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DEVELOPING SPORTS FAN AVIDITY FOR INCREASED REVENUE GENERATION

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ABSTRACT

The sports industry is thriving all over the world; in just the United States alone, it generated \$414 billion in revenue in 2010. Nearly every aspect of this success can be traced back to sports fans, so sports franchises' ability to capitalize on this lucrative market depends on the development of their fan bases. Previous research has shown that avid fans invest considerably more money into their sports fandom than casual fans, which highlights the importance of developing fan avidity to a franchise's success. The franchises that arm themselves with an understanding of the psychology that motivates fan interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement will be able to outperform the competition and increase their revenue generation. Social identity theory, identity theory, and self-determination theory each present a framework for motivating permanent avid fan behaviors that can be applied to a franchise's marketing practices. The identity theories offer techniques through which sports franchises can increase their fans' identification with team-related social groups and their individual sports fan roles in different social contexts, while self-determination theory explores methods for facilitating intrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors and encouraging the internalization of extrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors. The objective of this study is to uncover the psychological drivers of sports fan avidity and their managerial implications that will drive additional revenue for sports franchises.

Key words: fan avidity, fan development, sports marketing, identity formation, motivation

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CHAPTER I: OVERVIEW OF THE SPORTS INDUSTRY

Outside of religion and politics, no institution is more widespread and pervasive than sport. Accordingly, the popularity of sport has produced a lucrative global industry. We begin with an introduction of the industry's health, recent trends, forecast, and drivers in order to understand the landscape on which sports decision-makers are operating.

Current Health

According to Plunkett Research, the United States sports industry alone generated approximately \$414 billion in 2010, making it one of the ten largest business sectors in the country (Plunkett Research, Ltd., 2010). Recently, its annual revenues have been more than double those of the auto industry and seven times the amount generated by the movie industry (DeSarbo, 2010). Within just the country's four most popular spectator sports – football, baseball, basketball, and hockey – there are approximately 1,500 franchises alone, and this number increases greatly once the less popular professional team leagues and non-team sports, such as golf, tennis, and boxing, are accounted for (Hoover's, Inc., 2010).

In 2010, the average annual revenue was \$251 million for National Football League (NFL) franchises, \$205 million for Major League Baseball (MLB) franchises, \$127 million for National Basketball Association (NBA) franchises, and \$98 million for National Hockey League (NHL) franchises. (Forbes, 2010b; Forbes, 2011a; Forbes, 2011b; Forbes, 2010c). In the NFL, the two main sources of revenue are TV and broadcast fees (about 50 percent) and tickets and concessions (about 25 percent), with smaller streams coming from advertising and endorsement fees, merchandise sales, program sales, and facility rental fees (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). The league's current TV contract brings in over \$3 billion per year (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums,

2009) and about 67,000 people attend each game, where many purchase concessions, merchandise, and programs (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). In the NBA and NHL, the average attendance is much lower: about 17,000 per game (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). However, MLB franchises sell an average of 30,000 tickets per game for a combined total of 75 million per season (Hoover's, Inc., 2010).

The United States is not alone in boasting a strong sports market; sports enjoy similar popularity and success around the world. In Europe, soccer (or, as they know it, “football”) is the most notable and established sport. Soccer alone produces over \$12.5 billion in annual income and the clubs that have established global brands net higher revenues than the top-earning American sports franchises (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). Spain’s Real Madrid generated \$563 million in revenue in 2010, England’s Manchester United soccer club generated \$459 million, and Germany’s Bayern Munich generated \$406 million (Forbes, 2010d). China’s sports industry is just as impressive. A survey conducted by the Chinese Association of Sport Industry showed approximately \$23.7 billion in revenue in 2008 (People's Daily Online, 2010).

Growth, Spending, and Future Projections

The United States’ sports industry has been growing at a torrid pace. In the past 20 years, the values of sports franchises have increased exponentially to represent the franchises’ current financials and to capture their future expected profitability. During that time, the average NFL franchise value has grown 759 percent from \$132 million to \$1.02 billion (Forbes, 2010b); the average MLB franchise value has grown 432 percent from \$121 million to \$523 million (Forbes, 2011a); the average NBA franchise value has grown 527 percent from \$70 million to \$369 million (Forbes, 2011b); and the average NHL franchise value has grown 518 percent from \$44

million to \$228 million (Forbes, 2010c; Quirk & Fort, 1997). The United States' sports industry is not alone here, either. Sports industries all over the world have experienced similar growth rates, leading to higher valuations for foreign sports franchises; between 2003 and 2010, the average value of the top 20 European soccer franchises increased from \$443 million to \$632 million (Forbes, 2004; Forbes, 2010d).

These higher valuations have made the sports industry even more capital-intensive than it already was and have caused a shift towards a more profit-oriented business approach for most sports franchises. This is clearly reflected in their spending patterns. *SportsBusiness Journal* estimates that, from 2004 to 2006, annual spending within the United States sports industry increased by nearly \$20 billion (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). During this time, the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers increased its marketing budget by 15 to 20 percent and MLB's Arizona Diamondbacks increased its advertising by 60 percent, and in 2010 the NFL's Dallas Cowboys spent \$1.2 billion on the construction of a new stadium (Rein, Kotler, & Shields 2006; Forbes, 2010a). However, the most significant cost that sports franchises incur each year is player salaries. Because star athletes play such a critical role in attracting fans, sponsors, and broadcasters, franchises often engage in intense bidding wars in order to secure their services. The level of demand for top athletes is so great that, in 2010, the 50 highest paid American athletes earned an average of \$26.2 million per year (Sports Illustrated, n.d.). In the United States' four major sports leagues, annual player salaries generally do not dip below \$300,000 and, for some franchises, the payroll can take up as much as one-third to more than half of the organization's revenue, as it does for MLB's New York Yankees (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009; Hoover's, Inc., 2010).

The sports industry's future forecast is a big reason why sports organizations are spending so confidently. According to data collected by the ESPN/TNS Sports Poll – “a syndicated continuous tracking survey [...] considered by many as the ‘industry standard’ for monitoring the overall ‘health’ of sports” – sports fans are increasingly demonstrating promising fan behaviors and activities (DeSarbo, 2010). This is supported by the most recent Hoover's, Inc. (2010) industry profile on “Professional Sports Teams and Organizations,” which points to several indicators of the industry's continued growth. From 2009 to 2010, United States corporate profits rose considerably, which bodes well for increased corporate sponsorships, memberships, and donations. Similarly, personal income rose 4.1 percent, which means that consumers now have more money to spend on sports events and merchandise (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). This has already been reflected in the fact that the price of admission to sporting events increased 2.1 percent over the previous year (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). Between 2010 and 2015, Hoover's, Inc. (2010) projects that the industry will continue to grow at an annual compounded rate of five percent.

The Importance of Sports Fans

In order for franchises to capture market share and reap the benefits of today's booming sports industry, they must develop the size and devotion of their fan bases. With the exception of facility rental fees for franchises that own their stadiums – and most do not – every cent of revenue can be traced back to sports fans in some way or another. Broadcasters and advertisers pay big money to leagues and franchises for the rights to broadcast their content and to advertise through the different channels they offer in order to access their fans. At live events, sports fans purchase concessions, merchandise, and programs on top of the price that they have already paid for admission. And when they are not at live events, they spend money on other products and

services offered by sports franchises. Thus, profitability is dependent upon attracting new fans and retaining and developing the fans that they already have.

Effective marketing and competitive play are the two most important factors to achieving these goals. Unfortunately, franchises do not have the ability to guarantee a competitive team every year because they cannot control many unexpected issues, such as player injuries and poor team chemistry, that can derail a team's ability to compete at a high level. Since losing is an inevitable part of any sport, franchises must focus their efforts on developing strong marketing strategies independent of their teams' play to grow and develop their teams' fan bases.

