics. In a survey conducted with 55 participants, the group was asked to describe attributes of the SEC. Not one of the 55 responses mentioned the word academics. The SEC is perceived as a football focused conference that is based on tradition. In the survey, participants were asked if the universities must uphold a specific academic standard to be in their respective conferences. For the Big Ten, 88.46% of respondents felt that the universities needed to uphold a specific academic standard, but only 42.31% felt that SEC universities had a specific academic standard (Survey, 2016-2017). The Big Ten’s focus on both athletics and academics differentiates their brand and conference as a whole and gives them a competitive edge.

The attributes of the Big Ten, both original and current, are an important aspect of the conference because they are the foundation. When changes are made to the conference, it’s important to consider the perception of how these changes will affect the brand. Branding, the Big Ten’s rich history, and changes to the Big Ten have been discussed in the previous chapters. In order to evaluate the strength of the Big Ten’s brand it’s important to understand how the fans perceive all of the aspects of the Big Ten. Throughout a series of interviews, fans and members of the Big Ten conference were asked questions to reveal their feelings of the evolution of the conference and how it affects the brand. The participants, both male and female, were either alumni or students of a Big Ten university to ensure a variety of perspectives.

Before questions about if and how the brand had changed, interviewees were asked about their immediate reaction to the Big Ten conference. With this question, I hoped to gain insight into how people identify the brand. Answers usually centered on the ideas of football, sports, the
combination of athletics and academics, and tradition. This is very beneficial for the Big Ten because people’s perception of the conference aligns with its brand and core values. There is strong brand recognition and brand identity. What was extremely interesting was how people viewed the Big Ten’s goal. Many remarks focused on academics and athletics. Fans understood that the Big Ten wanted to provide the “Big Ten environment” but in a larger footprint, hence the expansion. Fans understood that the Big Ten has differentiated its conference to focus on academics and athletics. However, there were some fans who believed that the goal of the conference was financially focused. When asked about the goal of the Big Ten, one fan even responded, “Do you mean besides being money hungry?” (Interviews, 2016 - 2017). Some people see the financial aspect of the Big Ten as a benefit, while others see it as a scheme.

All the interviewees felt that the Big Ten had changed over time. Few felt it was a negative change, but it was a change nonetheless. Fans felt the changes occurred with expansion and the introduction of the Big Ten Network. More specifically, interviewees felt the last round of expansion to Rutgers and Maryland brought about the most change. Tim Curley’s explanation of the Big Ten’s change over time summed up what the other interviewees mentioned. He said, “I believe it has changed because it was so stable for almost 50 years with the charter schools other than UIC [University of Chicago]. UIC was a charter member, and then MSU [Michigan State University] came in a little later, but traditionally they’ve been a solid conference with the same schools for a long time period. As things started to change in demographics and television, the Big Ten was at the forefront with the addition of Penn State and then certainly now with Maryland, Nebraska, and Rutgers. They continue to evolve with the changing landscape and they’ve had a dynamic leader and leadership. They’ve evolved and continued with traditional values and mission, they’ve stayed true to what it is and have tried to evolve within that
mandate” (Curley, 2017). Change is inevitable because if the Big Ten remained exactly the same it wouldn’t be competitive against other conferences.

A main focus of the interview was around expansion because that seemed like the most obvious change to the Big Ten. It was interesting to gain perspective from people who attended different Big Ten universities. Some were alumni of the original Big Ten members, while others were alumni of the most recent additions. It was obvious that some alumni of the original members had negative opinions about some of the expansion.

When asked which of the four universities fit into the Big Ten the best, many felt it was Penn State. This is interesting because of the 18 participants; only four had an affiliation with Penn State. As discussed previously, the Big Ten remained unchanged for decades before adding Penn State to the conference. After that, the Big Ten waited another two decades before expanding. This gave fans time to adjust to Penn State being a member of the conference. Some voiced that they associate Penn State as one of the original Big Ten members because Penn State fit so well and had been a member for such a long time. According to respondents, Penn State hit every qualification and requirement of the Big Ten. With their strong alumni base and large fan base they brought a massive audience and support system to the Big Ten conference.

The interviewees felt as though the addition of Nebraska, Maryland, and Rutgers made sense and fit relatively well. In many interviews, fans explained that these three universities had some downfalls that did not make them as good a fit as Penn State. Fans felt that Nebraska brought a strong sports program and strong name recognition to the brand. Although they brought an athletic benefit, some respondents felt as though Nebraska weakened the academic portion of the brand. In terms of Aaker’s perspective, the result of Nebraska losing its membership to the AAU reduced perceived quality, which could have impacted brand loyalty
and the ability to create brand extensions in the future. Maryland’s downfall on the other hand, was centered on location. It was the first university to truly be outside of the Midwestern region. Interviewees understood the logic behind adding Maryland, but still weren’t as positive about it because Maryland was not as competitive as other universities. Adding Maryland was a way to reach the Maryland, Virginia, and Washington D.C. market and generate more revenue. The final addition of Rutgers received the most negative feedback among the interviewees. Some of them believe adding Rutgers did not add anything to the brand because it hasn’t had as much success. Some believed it was added to solidify presence on the East Coast.