The sports industry's growth and industrialization has created new obstacles that have made this task more complicated. Franchises have had to pass some of their rising costs on to fans by increasing ticket and merchandise prices, which have caused some fans to question their loyalty. Today, the average ticket to a MLB game costs \$25 and it is \$75 for a NFL game (Hoover's, Inc., 2010). Once the added costs of gas, parking, food, and any other miscellaneous expenses are considered, the decision to attend a live sporting event becomes a difficult one. Furthermore, the competition created by the availability of new and improving entertainment alternatives (including other sports) has made it harder to retain current fans and to attract new ones. To overcome these challenges, marketers need to develop new ways to identify and satisfy customers' wants and needs. They must better understand how sports fans connect to sports and make decisions and use this knowledge to increase and solidify their market share.

CHAPTER II: FAN AVIDITY AND ITS LINK TO SPENDING HABITS

In all cultures, sports unite families, cities and towns, and entire countries. For many, sports have also become a staple of life that helps connect them to their community, values, and heroes. Not only do these group memberships and personal connections cement the place of sport as a powerful and ubiquitous institution, but they also lead individuals to possess and act on strong emotional feelings for the sports teams that they follow (Hirt, Zillmann, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992). We call these individuals sports fans and their behaviors are the central drivers of the sports industry. In the following chapter, we will review these behaviors and their importance to a sports franchise's success.

Defining Fan Avidity

In order to fully understand sports fans, we must first establish what a sports fan is not: A sports fan is not a spectator. In their book *Sports Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) separated spectators from sports fans by noting that spectators merely “witness” sports and Jones (1997) echoed that spectators forget about a sport once they are done observing. Fans, on the other hand, remain “interested in and follow a sport, team, and/or athlete” (Wann et al., 2001, p.2).

DeSarbo (2010) formally defines the concept of fan avidity as “the level of interest, involvement, passion, and loyalty a fan exhibits to a particular sports entity (i.e., a sport, league, team, and/or athlete)” (p.1). Interest refers to the aroused curiosity and resultant attention that a sports fan gives to a team. It can include watching a game on television, checking the final score of a game that has already ended, or reading online news stories related to a sports team. Passion describes the strength of the feelings that a sports fan feels towards a team. Sports fans may

demonstrate their passion by wearing team apparel, engaging in conversations about their favorite teams, or painting their faces to match their favorite teams' colors (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). Loyalty is the likelihood that sports fans will continue to associate themselves with a sports team regardless of the team's performance. The most loyal fans continue to root for their favorite teams even when they are not competing at a high level. Lastly, involvement is the extent to which a fan participates with and interacts with a sports team. Involved fans might attend games and other team-hosted events or interact with team personalities, including players and executives, online using social media.

Of course, not all fans are equally interested, passionate, loyal, and involved. Rather, they range across a broad scale depending upon their level of interest and engagement. The most casual sports fans occupy the lowest end of the scale. Though they are mildly interested in and follow a sports team, their resultant behaviors are inconsistent and often unenthusiastic relative to other sports fans. Some refer to these inconsistent fans as "fair-weather" fans, or those who only "join in the fun when the team is performing well" (Wann & Branscombe, 1990, p. 111). The team's strongest supporters – the avid fans – occupy the high end of the sports fan scale.

Syracuse (2008) describes avid fans as "those than have an emotional connection to the game – people whose interest, enthusiasm, and passion [...] defy the norm" (para. 1). Industry-leading commercial data suppliers such as TNS, Octagon, TURNKEY, Scarborough Sports Marketing, and Analytika Marketing Sciences generally measure this construct through the use of discrete response scales designed to operationalize fans' psychological connectedness to teams and their subsequent behaviors (DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2012). The ESPN/TNS Sports Poll defines avid fans as those who rate their interest eight and higher on a ten-point scale. Using this

measurement system, ESPN has concluded that avid fans account for roughly 35 percent of the United States' 222 million sports fans (Blyn, 2011).

Research and Conclusions on Fan Avidity

Most businesses rely heavily on their most loyal and dedicated consumers and sports franchises are no different. Avid sports fans express their avidity in a variety of ways that bring tremendous value to the teams that they are supporting. The NHL has collected data that shows that avid fans “attend lots of games, consume hockey through multiple media and are inclined to use high-tech products, such as broadband and high-definition television” (Syracuse, 2008, Understanding the Avid Fan section, para. 2). Most importantly, though, the NHL has identified avid fans as the biggest and most consistent spenders supporting the league’s teams. Other academic studies have drawn similar conclusions regarding fan avidity as a strong predictor of sports fan expenditures (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Kolbe & James, 2000) and TURNKEY, Scarborough Sports Marketing, and TNS have all shown that avid sports fans spend considerably more money on products and services related to the teams that they associate themselves with, including tickets, merchandise, and team-related media (DeSarbo, 2010; DeSarbo & Madrigal, 2012). Furthermore, teams with large avid fan bases are able to command more money from sponsors and advertisers that wish to redirect the strong emotional connection that these fans have with their favorite teams to their products and services (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). For these reasons, sports fan avidity has become a growing topic of interest within the sports industry as teams look for new ways to maximize their profits.

Octagon has established itself as the leading researcher of fan avidity with its psychographic study titled “Passion Drivers,” which explores the motivators behind avid sports fan behaviors. The study identified 56 motivating attributes and grouped them into 12 different

categories – the passion drivers (SportsBusiness Journal, 2010). These passion drivers were then used to craft surveys that have been administered to approximately 50,000 avid sports fans and have enabled Octagon to build profiles of the fan bases for different sports (SportsBusiness Journal, 2010). For instance, Octagon has identified “team devotion” as the leader passion driver for both NFL and NHL fans, while MLB fans are most influenced by “nostalgia” (SportsBusiness Journal, 2010).

Meanwhile, DeSarbo (2010) has attempted to identify the different ways in which avid fans manifest their avidity and their resultant financial implications. His study organized fan behaviors into four behavioral categories: on-field participation, passive following, social, and purchasing. On-field participation behaviors included trying out for a team’s cheerleading squad, joining a band that supports the team, and working at the team’s stadium during a game. Passive following behaviors included watching a game on television or listening to it on the radio, reading about a sports team in a newspaper or magazine, and following a team online. Attending live games, participating in tailgates, and attending postgame parties were considered social behaviors and buying team-related merchandise and paying to join a team’s fan club were classed as purchasing behaviors. He identified the social and purchasing categories as the two with the largest revenue implications, but noted that passive following behaviors could also add to a team’s bottom line because of the sponsorship and advertising dollars tied to fans’ increased exposure to media.

In an article in *SportsBusiness Journal*, DeSarbo (2009) explained that he used his behavioral analysis to derive three market segments of avid fans. He labeled the largest segment “social butterflies.” Fans in this segment, which account for 45 percent of avid fans, showed that they enjoyed using sports as a means for interacting with friends, attended live games and other

activities associated with their favorite teams, and had the highest purchasing rates of team-related merchandise. The second largest segment, with 32 percent of avid fans, was the “passive followers.” They showed that they were just as interested as the social butterflies, but preferred to express their avidity in a more detached manner, such as watching games on television, listening on the radio, and reading about their favorite teams in newspapers and online. The final 23 percent of avid fans were placed in the “nonfinancial” segment. They demonstrated the lowest purchase intentions, but had the highest on-field participation rate. DeSarbo’s (2009) analysis of these segments showed that 77 percent of avid sports fans present a huge potential for revenue generation. Social butterflies add directly to a team’s revenue through their purchases, while passive followers allow teams to collect revenue from increased sponsorship and advertising during game broadcasts and online.

Although research has proven that sports fan avidity is directly linked to increased revenue generation, franchises are still faced with the challenge of cultivating an avid fan base in order to capitalize on this corollary. Ironically, the industry’s growth has actually made this task more challenging; fan avidity is becoming less common as the number of outlets competing for fan attention increases. As a result, franchises must now arm themselves with more knowledge regarding what motivates sports fan avidity in order to drive fan spending and improve their positioning in the industry. By applying psychological theories to their marketing practices, sports franchises can develop fan avidity for increased revenue generation.

CHAPTER III: THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND SPORTS FAN AVIDITY

In order to increase and sustain fan avidity, sports franchises must first understand the psychology that drives the behaviors associated with it – extreme interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement – and how to ensure their permanence. Fortunately for these franchises and their marketers, psychologists have performed extensive research and developed theories that, if applied correctly, can help them to achieve these goals. There are two main groups of theories – identity theories and motivational theories – that are especially applicable when it comes to understanding how fans relate to the teams they support and influencing behaviors that reinforce their relationships. The identity theories that we will examine are social identity theory and identity theory. Within the category of motivational theories, we will look at self-determination theory and its two subtheories that address intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Identity Theories

In social psychology, identity theories exist to explain the formation of the self. These theories are relevant to understanding and developing sports fan avidity because they address how human behavior is influenced by the conceptualization and expression of group affiliations and individuality. The two most dominant theories are social identity theory and identity theory. Though their titles are similar, their foundations address two entirely different contributions to the formation of one's identity. Social identity theory focuses on the contribution that an individual's social groups play in identity formation, whereas identity theory attempts to explain how behavioral roles influence one's identity. While fundamentally different, these two theories complement each other quite well and together they “establish a more fully integrated view of the self” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224).

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory attributes identity formation to one's self-categorization into different social groups. Hogg and Abrams (1988) define a social group as a set of "individuals who share a common social identification of themselves or [...] perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (p. 7). This definition makes it clear that these social groups do not need to be organized. Rather, social groups are simply categories that exist within structured society in relation to other different categories. The groups are defined using a social comparison process by which people group themselves with those that have similar attributes (thus forming the "in-group") and place those that differ in respect to these same attributes in other groups (the "out-groups").

There are two central processes at play here: self-categorization and social comparison. Self-categorization, or the self-placement into a social group with which one identifies, creates a dynamic in which one perceives accentuated similarities between the self and other in-group members and accentuated differences between the self and out-group members. These similarities and differences may include attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, or any other attributes that tie the group members together and set them apart from others. Sports fans place themselves into team-related social groups that include the teams' fans. Then, through the social comparison process, they apply favorable attributes to their in-groups and unfavorable attributes to the out-groups, such as fans of other teams, in order to enhance their social identities.

According to Stets and Burke (2000), the basis of social identity theory lies in the consistency of perceptions and actions of members of a particular group. This consistency exists because group members become depersonalized. Depersonalization describes the process in which one views the self as a prototypical member of a social group and acts in accordance with

that identity (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). In team-related social groups, this depersonalization can be seen in the similar fan beliefs and behaviors expressed by a given group's members.

Researchers have proposed multiple motivational underpinnings to explain this depersonalization and the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors that follow. One of the most popular, proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), states that depersonalized individuals act to maintain and enhance their self-esteem by favorably evaluating their in-groups relative to the out-groups. Another proposed motive suggests that social identities cause individuals to self-regulate their behaviors to match the in-group's relevant standards and confirm their identification with the group (Abrams, 1992).

This consistency caused by depersonalization can be seen on three levels: cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). At the cognitive level, researchers have pointed to social stereotyping as a supporting dynamic. Haslam et al. (1996) found that identification with an in-group leads people to apply stronger and more homogenous stereotypes to in-group and out-group members. This explains why many sports fans often automatically attribute the uniform qualities to those in out-groups. At the attitudinal level, multiple studies have concluded that people view the groups to which they belong in a more positive light (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg & Hardie, 1992). This, in turn, produces more fervent devotion to the group and a greater willingness to stand loyally by it at times when the group's status is diminished (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). In the sports industry, higher fan identification with a team-related social group increases the likelihood of a fan developing a long-term relationship with the group, which leads to increased loyalty to the team (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). Finally, at the behavioral level, Ethier and Deaux (1994) concluded that individuals who identify highly with a group are more than likely to be attracted to and participate in the group's culture and to behave in ways that will confirm their superiority to the

out-group. Because the in-group members share similar perceptions, these perceptions are mutually reinforced and they act in unison. Sports fans reflect this behavioral component through their passion and involvement with their team-related social groups.

It is important to understand that these cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes will only transpire when identification with a group is activated. In social identity theory, activation is said to occur when identification with a group is salient, or “functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one’s membership in that group on perception and behavior” (Oakes, 1987, p. 118). Group identification becomes salient when the group identity is both accessible and fits the context of a situation. Accessibility is a function of how familiar an individual is with the group identity and the strength of the individual’s emotions towards the identity; higher familiarity and stronger emotions create greater accessibility. Fit describes the degree to which the social requirements of a situation activate one’s social identity. For instance, when at a live sporting event with other sports fans, there is a high degree of fit between an individual’s team-related social identity and the situational context, so the identity is likely to be activated.

The tenets of social identity theory can be directly applied to sports fans because of their membership in social groups defined by the teams that they associate themselves with and their resulting cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. Through self-categorization and social comparison, sports fans perceive accentuated positive similarities between the self and other fans in their team-related social groups and view other teams’ fans more negatively. This leads to a more positive evaluation of the in-group and a regulated effort to behave in accordance with the group’s accepted standards. As a result, the fans become more interested in, passionate about, and loyal to their team regardless of performance and involved in the team’s fan culture. In other

words, they become avid fans. Of course, franchises must facilitate the activation of team-related social identities in order to create this desired outcome. To do this, they must increase the group identity's accessibility to their fans by creating familiarity through a clearly communicated brand and strengthening fans' bonds with the team and other fans by developing new and innovative opportunities for interaction. Franchises must also facilitate the creation of social environments that fit the team-related social identity and support additional opportunities for activation.

Identity Theory

While social identity theory explains identity formation as a result of categorization into groups, identity theory explains identity formation using categorization into behavioral roles. Identity theory holds that people label themselves and others with specific roles, each of which is accompanied by its own set of meanings and behavioral expectations established by structured societal standards. Together, these meanings and expectations govern the standards by which an occupant of a role is expected to behave. One's identification with his or her designated roles and the behavioral standards associated with them forms the core of that person's identity at the individual level (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Identity theory researchers have found that individuals adopt the meanings and expectations attached to the roles they identify with and attempt to verify and preserve them through their behaviors (Thoits & Virship, 1997). This process is known as self-verification and is clearly displayed in the behaviors of sports fans. When individuals see themselves in terms of their sports fan roles, they act consistently with the meanings and norms associated with them. Similar to social identity theory, self-esteem enhancement acts as a motivational underpinning driving this desire to verify one's role. When one positively evaluates his or her performance of

a role, the individual's self-esteem increases (Stryker, 1980). Another motivating factor is self-efficacy, which asserts that individuals desire control over their environment and successful role performance gives them this feeling of control (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983).

However, successful role performance becomes complicated in group settings when individuals must interact with others whose role objectives counter their own. Unlike the group interaction in social identity theory, here the relations between individuals are not parallel; they are reciprocal, as each individual is dedicated to his or her unique interests, duties, and resources. Thus, the different roles in a group are interrelated but still set apart, and they sometimes conflict with one another. When this happens, each role and its counter-roles must negotiate to reach a solution that allows for the differing performances of each role (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Role negotiation is important for sports fans because they must ensure that the performance of their fan behaviors does not conflict with the behaviors of other interrelated roles.

Because individuals seek to fulfill the expected behaviors attached to their roles in order to verify their role identities, the success of this negotiation is critical: Failure can lead to negative outcomes. Riley and Burke (1995) conducted a study that observed that individuals become dissatisfied with their roles and are less likely to remain in a group when the performances of differential roles cannot be negotiated. Conversely, other researchers showed that the successful negotiation of differential role behaviors and meanings strengthens group attachment (Burke & Stets, 1999).