Overall, the interviewees could understand why the Big Ten added the schools, but some still had negative opinions. Since the most recent expansion occurred between 2011 and 2014, it will be interesting to see how fans perceive the expansion in the future once the universities have time to fully integrate into the Big Ten conference.

Another interesting concept that surfaced during interviews was the prospect of the Big Ten changing its name. When the conference added the 11th member, Penn State, there was speculation as to whether or not the Big Ten would change its name because it no longer had 10 universities. The Pacific 12 Conference (PAC-12) is an example of a conference that changed its name in adjustment to conference realignment. Phil Esten had an excellent point on the idea of name change. He said, “The Big Ten was smart in that when you think of the brand and the organizational culture of what the Big Ten stands for, it has not changed. The conference title is the conference title, regardless of how many institutions represent it. It’s still the Big Ten and the Big Ten has brand recognition and you shouldn’t change the name” (Esten, 2017). Interviewees agree with Esten. Many felt that there was brand recognition, tradition, and history associated with the Big Ten’s name. If they changed it, there could’ve been confusion. Armstrong and
Kotler (2012) explain that a strong brand name should suggest something about the products benefits, be easy to pronounce, recognize, remember, be distinctive, and be extendable. The Big Ten’s name fit those characteristics. The use of the number “10” also provided the association of stability and strength. Whether there is 14, 10 or even seven universities, The Big Ten still stands for being an academically and athletically excellent conference.

The Big Ten Network (BTN) was also constantly mentioned in interviews. Fans perceive it as a way to generate revenue, but also as one of the best marketing techniques for the conference. One fan said, “Brand evolution is a such a big part of today. When I was younger I did not pay attention as much, but through social media and the constant change in digital factors, such as BTN channels, apps, and twitter, the marketplace has changed. There are many tools available that the Big Ten can use to recruit and keep it’s fan base alive. Now they can do it through more than just TV and magazines. They can follow it on social media 24/7” (Interviews, 2016 – 2017). The BTN has proven to be a very successful marketing tool for the conference. It has generated revenue that goes back to the universities and their athletics programs. Tim Curley also made an interesting point when he said, “With social media and television now, the marketing abilities in this day and age are just endless. The brand will just continue to grow as long as it’s nurtured and the schools stay true to the values and ideals of what the conference stands for” (Curley, 2017). The bottom line is that the Big Ten’s brand will continue to grow, especially with its investment in the BTN, but the universities must remain true to their values so the brand stays strong and perceived quality does not become tainted.

At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to rank the Big Ten’s brand on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being the weakest and 10 being the strongest. A majority of the respondents gave the Big Ten an eight or a nine. People felt that there was room for
improvement because conditions are always changing, but it’s a strong brand that has a lot of potential and great brand recognition. Many respondents focused their answers around the athletic and academic strength of the conference and how that is what makes the brand so strong. Commissioner Delany, Phil Esten, and Tim Curley all gave the Big Ten a ranking of 10 for their brand strength. They have affiliations with the Big Ten, which impacts their responses, but their passion and support of the conference speaks volumes of its potential. Phil Esten put it best when he said, “Big Ten is a ten. When you think Big Ten you think excellence, comprehensive, strong academic profile, alumni are leaders, alumni bases, research productivity, integrity, and all these positive things. It’s the best of the best” (Esten, 2017).

Overall, the Big Ten has evolved over the years, but fans still perceive it as a strong conference and even stronger brand. Some of the changes made to the Big Ten have caused speculation over the true intentions of the conference moving forward, but people truly believe in the academic and athletic excellence of the Big Ten. The conference has differentiated itself from the other conferences, especially the SEC, by having common attributes that evolve along with the changes made to the conference. It will be interesting to see where the conference evolves to in the future, but for now, fans perceive the brand as a strong brand because of their brand identity, strong core values, and their accomplishments thus far.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

Since January of 1895, The Big Ten conference has established a strong brand that has evolved with intercollegiate athletics as a whole. The conference started as a meeting between eight leaders from different universities to regulate intercollegiate athletics, and has evolved into a group of 14 universities who focus on the combination of strong academics and athletics. Initially, the Big Ten’s focus was on setting an academic standard for the athletes of the eight universities. This was in response to the unethical and delinquent behavior of the participating universities. The collaboration of the university leaders set the groundwork for what developed into a strong athletic, academic, and ethical conference.

In 1917, the conference had been named the Big Ten conference when University of Michigan was reinstated. At this point, the conference started gaining a brand identity and brand recognition. The Big Ten was known for having strong tradition, strong athletics, and strong academics. Over the years, the brand has gained more support and brand loyalty due to the ever-growing alumni base and student body. The conference has maintained the brand by developing brand equity and constantly updating their brand image, especially throughout the changes of the conference.

It is obvious that the Big Ten has evolved over time just based on the number of universities in the conference. As explained previously, when the Big Ten had the original 10 universities, the conference members had similar characteristics, which formed strong brand associations. All the original members are located in the Midwest and are strong research
institutions. After being perceived as a Midwest conference for multiple decades, the Big Ten conference realized it had captured a majority of the Midwest market share. From there, the conference decided to push the envelope to the East and West when they added Penn State and Nebraska.

The expansion after Penn State provided monetary benefit and opportunities to the conference. With the addition of Nebraska, the Big Ten conference had 12 members, meaning they could host a conference championship. This eventually led to invitations to more prestigious bowl games, due to the success of the conference. A conference championship and involvement in well-known bowl games generated more revenue for the conference because it meant more television time and more lucrative media contracts. The increase in revenue and viewership created a stronger sense of brand loyalty because more fans were being reached.

Adding Rutgers and Maryland provided the Big Ten with the opportunity create new brand associations, new brand extensions, and increase perceived quality with their movement to the East. This opportunity also reduced the Big Ten’s differentiation and competitive advantage because they were no longer a Midwestern conference. Although some argue that it is still considered a Midwest conference, geographically it has moved over several regions. With this strategic move, the conference gained entry into two very popular media markets, Washington D.C. and New York. This took away from the original Midwest attribute and some people started to question the true intentions of the Big Ten conference moving forward. The universities still upheld the academic standard of the conference, and most were athletically successful.

The biggest revenue generating opportunity and strongest marketing tool for the Big Ten was the creation of the Big Ten Network. The BTN provided the opportunity for the conference to establish it’s own identity on it’s own channel. The channel and other BTN media outlets,
showcase all different sports games and the accomplishments of the universities. Commissioner Delany explained in his interview that it was an opportunity to feature other athletes and sports other than football and basketball (Delany, 2016).

Although the BTN gives the opportunity to build the brand and spread the word about the Big Ten as a whole, it also is the main contribution to the revenue sharing model the Big Ten conference has implemented. As of 2016, each university in the Big Ten received $32.4 million due to the revenue sharing. In 2017, this amount will increase due to a new television contract with the Big Ten, FOX, and ESPN, which includes Friday Night football games. “The league’s new TV deal kicks in later this year, a reported $2.6 billion package over six years. The Cedar Rapids-Gazette reported that per-school payouts are conservatively estimated to top $43 million in 2017-2018 and could top out at $54 million per school at the end of the contract. The SEC is the only other league in that stratosphere, and the Big Ten is expected to outpace everyone in total revenue” (Bennett, 2017). Now, with 14 universities, the Big Ten is generating more revenue than any other conferences and becoming more powerful.

One of the major issues with this revenue is where it is spent. The Big Ten is founded on academics and athletics, but according to reports, “Big Ten schools have committed to using those dollars to improve their football programs, greatly increasing the pay for head coaches and building brand new facilities” (Bennett, 2017). The revenue seems to be benefitting the athletics more than the academics, but Phil Esten provided great insight on the matter when he said, “We expanded the market share so we could drive more revenue, so we could provide the universities with more resources, so they could put [the resources] back into the students” (Esten, 2017).

The salaries of the Big Ten head football coaches are listed below in Table 1. Their salaries are expected to increase as a result of the new contracts. The remaining money is going
towards facilities and athletic programs. This will make the universities more attractive to recruits and lead to more success in the conference. One specific university, however, is handling it differently. President Eric Barron of Penn State reported that a portion of this money would go towards the university as a whole. When discussing the new revenue sharing amount, he said, “They aren’t done yet, but we have enough confidence in the outcome that we’ve decided to take $4 million of that and have it be a bigger athletic contribution to the success of the university as a whole” (Falce, 2017). Ultimately, with more revenue being put into the resources, the conference hopes to continue developing.

The Big Ten conference started and built its brand with a focus on regulating academics and athletics. Currently, it seems as though the conference is concentrating on generating revenues primarily to enhance the athletic programs of the universities. Although Aaker emphasizes that profit and brand extensions are crucial for the brand, this growth could be counterproductive to the perceived associations and core values the Big Ten spent so long building. This is a very logical strategy because the conference understands that building on athletics generates more fans, more support, and in a sense, a stronger brand. The real issue of this situation though, is how fans will perceive the Big Ten’s evolution in the future. A brand is based on perception, so if people start to see the Big Ten’s revenue increasing, they could start questioning the true intentions of the brand. The Big Ten has remained at the forefront of intercollegiate athletics. It’s unknown how the conference as a whole will evolve moving forward. With the Big Ten’s continuing fixation on generated money, their brand perception could be affected in the future. The Big Ten brand has evolved over time due to expansion and the creation of brand extensions. These extensions have increased the efficiency of marketing, giving the Big Ten a competitive advantage. However, it is unknown where brand extensions and
the brand itself might go in the future with this goal for more media dollars and competitive edge with other conferences. So far, according to my research, except for its geographic identity with the Midwest, The Big Ten has been able to maintain the primary attributes it was founded on – strong athletics and academics, and ethical behavior. This perception of the brand evolution is intact with nearly all of the responses in my research.