Another way that identity theory differs from social identity theory is in its approach to the concepts of salience and activation. In social identity theory, an identity is activated once it becomes salient, but that is not the case in identity theory. Here, salience describes the likelihood that an identity will be activated, while activation is whether or not it will actually be

played out (Stryker, 1980). Salience is a direct function of an individual's commitment to an identity and it has both quantitative and qualitative features (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Its quantitative feature is the number of people to whom one is connected, or interacting with, in a given role. The likelihood that an identity will become salient is positively correlated to the number of people that the role is connected to. The qualitative feature is the strength of the connections to the other interrelated roles and this relationship is a positive correlation as well. The concept of salience also differs in identity theory in that an individual holds multiple social structural roles and, in certain situations, more than one of these roles might be appropriate. When that occurs, the role that is most salient in the individual's salience hierarchy – determined by the individual's level of commitment to each of the roles – will be activated.

Assuming that a role is salient in a given situation, the situation's context then determines whether or not the activated role will actually be played out. In order to be played out, the role must be structurally embedded into the context of a situation and the situation must offer the individual psychological rewards for verifying the role identity (Owens, 2003). Stryker (1968) hypothesized that people will seek out opportunities to enact their most salient role-identities because they offer the greatest psychological rewards. In the live sporting event example offered in the previous section, the situational context would likely lead to the sports fan role being played out because the individual would experience increased self-esteem and demonstrate control over their environment by verifying to oneself and to the others that he or she is a sports fan.

Just as one always belongs to a group in social identity theory, an individual also always occupies multiple roles in identity theory. Thus, it is also important to understand the role that a sports fan enacts as a member of a team-related social group and other social groups, in addition

to his or her general group membership. Sports franchises can increase fan avidity by helping to define the meaning and behavioral expectations attached to the sports fan role in a way that encourages increased interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement when an individual acts to verify the role. When defining the role standards, sports franchises should attempt to do so in a way that will avoid role conflict with other interrelated roles. For example, teams should try to promote camaraderie and mutual respect between their fans regardless of how avid they are, and should establish that fans should support and encourage each other's avidity. According to Burke and Stets (1999), this should strengthen fans' attachment to the teams they associate themselves with. Doing so should also increase the position of the sports fan role in an individual's salience hierarchy by increasing the strength of the connections with interrelated roles and motivate fans to act out the role by fostering a psychologically-rewarding social environment.

Motivational Theories

We have just established that social identity theory and identity theory can be used to increase sports fans' identification with the teams that they root for, their fan groups, and their roles as sports fans. In turn, this heightened identification facilitates the performance of desirable avid fan behaviors. Motivation theories serve a similar purpose; they also seek to direct and energize individuals to behave in a certain way.

Contemporary motivational theories are primarily focused on the performance of behaviors to achieve a desired outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Many theories fall within this category, but we will focus on two subtheories of the broader self-determination theory related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These theories have been chosen because they deeply consider the psychology that drives behaviors directed at goal achievement. Furthermore, they

complement the identity theories discussed above in that they address the concept of incorporating behaviors into one's sense of self.

Self-determination theory and its subtheories are inspired by the idea that all humans have three basic innate psychological needs that they strive to fulfill – autonomy (DeCharms, 1968), competence (Harter, 1978), and relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) – in order to satisfy their natural desire for psychological growth and development. Autonomy involves making decisions without outside influence; competence is the ability to perform a task effectively; and relatedness describes interaction and connectedness with others in a caring environment. The theories assert that the successful pursuit and attainment of goals is dependent upon the degree to which these needs are met.

Although humans naturally pursue the fulfillment of these needs and thus do not have to be pushed to act, the actualization process is not automatic. Rather, there must be a supportive social context to facilitate their tendencies. If the conditions are unfavorable – such as an environment in which they lack control, the tasks are overly challenging, or their peers do not accept them – the process will be inhibited (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Cognitive evaluation theory and organismic integration theory are the two subtheories of self-determination theory that outline the contextual factors that support the fulfillment of these needs in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, respectively.

Cognitive Evaluation Theory

Intrinsic motivation has been defined as “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). Its self-endorsed and authentic nature is conducive to increased interest and excitement and researchers have proven that these feelings lead to enhanced engagement (Deci

and Ryan, 1991; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997) However, since this form of motivation is internally driven, outsiders cannot stimulate these resulting feelings and behaviors.

Even though this form of motivation is not prompted by external forces, it still requires a supportive social and environmental context in order to be maintained and enhanced. If the right conditions are not present, it can easily be repressed. For example, an intrinsically motivated avid fan might repress his passion if a situation's context does not satisfy his or her innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To ensure that these needs are satisfied, cognitive evaluation theory defines a framework for supporting the contextual factors that influence variability in intrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

In his book *Personal Causation*, DeCharms (1968) asserted that individuals must feel as if their behavior is self-determined, or autonomous, in order for their intrinsic motivation to be facilitated. His assertions have been supported in multiple studies, including those by Fisher (1978) and Ryan (1982). Along this same line of thought, Deci and Ryan (1985) have proven that "choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction" (p.29) enhance intrinsic motivation because they generate a feeling of autonomy. Sports fans, therefore, are more likely to enact intrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors when a situation's context enables them to act independently. Perhaps equally important, psychologists have found that the use of external rewards and external threats to motivate behavior is detrimental to intrinsic motivation because it detracts from the feeling of autonomy (Deci, 1975; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999).

Cognitive evaluation theory also maintains that feelings of competence are instrumental in facilitating intrinsic motivation. Specifically, it emphasizes manageable challenges, positive feedback, and avoidance of negative evaluations as mechanisms that make individuals feel competent. Multiple studies have also proven that not only does positive feedback enhance

intrinsic motivation, but negative feedback detracts from it (Deci, 1975; Vallerand & Reid, 1984). So, if a sports fan attempts to perform an avid behavior and receives negative feedback, this will hamper the individual's intrinsic motivation to perform the behavior and decrease his or her sports fan avidity.

Relatedness is the third and final innate need that facilitates intrinsic motivation. Though it is not as crucial as autonomy and competence, research has still proven that its fulfillment will facilitate intrinsic motivation (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). However, there do not need to be proximal factors present to fulfill an individual's need for relatedness; rather, simply a distal sense of support and security will facilitate the behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Sports fans' intrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors will likely be more robust if they feel that their favorite teams and other fans support them, but it is not necessary for anyone to be present in order for the fans to act on their intrinsic motivation.

Because intrinsic motivation naturally leads to increased excitement, interest, and ultimately engagement, the concepts proposed in cognitive evaluation theory are especially relevant to sports franchises desiring to promote avid fan behaviors. Franchises that understand the innate needs of humans will have a better understanding of which approaches will facilitate their fans' intrinsic motivation to perform avid fan behaviors and, just as important, which ones will thwart it. Some examples provided in this section that can be directly integrated into a franchise's fan development strategy include providing fans with an assortment of choices for how they can demonstrate avidity and empowering them to act on their own (satisfying their need for autonomy), presenting the fans with manageable challenges related to behaviors that they want them to perform and giving them positive feedback after they have been performed

(satisfying their need for competence), and assuring fans that the team cares about and supports them (satisfying their need for relatedness).

Organismic Integration Theory

Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is not internally driven. Rather, extrinsically motivated behaviors are performed to attain a separate outcome so the values regulating these behaviors are not always internalized and integrated into an individual's sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Consequently, extrinsic motivation may not garner the same level of commitment generated by intrinsic motivation that leads to the amplified interest, excitement, and engagement essential to sports fan avidity. In fact, extrinsic motivation can produce a range of internalization from none at all to full commitment, similar to that found in intrinsic motivation, depending upon the degree to which an individual's innate psychological needs are satisfied. Organismic integration theory explores four different types of extrinsic motivation that lie along a continuum of relative autonomy and thus moderate the internalization and integration of these behaviors.