Table 1 Big Ten Coach Salaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
<td>Jim Harbaugh</td>
<td>$9,004,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
<td>Urban Meyer</td>
<td>$6,094,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn State University</td>
<td>James Franklin</td>
<td>$4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Iowa</td>
<td>Kirk Ferentz</td>
<td>$4,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan State University</td>
<td>Mark Dantonio</td>
<td>$4,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
<td>Pat Fitzgerald</td>
<td>$3,350,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Nebraska</td>
<td>Mike Riley</td>
<td>$2,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Wisconsin</td>
<td>Paul Chryst</td>
<td>$2,706,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>DJ Durkin</td>
<td>$2,412,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana University</td>
<td>Kevin Wilson</td>
<td>$2,320,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdue University</td>
<td>Darrell Hazell</td>
<td>$2,190,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutgers University</td>
<td>Chris Ash</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois</td>
<td>Lovie Smith</td>
<td>$1,809,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota</td>
<td>Tracy Claeys</td>
<td>$1,400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

First Official Rules of the Big Ten Conference

1) Each college and university which has not already done so shall appoint a committee on college athletics which shall take general supervision of all athletic matters in the respective college or university, and which shall have all responsibility of enforcing the college or university rules regarding athletics and all intercollegiate sports.

2) No one shall participate in any game or athletic sport unless he be a bona fide student doing full work in a regular or special course as defined in the curriculum of his college; and no person who has participated in any match game as a member of any college team shall be permitted to participate in any game as a member of another college team, until he has been a matriculate in said college under the above conditions for a period of six months. This rule shall not apply to students who, having graduated at one college, shall enter another college for professional or graduate study.

3) No person shall be admitted to any intercollegiate contest who receives any gift, remuneration or pay for his services on the college team.

4) Any student of any institution who shall be pursuing a regularly prescribed resident graduate course within such institution, whether for an advanced degree or in one of its professional schools, may be permitted to play for the period of the minimum number of years required for securing the graduate or professional degree for which he is a candidate.
No person who has been employed in training a college team for intercollegiate contests shall be allowed to participate in any intercollegiate contest as a member of any team which he has trained, and no professional athlete or person who has ever been a member of a professional team shall play at any intercollegiate contest.

No student shall play in any game under an assumed name.

No student shall be permitted to participate in any intercollegiate contest who is found by the faculty to be delinquent in his studies.

All games shall be played on grounds either owned by or under the immediate control of one or both of the colleges participating in the contest, and all games shall be played under student management and not under the patronage or control of any other corporation, association or private individual.

The election of managers and captains of teams in each college shall be subject to the approval of its committee on athletics.

College teams shall not engage in games with professional teams not with those representing so-called athletics clubs.

Before every intercollegiate contest a list of men proposing to play shall be presented by each team or teams to the other or others, certifying that all members are entitled to play under conditions of the rules adopted, such certificate to be signed by the registrar or the secretary of the college or university. It shall be the duty of the captain to enforce this rule.

We call upon the expert managers of football teams to so revise the rules as to reduce the liability to injury to a minimum.
Appendix B

Big Ten and SEC Attribute Survey

1. What do you think are the attributes or characteristics of the Big Ten?
2. What do you think are the attributes or characteristics of the SEC?
3. Did you attend a Big Ten University?
   - Yes
   - No
4. Did you attend a SEC University?
   - Yes
   - No
5. Do you believe the Big Ten has changed over time?
   - Yes
   - No
6. Has the change been good or bad?
   - Good
   - Bad
   - No change
7. If yes, why was the change good or bad?
8. Do you believe the SEC has changed over time?
   - Yes
   - No
9. Has the change been good or bad?
   - Good
   - Bad
   - No change
10. If yes, why was the change good or bad?
11. Do you believe the Big Ten is a strong brand?
    - Yes
    - No
12. Do you believe the SEC is a strong brand?
13. Do you believe “location” is a key attribute of the Big Ten?
    - Yes
    - No
14. Do you believe “location” is a key attribute of the SEC?
    - Yes
    - No
15. If you had to choose, what location do you believe describes the Big Ten?
   - Northeast Region
   - Midwest Region
   - South Region
   - West Region

16. If you had to choose, what location do you believe describes the SEC?
   - Northeast Region
   - Midwest Region
   - South Region
   - West Region