The first and least autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is external regulation. Here, one only acts to attain or prevent a certain outcome. Externally regulated sports fans will only perform avid fan behaviors to comply with rules, attain tangible rewards, or avoid punishment. The resultant behaviors have an "external perceived locus of causality" (DeCharms, 1968, p. 284), meaning that individuals feel as if they are not controlling their decisions. This lack of control suggests that the behaviors are performed less enthusiastically and are not maintained once the external regulation is withdrawn (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Introjected regulation is the next form of extrinsic motivation on the autonomy continuum. As with external regulation, this form entails behaving to satisfy a regulation, but the

motive is different. Rather than seeking a desired externally-offered outcome, sports fans will act to attain self-administered esteem-related outcomes. They might act to increase their contingent self-worth or to avoid feelings of shame and guilt (Ryan, 1982). Because the outcomes are administered internally, it can be said that introjected regulation is more internalized than external regulation and the behaviors are more likely to be maintained, but the self-administered outcomes are still not integrated into the self and therefore remain unstable (Koestner, Losier, Vallerand, & Carducci, 1996).

Identified regulation is the third form of extrinsic motivation and the first to begin to internalize the behaviors it generates. In this form, sports fans successfully recognize the values attached to their behaviors and accept them as personally important. Their behavior is still considered extrinsically motivated because it is instrumental in achieving a desired external outcome, but the identification with the values creates a greater feeling of autonomy, resulting in higher commitment and performance.

The final and most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. This involves not only identifying and embracing the values behind certain behaviors, but also integrating these values with other aspects of the self (Pelletier, Tuson, & Haddad, 1997; Ryan, 1995). Of all of the forms of extrinsic motivation, this form is most similar to intrinsic motivation because the behaviors it generates become fully autonomous and self-regulated. It generates the greatest levels of engagement and is consequently best suited for motivating avid fan behaviors (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Given the value of increased engagement, it is important to understand how autonomous regulation can be fostered in extrinsically motivated behavior. For this purpose, organismic integration theory addresses how the social context facilitates this process. More specifically, it

considers the role played by each of the innate psychological needs established in self-determination theory. When conditions support the satisfaction of all three of these needs, behaviors will be more internalized and integrated into an individual's identity (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994).

As with cognitive evaluation theory, sports fans must perceive themselves as the drivers of their own behavior. The feeling of autonomy facilitates internalization and integration of the values associated with the behaviors that they perform. This occurs because individuals who perceive that they alone have determined their actions are more likely to permanently integrate the values that caused them to make the decisions. On the contrary, the presence of rewards or threats can prevent behaviors from being internalized because the actor might sense that he or she is not the sole causal agent of the behaviors.

Likewise, sports fans are more likely to internalize avid fan behaviors when they make them feel competent (Vallerand, 1997). For this to occur, people must be able to perform the behaviors well and understand the rationale behind them (Deci et al., 1994). This is especially relevant in the context of social groups because individuals are much more likely to enact behaviors valued by their social groups when they feel that they can perform them competently (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Relatedness is an equally important factor in facilitating the internalization and integration of extrinsically-motivated avid fan behaviors. Often, the external forces that prompt individuals to behave in certain ways are linked to valued social groups – in this case, team-related social groups – that they wish to feel related to. A social group may initiate behaviors by directly encouraging them or by communicating which behaviors it values. Because of the

natural urge for humans to feel that they belong and are liked, creating this feeling increases the extent to which behaviors will be internalized (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994).

In order to most effectively motivate their fans to perform avid fan behaviors, sports franchises must have an understanding of the different forms of extrinsic motivation and know how to shape the social context to encourage the internalization and integration of these behaviors into the fans' self-identities. Specifically, this requires an understanding of how to cater to the innate psychological needs that humans naturally strive to fulfill by building feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness into their fan development initiatives. Methods for cultivating feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in extrinsic motivation are similar to those used to facilitate intrinsic motivation. To satisfy the need for autonomy, franchises should give their fans the opportunity to independently process and perform the behaviors that they encourage. Competence can be accounted for by carefully promoting behaviors that fans can perform effectively and ensuring that they understand the reasons for performing these behaviors. And they must satisfy fans' need for relatedness by enriching fan relationships with team personalities and by encouraging friendship and support amongst the fans.

CHAPTER IV: DEVELOPING SPORTS FAN AVIDITY

Thus far, we have established that higher levels of sports fan avidity are positively correlated with increased fan spending habits and, in turn, increased revenue generation for sports franchises. We have also established that select identity- and motivation-related psychological theories – specifically social identity theory, identity theory, and self-determination theory – provide frameworks for permanently increasing sports fan avidity through an understanding of identity formation and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Below, we will propose real methods for contextual applications of each of these theories with the end goal of developing fan avidity for increased revenue generation.

Applications of Social Identity Theory

When one's social identity is activated, the individual becomes depersonalized, meaning that he or she identifies as a prototypical member of an in-group and acts in accordance with the group's established standards. The perceptions and actions of the in-group's members align and lead to group consistency in their cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. This consistency manifests itself in increased social stereotyping and application of positive attributes to members of the in-group, more devotion and loyalty to the in-group, and greater participation in the in-group's culture. Sports franchises that succeed in activating their fans' team-related social identities will cause increases in fan avidity, as demonstrated by their interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement with the team and their fellow fans. In turn, the fans' purchasing intentions will increase and the franchises will generate more revenue. For a franchise to achieve this desired result, it must take measures to activate the team-related social identity by ensuring that its fans

are familiar with the expectations attached to the identity, fostering strong emotions for the team, and creating social environments that are conducive to its activation.

Sports franchises can increase accessibility to a team-related social identity by branding their fan base along with the franchise and communicating the brand effectively. By using a brand to establish standards for desired fan behavior, franchises will increase the likelihood that the social identity will be activated. Rein, Kotler, and Shields (2006) tout the importance of designing a strong brand that “triggers a number of mental associations that markets can readily identify about the product” (p.23) and creates a sustainable connection with fans independent of competitive outcomes. Franchises that wish to increase the accessibility of a fan’s team-related social identity must first determine what expectations they would like their fans to fulfill. Since avid fans are characterized by their heightened interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement, franchises should focus their expectations around these qualities. For instance, a franchise may market itself as a sports team that boasts “fans that love to show their pride.” If this brand message is visibly promoted and made available to consumers across a variety of platforms, the team’s fans will know that, as a group, they are expected to publicly display their affiliation with the team. The brand’s presence will serve as a reminder for this expected behavior and increase the accessibility of the team-related social identity, thus making it much more likely to be activated. The student body at the Pennsylvania State University is an excellent example of a branded fan base. After ESPN recognized the University for having the nation’s top student section at football games in 2008, the athletic department immediately used the accolade to brand the team’s fan base (Herbstreit, 2008). To this day, students at the University pride themselves on this honor and cheer passionately for the men’s football team in part to fulfill the expectations that have been set for them.

Strong emotional connections to the team also facilitate the activation of team-related social identities by making the identities more accessible and increase fan avidity. A franchise can foster stronger emotional connections between its fans and its team by creating opportunities for the fans to get to know the players and other key personalities associated with the team on a personal level, giving fans access to the franchise's inner-workings, and making the fans feel as if they are part of the team themselves.

Unfortunately, the growth and industrialization of the sports industry has negatively impacted the treatment of fans. Whereas sports fans used to enjoy a more informal and interpersonal experience, team owners' increased profit motivation has led them to neglect intimacy in favor of new and sexy amenities. Today, fans generally do not have access to players, coaches, or team executives and franchises often make decisions that clearly do not consider fan interest, such as raising ticket prices or relocating the team (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006). Franchises that wish to recreate the emotional connection that fans once shared with the teams they root for must implement practices that increase two-way communication between fans and the team. Many teams already host a variety of events, from autograph sessions to cruises with team personalities, but they are often only available to a small percentage of the fan base. Furthermore, the fans that attend these events are generally already avid fans, so franchises must make an effort to target their personal communication initiatives at more casual fans. The New Zealand All Blacks – the most popular rugby team in the world – does this very well; management trains the players on how to best interact with the team's fans and goes out of its way to make the players accessible to all of the team's markets (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006).

New media have also presented revolutionary opportunities for franchises to increase fan-team communication. In a 2010 survey conducted by Catalyst Public Relations in cooperation

with *SportsBusiness Journal*, the firm found that most MLB and NFL fans that connected with the leagues using social media now consider themselves to be more avid fans of the leagues (SportsBusiness Daily, 2010). These results are certainly applicable to franchises as well, so long as they properly utilize the services available to them. Franchises should use team social media accounts and encourage the team's players to use their social media accounts to disclose behind-the-scenes information about team personalities. Many fans would be interested in knowing about players' families, what they do when they are not with the team, and interesting daily events that take place in their lives. Of course franchises should not require individuals to divulge private information that they are not comfortable revealing, but it is important for everyone associated with the team to understand that they will directly benefit by inviting fans into their lives.

Other forms of online media can also be used to give fans access to a team's inner-workings. For instance, franchises could tape and post videos of the motivational speeches coaches give to the players, stream live team scrimmages, and have the team's executives provide their logic after making trades and signing players. This would have to be done delicately so that the team does not expose information that sacrifices any competitive edge, but there is more than enough happening within a team's day-to-day operations that doing so should not be difficult. And in-person events are just as, if not more, effective. Most teams already offer stadium tours that allow fans to see the locker rooms, executive offices, and step onto the playing area, but such initiatives generally do not cater to a large audience. Rather than hosting a ten-person tour for a group that calls in and requests it or just for the most loyal season ticket holders, teams could cater to a much larger group of fans by hosting an "open house" at the beginning of every season. Such a strategy could also be used to target specific segments, such

as families; if a team hosted a free-to-attend family night where families could tour the stadium and participate in activities together, they would increase the likelihood that the families would then attend a game later on. By offering all of the team's fans an opportunity to experience the same behind-the-scenes world as the players, fans will feel a stronger emotional connection to the team as a result.

Franchises can also increase fans' emotional connections to the team by implementing strategies that make them feel included. MLB's Boston Red Sox are a great example: The franchise gives its fans identification cards that grant them citizenship in "Red Sox Nation" and after its World Series victory in 2004, the Red Sox made replica championship rings and bottles of wine available to their fans so that they would feel that they contributed to the team's success (Hiestand, 2005). And, as the United States' only publicly-traded professional sports team, the Green Bay Packers offer the most extreme example of fan inclusion. Packers fans have the opportunity to literally own a piece of the team – and, as of July 2010, 112,158 do – which in turn creates an emotional connection driven by the fan investment ("Shareholders," n.d.). In addition to using an approach that offers fans something physical to make them feel included, teams can also increase feelings of inclusion by carefully choosing the language that they use when communicating to their fan base. Fans that identify highly with the teams that they root for often refer to the team as "we" and franchises can encourage this by using the same inclusive language in their marketing campaigns (Masteralexis, Barr, & Hums, 2009). Rather than delivering a message that says, "Come watch the team play this Friday night!," franchises can make fans feel more involved and emotionally connected by changing the words to, "We have a game this Friday night! You better be there!"

Another great method for making fans feel included is soliciting their feedback so that they feel as if they are part of the decision-making process. Feedback can be solicited in person or online. The Carolina Hurricanes of the NHL host town-hall meetings for their fans in which they invite all of the attendees to express their opinions on different decisions that the team has made and to propose suggestions for the future (Carolina Hurricanes, n.d.). Similarly, teams can also solicit feedback online by allowing fans to share their opinions directly with the team via social media or through the creation of online polls on the team's website.

Lastly, franchises must create social environments that are conducive to the activation of fans' team-related social identities at and away from games. In a study conducted by Andrijiw and Hyatt (2009), the researchers showed that the company of other fans makes the experience of attending a live game more enjoyable. This has been attributed to the intense bonds created between fans as they cheer on their favorite team together, which lead to feelings of belongingness, validation, and empowerment (Fagan, 2009). Franchises can strategically facilitate the creation of a social environment that ensures that even the most casual fans demonstrate avid fan behaviors by using the team's most avid fans to engage the other fans in attendance. The University of Memphis uses such a strategy to increase fan avidity for its men's basketball team. A group of the team's 150 most avid fans, known as the "Blue Crew," is invited to partake in the team's culture by attending practices, away games, and other special events hosted for the team. In return, they are tasked with the duty of being the loudest and most passionate fans at every home game and encouraging their fellow fans to follow suit (Parrish, 2005). Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union takes a similar approach. When the franchise's management decided that it wanted to introduce a new chant to be sung after each goal the team scores in order to unite the fans behind the team, it turned to its most avid fan

group – the Sons of Ben. Together, management worked with the group’s leaders to devise a chant and the Sons of Ben now lead the chant at every home game (Levine, 2011). The chant symbolizes the close relationship between the team and its fans and encourages the entire fan base to get involved and show their passion when they see their fellow fans chanting loudly following a goal.

Since fans spend most of their time away from live games, it is even more important to create social environments that activate their team-related social identities at outside events and online. Rein, Kotler, and Shields (2006) explain that sports operate as social currency, which lends itself to the creation of such an environment:

A critical component of the social currency connection is the social engagements that sports encourage. Sports events are often social gatherings, with tailgating, parties, and other functions centered around the competition. This atmosphere often motivates fan connection, which is usually not so much about the actual game as it is about the supplementary events. One of the fundamental advantages of social currency is that it appeals to the desire of fans to be part of crowds. This factor is critical to the popularity of Super Bowl parties, pre- and postgame tailgate parties, traveling to away games, playoff celebrations, or 10 people watching a game on television. These relationship experiences not only produce social currency for the fan, but they also encourage fans to associate these experiences with the sport. (p. 60)

Franchises that bring the team’s fans together away from live games can create additional opportunities for their team-related social identities to be activated. These events can include, but are not limited to, viewing parties, pick-up sports games, team-run participation clinics, and video game tournaments and each has different implications. Viewing parties, for instance,

create an opportunity for fans to experience a similar camaraderie that is offered at live games when they cannot or do not want to attend a live game. More casual fans are often unwilling to pay all of the costs associated with going to a live game, so this presents them with an affordable alternative where they can still interact in person with members of their team-related social groups. Pick-up games offer a different, but still psychologically rewarding, experience. By participating in pick-up sports, fans not only get to interact with fellow fans, but they also increase their knowledge of the sport's nuances and gain an appreciation for the skills demonstrated by their favorite teams' athletes. These live events are especially important for developing fan avidity of nonlocal fans. Since these fans do not have the same opportunities to attend live games, franchises can help them connect to their team-related social groups by assisting in the organization of events closer to where they live.

In addition to creating new opportunities for communication between the team and its fans, recent technological trends have also made it possible for franchises to create online social environments where fans' team-related social identities can be easily activated. In his study "An Examination of NFL Fans' Computer Mediated BIRGing," End (2001) proved that fans heavily relate to their favorite teams online. The majority of professional sports teams have their own websites where fans can get information about the team, but they must also capitalize on the other distribution channels available to them. Every professional sports team should run a web log, or "blog" for short, so that it can communicate controlled messages to its fans about topics that they are interested in and should host a message board. Online message boards essentially serve as fan communities where fans can activate their team-related social identities and interact with other like-minded fans. Furthermore, the emergence of social media trends has led to the creation of additional platforms through which franchises can reach their teams' fans. Today, it

is just as important for a professional sports team to control a presence on the communication tools Facebook and Twitter as it is to have its own website.

Applications of Identity Theory

Identity theory explores the behavioral roles that individuals hold within a social environment. When activated, individuals act to fulfill the meanings and behavioral expectations attached to their roles in order to verify that they are capable of performing them, to increase their self-esteem, and to gain feelings of control over their environment. Effective role performance requires that different roles in a common environment work together to ensure that everyone is able to fulfill their role identities. Successful role negotiation strengthens group attachment, but individuals will become dissatisfied with their roles and may leave a group if the role behaviors cannot be negotiated. In identity theory, salience and activation are two separate processes. Salience refers to the likelihood that the role will be activated and is regulated by the number of roles that a given role interacts with and the strength of the role's connections to the other interrelated roles, while activation is whether or not the role is actually acted out and will only occur if the situation's context offers the individual psychological benefits in exchange for role performance. Sports franchises can develop their fans' avidity and generate more revenue by applying the principles of identity theory. To do so, they must clearly define the expectations attached to their fan role identity in a way that will not conflict with interrelated roles, support the activation of the fan role identity by increasing and strengthening its connections with interrelated roles and integrating psychological rewards for role performance, and associate desired avid fan behaviors with their fans' other salient role identities.