17. Do you believe “size” is a key attribute of the Big Ten?
   - Yes
   - No

18. Do you believe “size” is a key attribute of the SEC?
   - Yes
   - No

19. If you had to choose, what size do you believe best describes the Big Ten?
   - Under 20,000 students (small)
   - 20,001 – 50,000 students (medium)
   - Over 50,000 students (large)

20. If you had to choose, what size do you believe best describes the SEC?
   - Under 20,000 students (small)
   - 20,001 – 50,000 students (medium)
   - Over 50,000 students (large)

21. Do you believe universities must uphold a specific academic standard in order to be a Big Ten university?
   - Yes
   - No

22. Do you believe universities must uphold a specific academic standard in order to be a SEC university?
   - Yes
   - No
   - How old are you?
Appendix C

Survey Results

What do you think are the attributes or characteristics of the Big Ten?

- Football
- Large schools, great educations, heavily deal with sports
- Though, gritty, old schools
- Northern, developing, welcoming
- “Kind of the original conference in a way, basketball is top sport”
- History of accomplishment
- Camaraderie; bigger than the school following; tailgating; tradition
- Smart athletes; high academic expectations; high athletic expectations
- Academics, class, history, athletics
- Spirit, Camaraderie
- Midwest, pride, hometown spirit
- Large size school
- Big, Public school in the Midwest
- Strong academic programs, mostly Midwest
- Rape culture, sports
- Dominance
- Old, established conference of large Midwest universities. Often pioneers innovators that the other major conferences soon adopt (like with the BTN)
- Gives you that Midwest feel, welcoming and open
- Overrated, arrogant, poorly educated
- Blue Collar
- Academics, athletics, social prestigious
- Strong Academics and well-earned reputation of universities
- Winning
- Athletics, lots of students
- Northern schools, good academics, good sports
- Good school
- Research Universities
- Tremendous amount of school spirit. Seems like people don’t give a sh** about things
- Big school spirit
- A lot of people, good sports, good academics
- Football, academic, big school, diverse
• Well-rounded students, work hard play hard attitude
• Aggressive, fun
• State schools, good education, big schools, blue collar
• Competitive, loyal, pride, there is just history and it is seen among students and players
• Academics, also sports
• Great football and passionate fans
• High quality academics and athletics
• Schools in the cold, less dressy
• Smart and athletic, underrated
• Big state schools, smart institutions, great sports
• Success, Power, Humble
• Being in the east
• Sportsmanship, tradition, integrity, academics
• More northern schools, larger “party” schools, football is the most major sport but there are sports that attract attention like basketball
• Big school population and money spent on athletics
• Large northern schools
• Great football, large schools, party schools
• Good sports coupled with strong academics
• Northeast/Midwest regions, big universities

What do you think are the attributes or characteristics of the SEC?
• Football
• Warm weather, southern schools, football and basketball schools
• Athletic, talented
• Southern, consistent, intimidating, traditional
• It’s a lifestyle, passionate, hardworking top tier
• Competition; pride; money; fancy tailgates
• High athletic expectations
• Athletics, pro athletes, lack of education, focus on sports, allowing athletes to get by
• More of an event to attend, dresses up, social gathering
• Center of the city, players are celebrities
• Southern school
• Southeast, big school
• Strong football program, south
• Rape culture, sports
- Traditional
- Old (but a bit newer), established conference of large southern universities. Invest heavily intercollegiate athletics (especially football)
- Cocky and exclusive
- Preppy, obnoxious, VERY poorly educated
- Southern belles
- Alabama football
- Strong athletics department
- Cheating
- Winning More
- Athletics, southern, money
- You should be in the southeast?
- Football schools
- A lot of people attending
- Sports
- Different type of school spirit. Very traditional, girls are very formal
- Football, sports, South, dominant
- Put together
- Southern football
- Just sports
- Southern, BIG, religion, tradition
- Southern schools, dressier tailgates, tradition
- The kind of college football, sports more important than academics
- Large southern schools, great football schools
- Being in the south
- Sportsmanship, tradition
- More southern, football is the only big sport followed, seems more old/established as a conference over big 10, overall seems to be scary or intimidating
- Larger southern schools
- Powerhouse football
- Big universities, south

**Did you attend a Big Ten University?**
- Yes – 67.27%
- No – 32.73%

**Did you attend a SEC University?**
- Yes – 5.45%
- No – 94.55%
Do you believe the Big Ten has changed over time?

- Yes – 74.55%
- No – 25.45%

Has the change been good or bad?

- Good – 54.55%
- Bad – 16.36%
- No change – 29.09%

If yes, why was the change good or bad?