Just as we suggested branding a team's fan base to establish standards for desired social group behavior, franchises must also communicate to fans what behavioral standards they expect

from them on an individual level. In order to increase their sports fan avidity through the activation of fan role identities, these expectations must focus on the interactions that fans have with other fans and the interactions that fans have with interrelated non-fan roles, such as their family members, friends, and co-workers. However, this does not mean neglecting the interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement that characterize sports fan avidity. Rather, teams must consider these desired behaviors in an interactive context. Because it is so critical for an individual to be able to negotiate role performance with other interrelated roles, franchises need to promote cooperation. They should endorse camaraderie and mutual respect between interrelated fans regardless of where each fan falls on the sports fan scale and should urge individual fans to respectfully encourage interrelated nonfans to become casual fans, thus creating the possibility for avid fan behaviors in the future.

Here, it is more efficient for franchises to communicate their desired standards for fan role behaviors directly to their fans rather than publicizing the desired behaviors as part of a larger brand. This message can still be communicated through multiple channels, though. At live games, franchises can have the team's players encourage the fans to be respectful of each other and to support each other's passion and involvement in the game. Franchises can communicate to fans away from the game through email, online media, and direct mail. One creative approach might be to create a "fan manifesto" that states the behaviors each fan is expected to abide by in order to be an exemplary fan of the team. This manifesto could be posted in the corridors and bathrooms at the stadium, shown on the JumboTron at live events, printed on game tickets, posted on the team's website and other online accounts, and mailed directly to the team's fans. Additionally, franchises could ingrain the message by creating opportunities for interaction with the manifesto. For example, they could choose one fan during

a live game to read the manifesto out loud into the microphone in exchange for a prize or they could create a Facebook application in which the team's fans could virtually sign the manifesto and then share this declaration of their fandom with their friends.

For a fan role identity to become salient and then activated, franchises must make a conscious effort to increase the number of interrelated roles that the fan role identity interacts with and strengthen the ties between these roles, while also integrating psychological rewards for role performance. There are many approaches that a franchise can take to increase the number of interrelated roles. At live events, including games and other team-sponsored functions, this number can be increased by encouraging interaction with other fans and casual spectators, regardless of whether or not they have been previously introduced. By creating opportunities for nearby individuals to become acquainted with each other, such as simply asking them to say hello to someone that they do not know in order to spark further conversation, franchises can increase the number of connections to each role identity and therefore make fans more likely to activate their fan roles' associated meanings and behaviors. Franchises can also increase the number of connections that a given role identity interacts with away from live games by organizing online communities where the team's fans can meet new people. Message boards and social networks, which tie together many fans around a common interest, increase each fan's total number of role connections by facilitating interaction between like-minded sports fans that may not have had the opportunity to meet in person.

However, it is not enough to simply connect to others; the connections must also be strong for a fan role identity to become salient. In addition to interaction, franchises must promote mutual cooperation and support between fan roles and other interrelated roles in order to strengthen their bonds. One method that could be used to strengthen bonds between roles is the

arrangement of an activity that requires teamwork and collaboration. The activity's context should require successful negotiation of role performance in order to be completed and offer psychological rewards to the participants. For example, a franchise could host a friendly competition between local schools where the children must work together to paint a mural of the team's players. Such an activity would require children in fan roles to interact with their nonfan classmates and would allow the children in different roles to demonstrate control over their environment through successful role performance. The franchise could later maximize the psychological benefits by praising and recognizing all of the participating children for their hard work at a live game, which would increase their self-esteem and create an opportunity for them and their families to have a positive sports fan experience.

Sports franchises can supplement their efforts to shape and activate their fans' fan role identities by simultaneously pursuing strategies aimed at incorporating desired avid fan behaviors into their fans' other role identities that are already salient and frequently activated. Just as economic support is often considered synonymous with being a good father and husband, franchises can benefit by making avid fan behaviors synonymous with the role identities that their fans value the most. Research will likely show that sports fans' most salient roles are related to family, friendship, work, and community. A franchise could tie fan avidity to parental roles by encouraging parents to involve their children in sports through participation in recreational leagues and by following the sports team. This connection can be explained by stressing the importance of physical activity in order to stay healthy, the positive examples set by the team's athletes, and the team's commitment to education and community involvement. The franchise could also tie parental roles to sports fan avidity by explaining that parents can support their kids' interests and passions by taking them to team-sponsored events, such as live games

and autograph sessions. In order to incorporate avid fan behaviors into the community member role, franchises must actively and generously involve themselves with and give back to their local community. Most sports organizations already do this, but they often forget one key component when they get involved: Franchises must invite their local residents to join them in their community initiatives so that they are able to experience the team's commitment to the community first-hand. This will allow casual fans and nonfans to tie the community member role and fan role together and increase the likelihood of increased avid fan behaviors.

Applications of Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory, like all motivation theories, explores methods for influencing human behavior. It is founded upon the central concept that this behavior is driven by three innate psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – and that the degree to which these needs are met determines how motivated individuals will be to attain specified goals. In order for humans to be motivated, there must be a supportive social context to facilitate the fulfillment of these three needs. Within self-determination theory, there are two subtheories that examine how this social context can be best constructed to support intrinsic motivation and cause internalized extrinsic motivation.

Supporting Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the inherent desire to behave in a certain way. Because the desire is completely internally driven, the resultant behavior is generally characterized by increased interest and passion. However, even though the behavior cannot be instigated by external forces, it is still important that the social context is conducive to its performance. If the right conditions are not present, intrinsic motivation can be repressed and individuals will not behave as they would have in a more favorable setting. Specifically, it is important that the natural human

desires for feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. Cognitive evaluation theory is the subtheory of self-determination theory that addresses how these needs can be met so that intrinsic motivation can flourish. It is relevant to sports franchises interested in developing the avidity of their fans for increased revenue generation because of the role that intrinsic motivation often plays in causing avid fan behaviors. Fans that are intrinsically motivated to root for and support their favorite teams will do so more passionately than other fans, so it crucial for teams to understand how to foster an environment that facilitates this form of motivation.

Since intrinsically motivated fans are naturally driven to perform desired avid fan behaviors without outside influence, cognitive evaluation theory posits that franchises need only to focus on ensuring that there are no obstacles present that could interfere with the fulfillment of their three innate psychological needs. First, fans must feel as if their behaviors are self-determined. The use of external rewards or threats to motivate fan behaviors can cause sports fans to attribute their behavior at least partly to these outside forces and they may feel less motivated to display interest and passion as a result. Therefore, franchises should remove and avoid using external forces that might jeopardize fans' feelings of autonomy. For example, fans that travel across the country to see their favorite teams play are often intrinsically motivated to do so. Franchises should not try to motivate this behavior by offering fans rewards in exchange for their attendance because doing so will decrease the intrinsically motivated fans' sense of autonomy and may discourage them from performing the behavior.

It is also important that intrinsically motivated sports fans feel that they are performing their fan behaviors competently. Here, franchises must ensure that avid fans are not receiving any negative feedback in response to their behaviors. They must also remove challenges that will be too difficult for fans to complete, thus discouraging their fan avidity. For example, some

avid baseball fans like to involve themselves in the team's culture by attending pre-season spring training games. However, this is overly challenging for many fans of teams in the northern United States because all teams hold their training camps in warmer climates and there is usually not a cost effective way for the team's most passionate fans to attend. If an avid fan of a team is intrinsically motivated to travel to see his or her team prepare for the upcoming season, the franchise should act to remove any obstacles that may prevent that fan from doing so. Specifically, franchises can facilitate these fans' intrinsic motivation to attend spring training games by negotiating group deals with airlines and hotels that will allow fans to make the trip for less money.