- I think the big ten has become a more talented conference specifically in football due to the coaches that have taken over the programs in the last 5-10 years
- They have fluctuated from being a good conference to a not so good and then back to getting better so I think they are on the up and up again
- More challenging greater number of competitors
- Expanded the conference positively
- Though the teams change there’s the same spirit around the other teams – the rivalries and competitions are always fun and the tailgating sports fan atmosphere is so energetic
- Academic rigor ahs become more important. Life after sports is a priority
- Much better academics than most conferences, but conference in two sports
- Less focus on the sport itself than the people
- They have attracted more critical talent from Midwest states
- Too many schools, too broad
- Too many schools added, less rivalry among them
- Vaguely more diverse (only on paper)
- Expansion brought in quality programs like OSU, MSU, PSU, and Nebraska. However the unfortunate addition is Rutgers
- Made strides to better the programs and people who represent them
- Became all about the $$$
- Money, money, money
- More teams have invested in hiring big name HCs
- There’s more winning
- More prestigious
- Much more opportunities
- More focus on things other than sports, good at everything
- Expanded to other areas, more impact on east coast, better education
- People’s perspectives have changed in a negative way, especially a Penn State. We used to be one of the top teams in the country and we are slowly returning ot the position but it has taken time
• There are 14 teams
• Added schools that don’t follow the traditions such as a strong academic record and sportsmanship
• More teams make the BIG more competitive
• Got Bigger
• Our division has grown over time
• More schools to create diversity of competition
• More publicity
• New/different schools, but also gaining more recognition
• The competition has increased

**Do you believe the SEC has changed over time?**
• Yes – 28.85%
• No – 71.15%

**Has the change been good or bad?**
• Good – 14.00%
• Bad – 16.00%
• No change – 70.00%

**If yes, why was the change good or bad?**
• Addition of A&M and Missouri have improved the conference but as recruiting has become more of a national scale operation many ACC, Big Ten, and PAC 12 teams have been able to lure some of the best high school players out of the hotbed that is the southeast
• I feel the SEC has always been on the top from what I can remember
• Expanded the conference positively
• They have lost a lot of the competitiveness that the Big Ten has gained
• SEC has modernized a bit, but there is a lot of continuity with the conference, South Carolina, Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas A&M were good additions. Arkansas and A&M were especially strong acquisitions since these additions weakened the SEC largest regional rival conference at the time (The SWC and Big 12 respectively)
• More accepting
• Increased $$ has led to other exposure for other sports
• Mizzou
• Bama has dominated the whole SEC over the last 7 years
• More winning
• Gotten better
• Corrupt
• Athletics focused
• Lots of athlete crime, trouble, bad grades
• Athletes getting away with not taking certain classes giving BS classes for grades

Do you believe the Big Ten is a strong brand?
• Yes --- 90.20%
• No – 9.80%

Do you believe the SEC is a strong brand?
• Yes – 92.16%
• No – 7.84%

Do you believe “location” is a key attribute of the Big Ten?
• Yes – 76.47%
• No – 23.53%

Do you believe “location” is a key attribute of the SEC?
• Yes – 88.24%
• No – 11.76%

If you had to choose, what location do you believe describes the Big Ten?
• Northeast Region – 40.38%
• Midwest Region – 57.69%
• South Region-- 1.92%
• West Region—0.00%

If you had to choose, what location do you believe describes the SEC?
• Northeast Region – 3.92%
• Midwest Region – 3.92%
• South Region – 92.16%
• West Region – 0.00%

Do you believe “size” is a key attribute of the Big Ten?
• Yes – 80.77%
• No – 19.23%

Do you believe “size” is a key attribute of the SEC?
• Yes – 67.31%
• No – 32.69%

If you had to choose, what size do you believe best describes the Big Ten?
• Under 20,000 students (small) – 0.00%
• 20,001 – 50,000 students (medium) – 55.77%
• Over 50,000 students (large) – 44.23%

If you had to choose, what size do you believe best describes the SEC?
• Under 20,000 students (small) – 5.77%
• 20,001 – 50,000 students (medium) – 63.46%
• Over 50,000 students (large) - 30.77%
Do you believe universities must uphold a specific academic standard in order to be a Big Ten university?
- Yes -- 88.46%
- No -- 11.54%

Do you believe universities must uphold a specific academic standard in order to be a SEC university?
- Yes -- 42.31%
- No -- 57.69%

How old are you?
- 18 – 1.92%
- 19 -- 3.84%
- 20 – 9.62%
- 21 – 26.92%
- 22 – 15.38%
- 23 – 7.70%
- 24 – 5.77%
- 30 – 5.77%
- 32 – 1.92%
- 39 – 1.92%
- 47 – 1.92%
- 48 – 1.92%
- 60 – 3.84%
- 65 – 1.92%
Appendix D

General Interview Guide

General Guiding Questions:

1. When you think of the Big Ten, what do you think of?
2. What do you think the goal of the Big Ten is?
3. What do you think are the values of the Big Ten?
4. What are the attributes of the Big Ten?
5. Which do you think is the most important attribute of the Big Ten?
6. Which do you think is the most important value of the Big Ten?
7. What does the Big Ten stand for?
8. What are the first 2 universities that come to mind when you hear Big Ten?
9. What do the Big Ten Universities have in common?
10. What’s the strongest aspect of the Big Ten?
11. What’s the weakest aspect of the Big Ten?

Questions about changes:

1. Has the Big Ten Brand changed over time?
2. When do you think the Big Ten brand started to change?
3. Are there certain values that have changed?
4. Are there certain attributes that have changed?
5. What are some changes that have strengthened the brand?
6. What are some changes that have weakened the brand?
Questions about expansion:

1. When the Big Ten expanded more than 10 universities, should they have changed their name?
   a. If yes, at which point?
   b. Why at that point?

2. Do you believe adding universities to the Big Ten strengthened or weakened the brand?
   a. Did it occur with adding the 11th team, Penn State?
   b. Did it occur with adding the 12th team, Nebraska?
   c. Did it occur with adding the 13th and 14th team, Rutgers and Maryland?

3. Do you think the creation of the East and West Divisions affected the brand as a whole?

4. Is it possible for the Big Ten to be a unified brand if its members are constantly competing with one another?

Questions about Friday Night Games

1. How do you feel about the announcement of Friday night games?

2. How do you think it will affect the brand?

3. Do you think the addition of Friday night games could affect the values of the big ten?
   a. How so?

4. How could this take away from the Big Ten?

5. How could this benefit the Big Ten?

Final Question

1. On a scale of 1 – 10, how strong would you consider the Big Ten brand? (1 being the weakest and 10 being the strongest)
Appendix E

Interview Results

First reaction to Big Ten

- Football
- Sports
- Combination between athletics and academics
- Original Schools
- Family and Tradition
  Popular Phrases:
  - “Now 14 Universities”
  - “Best conference”
** People who talked about original schools didn’t ALL lean towards expansion as a weak factor **

Goals

- Academics and athletics
  - Providing the environment (@ bigger footprint)
  - Positive
  - Excellence
  - Strong Balance
  - Well-rounded conference
- Make money
- Further the mission of NCAA
- Prepare students and athletes for the rest of their lives

Attributes

- Great institutions
- Large State schools
- Land grand schools
- Strong alumni base

Has the Big Ten changed over time?

- Everyone said yes
- Few felt it was a negative change, but a change nonetheless
How/Why has it changed?

- Expansion
- Big Ten Network
- Social Media/Brand Evolution
- Revenue sharing? – talked about money in a few

When did it change?

- Introduction of Big Ten Network
- Last round of expansion (Rutgers & Maryland)
- Modernization in the 90s
- Evolution of the brand/logo

Expansion

- Penn State
  - Dominate in football
  - Strong alumni base
  - Hits every qualification and audience
  - Potential
  - Historic
  - Large fan base
  - Mainly received football benefits (compared to basketball and other sports)
  - Added markets (gateway to East coast)
  - Best of 4 newest schools
    ** Some just associate Penn State with original 10 because it fit SO well **

- Nebraska
  - Name recognition
  - Weakened academically
  - Thought it’d be more powerful addition
  - Incredible sports program
  - Example of how Big Ten revenue sharing trickles down helps betterment of all sports
  - Historic program
  - Strong football fan base
  - Good competition

- Maryland
  - Good school
  - Good sports
Captures DC/Maryland/VA market
Benefitted Big Ten basketball
Not Midwest
Adding more fan base
Not as competitive
Trying to bring school history into Big Ten history from years before it was part of the Big Ten

Rutgers
Doesn’t add anything from marketing/brand standpoint
“Not a great decision”
Getting east coast
Hasn’t performed well
Similar core values
Not as big of a school
Adding fans/exposure

Most people discussed Penn State as a strength and that it fit really well
Nebraska and Maryland tended to stay out of the conversation UNLESS interviewees decided to group Maryland and Rutgers together
Rutgers received a lot of negative feedback UNLESS people just simply stated that all the schools fit and the Big Ten thought about it.

Ratings

9 – Big ten is always brought up
8 – people will put SEC higher because success. Big 10 has integrity
8 – brand recognition, all around experience
8/9 – room for improvement, tradition
8 – needs to develop some sports, has great academics and athletics
10 – atmosphere and tradition
8 – “on the up”, good academics and popular brand
9 – command high level of respect
8/9 – strong but all she hears bout – not THE strongest
10 – they’ve adapted and are strong
7.3 – pretty decent at sports
9 – lots of muscle and good reputation
8 – expansion added more fans – it’s THE conference

**Overall, people felt there was room for improvement because conditions are always changing, but it’s a strong brand that has a lot of potential and has great brand recognition**
Appendix F

James Delany Interview

In my interview with Big Ten Commissioner, James Delany, we discussed the foundation of the Big Ten, changes the conference has experienced, and how he interpreted the conference as a brand. My intention for this interview was to gain insight on how Commissioner Delany viewed the conference and whether or not it still upheld the same values it was founded on.

First, Commissioner Delany explained that the goal of the Big Ten was to sponsor intercollegiate athletics within academics. He emphasized the idea that the Big Ten needed to “get the equation right between both” because that was the foundation of the conference. From there, I asked the Commissioner to describe the attributes of the Big Ten. His answer focused on the large undergraduate research institutions. When he was asked to pick the most important attribute he mentioned the combination of competition and athletics, so it’s clear that both academics and athletics are important to the conference.

Next, the Commissioner and I discussed change. He felt as though the brand hadn’t changed much over time because it simply “evolved with the time.” When asked specifically about expansion, he explained that the Big Ten chose schools with “common DNA” to maintain their strong, developed brand. When asked if expansion affected the brand, Commissioner Delany explained that there are “so many Big Ten people on the East Coast”, so it was essential to move in that direction.

Finally, we touched on the topics of the Big Ten Network and the introduction of Friday Night football games. Commissioner Delany highlighted the success of the BTN and how it provided opportunities to the student athletes. In regards to Friday Night football games, Commissioner Delany felt that it was a necessity because other conferences were doing it. He
didn’t feel that it would affect the brand because it was only four games out of hundreds that are played.

Overall, Commissioner Delany felt that the conference established a brand and remained true to it throughout all the changes the conference faced. It is obvious that Commissioner Delany felt the conference was very strong and had great potential moving forward.
Appendix G

Tim Curley Interview

In my interview with Tim Curley, we discussed the foundation and evolution of the Big Ten conference. During my time with him, he elaborated on how he felt some of the changes affected the brand over time. Our conversation focused mainly on establishing attributes, expansion, and how the brand was supported.

When asked about the attributes and values of the Big Ten, his answers focused on academics, athletics, geography, tradition, and excellence. Specifically, he emphasized the importance of academics because he explained that all Big Ten institutions were “large land grant research institutions” and members of the AAU. It was clear that he really believed in the tradition of the conference. In his opinion, the conference has historical significance because it was one of the original conferences and established a strong brand.

After discussing the foundation of the conference, our conversation moved on to expansion and other changes. He described that the landscape of intercollegiate athletics was changing, and that the Big Ten evolved as well. In regards to expansion, he felt that all the schools made sense, but Penn State was a tremendous fit. Since conferences were realigning, he understood expansion was an important opportunity for the conference because it strengthened the Big Ten Network and the conference. Throughout the interview, he mentioned the Big Ten’s strong brand and marketing tactics. The support comes from the Big Ten Network and the revenue-sharing model because both directly impact the athletic programs and universities.

Overall, the interview concentrated on the idea that throughout all the changes, the Big Ten has remained true to its values. He explained that the brand is strong and successful because the conference remains committed to academics and athletics.
Appendix H

Phil Esten Interview

In my interview with Phil Esten, we discussed the academic and athletic foundation of the conference and how it has adapted to changes over time to remain a strong brand. It was interesting to hear his perspective because he has affiliations with three Big Ten institutions and other intercollegiate conferences. Throughout the interview, he emphasized the Big Ten’s attributes, changes, and resources that have made the conference so successful.

Initially, I asked him to describe the goal and attributes of the conference. He explained that the ultimate goal of the Big Ten was to provide support for its institutions to establish conditions for a successful conference. Throughout his interview, he constantly referred back to this goal when discussing other elements of the conference. A place where this was emphasized was when he explained the attributes. In his opinion, the attributes were focused on academic rigor and strive for excellence, and a national/international reach from the universities. He felt it was important to have that national exposure in order to contribute to the brand. During our conversation, he also mentioned the Midwest and how the conference’s values also aligned with Midwest values.

Next, as we discussed change, I asked specifically about expansion. He felt that each university was an opportunity to explore and expand market share. An increase in market share meant driving more revenue, which ultimately went back to support universities with more resources. His answers regarding change, directly tied to his perception of the Big Ten’s goal.

Overall, his answers had common themes about support, resources, and how the universities, athletics, and conference succeeded based on those resources. Those resources included great leadership that allows the conference to do its very best on behalf of the student
athletes. It was clear throughout the interview that he believed in the brand and its potential for the future.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Education
Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College
Smeal College of Business Class of 2017
Bachelor of Science in Marketing
Minor in Spanish

Universidad de Sevilla
CIEE, Sevilla, Spain

Association Memberships/Activities
Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity
Programming Council, Member Enrichment Chairman
Penn State Dance Marathon, Alternative Fundraising Committee Member

Schreyer Honors College
SHOTime Mentor

American Marketing Association
Penn State Marketing Association Member

Go Beyond Barrington
Board of Directors, Social Correspondent

Professional Experience
McCormick & Company
Sales Planning Intern