Lastly, although relatedness is not as important as autonomy and competence for intrinsic motivation, franchises can still benefit from instilling a sense of security and support in their fans. Sports fans will act out their intrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors more passionately if they simply feel that their favorite teams and other fans support their behaviors. By occasionally acknowledging how much they value their fans, franchises can cultivate this sense of support. Franchises should encourage their players and coaches to express their appreciation for the fans following big victories and communicate through the media that their teams' fans are an important part of their success.

Causing Internalized Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsically motivated individuals act to attain specific external outcomes. Because they are not internally driven, their actions are less autonomous and therefore their behaviors are usually performed less passionately and consistently than intrinsically motivated behaviors. However, extrinsically motivated behaviors can be internalized and when this happens individuals can display the same level of passion and consistency. Organismic integration theory

is the subtheory of self-determination theory that explains the different types of extrinsic motivation and the level of internalization caused by each type.

When sports fans only act to attain or prevent a certain outcome, the behaviors are not internalized and the extrinsic motivation will produce inconsistent, casual behaviors.

Conversely, when they recognize and accept the underlying values of a behavior as important, they are more likely to internalize the behavior. This is even truer when a fan embraces a behavior's values and integrates them into his or her self-identity. In both of these latter two cases, sports fans experience high levels of autonomy even though they are extrinsically motivated and they exhibit greater commitment to behavior performance. This increased commitment translates to sports fan avidity, so franchises can increase revenue generation by learning how to support the internalization of their fans' extrinsically motivated behaviors.

Franchises can utilize extrinsic motivation to develop fan avidity, but they must understand how to ensure that these behaviors are internalized and become part of their fans' identities. Otherwise, the fans will stop performing the desired behaviors when the external motivator is removed. As with intrinsic motivation, the internalization of extrinsically motivated behavior is largely dependent upon an individual's ability to fulfill his or her innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, since extrinsically motivated individuals do not naturally pursue the desired behaviors, sports franchises must not only focus on facilitating the satisfaction of these needs, but must also implement external mechanisms designed to energize fans and direct them towards performance of desired avid fan behaviors.

Extrinsic motivation takes a slightly different approach than intrinsic motivation to fulfilling the human need for autonomy. Rather than removing obstacles that detract from

humans' sense of autonomy, such as external rewards and punishments, franchises must integrate the feeling of autonomy into the behaviors that they encourage. Sports fans are empowered when they are given opportunities to determine their own behaviors, they are able to choose between multiple courses of action, and they have the information necessary to confidently make decisions. When a franchise promotes a certain desired avid fan behavior, it must make sure that these stipulations are met. Otherwise, even if their fans perform the desired behavior, it will not be internalized and it will likely be a one-time occurrence. For example, one staple of avid fan behavior is involvement in the team's culture. This includes attending live games and other team-hosted functions. When franchises encourage fans to come out to one of these events, it is important they account for their fans' desire to act autonomously. Although it is popular practice for sports franchises to offer fans incentives for attending games, such as giveaways at the front gate of the stadium, these incentives can actually inhibit internalization of this fan involvement because fans realize that they are not the sole determinants of their behavior. Rather than promoting a specific game using a giveaway, franchises should empower fans to choose between several games occurring over a period of time and give them information about their options including the details about the opponent and game time and a general explanation of why they should want to attend each game.

The concept of helping sports fans to understand why they are performing certain behaviors is also an important consideration when catering to the human need to feel competent. When discussing intrinsic motivation, we highlighted the importance of removing behaviors that fans will not be able to perform effectively and avoiding negative feedback. Organismic integration theory incorporates similar ideas; in order to foster internalization of extrinsically motivated avid fan behaviors, franchises must encourage attainable goals and provide

psychological rewards in the form of positive feedback after the goals are accomplished. A franchise should consider what segment it is targeting when it designs the goals that it would like fans to accomplish. If the franchise is attempting to develop team interest and loyalty in its most casual fans – those that only pay attention to and root for the team when it is competing at a high level – it will only succeed in internalizing the behaviors that it encourages if very casual fans are capable of performing them well. For this casual segment of fans, franchises must present easy opportunities to demonstrate dedication to the team. Social media services offer great platforms for doing so because they are easy to use and teams can save fans time and energy by initiating connections with them. On a service such as Twitter, casual fans must only subscribe to the team-run account in order to have news sent to them and the franchise takes care of the rest. Franchises can use Twitter to send fans relevant team news, inform them about upcoming team-related events, and present them with deals and offers to encourage fan involvement. Because most people use Twitter as a medium for accomplishing a variety of goals in their lives, connecting with fans on Twitter allows the franchise to keep fans all over the sports fan scale consistently engaged.

Though it is not as important when facilitating intrinsic motivation, extrinsically motivated behaviors will not be integrated into sports fans' identities unless their innate need for relatedness is satisfied as well. Relatedness is especially relevant here because the external force prompting the behavior – in this case, the franchise – is usually directly linked to the team-related social group that fans wish to feel related to. In order for fans to internalize the avid fan behaviors encouraged by the franchise, they must feel close to the team and other fans. This can be accomplished by focusing on developing more personal relationships between fans and team personalities and encouraging friendship among fans. When fans attend live games, franchises

should require their players and coaches to interact with fans afterwards by signing autographs and engaging in casual, friendly conversation. This practice is common in the relatively small environment of Minor League Baseball, but most high-level professional athletes and coaches do not even acknowledge the presence of their fans. Such behavior surely discourages fan interest in the team by communicating that their patronage is not appreciated. It is important that franchises go out of their way to express appreciation for sports fans that perform desirable avid fan behaviors, for this simple acknowledgement gives fans the feeling that their favorite team also cares about them. Likewise, sports fans are also more likely to participate in a team's culture when their interaction with other fans fulfills their need for relatedness. Social networks are helpful here as well because they offer the opportunity for fans to interact with each other and support each other's avid fan behaviors. By sharing team-related comments, pictures, videos, or other forms of media or engaging with fans that do, fans can encourage each other's fan avidity by supporting their interest in and passion for the team.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Directions for Future Research

In the past, franchises have attempted to engage their fan bases by marketing excitement and value with little thought to what actually motivates permanent avid fan behaviors. The theories discussed in this thesis offer a new approach for looking at the development of sports fan avidity. By examining the psychological underpinnings that cause sports fans to identify with team-related social groups and their roles as sports fans, as well as methods through which humans' innate psychological needs can be leveraged to motivate and internalize specific avid fan behaviors, a franchise can improve its ability to cultivate a revenue-generating avid fan base.

However, it is important to understand that there is still a lot of work to be done in this area. In relation to the identity theories, we still do not have a comprehensive understanding of exactly how and the extent to which social group identities and role identities contribute to identity formation. We also need to gain a better understanding of how these two separate pieces of an individual's identity interact with each other. For instance, how will an individual behave when the standards of a highly salient social group conflict with the behavioral standards of a highly salient role identity? Eventually, this research can pave the way for the design of a structural model that explains how each of the psychological constructs influences sports fan avidity and how they are interrelated. This model will aid the efforts of franchises searching for effective methods for developing sports fan avidity in order to generate additional revenue.

Similarly, more research must be conducted on the motivational theories to account for unexplained circumstances. Self-determination theory states that the use of external motivators can actually prevent a sports fan from integrating avid fan behaviors into his or her sense of self

because it detracts from one's sense of autonomy. However, external rewards are often a central component of a franchise's marketing mix, so it is important for these organizations to identify concrete ways through which they can incentivize desired fan behaviors without detracting from their fans' innate need for autonomy.

Researchers must also account for different moderators that can have an effect on identity formation and behavioral motivation. A sports fan's interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement may very well be affected by factors other than just the efforts that a franchise dedicates to psychologically-driven fan development strategies. Different segments might be more receptive to different strategies dependent upon their gender, social class, location, and other demographics. For franchises to effectively target each of these segments, they must understand and consider the implications that these moderators have on identity formation and motivation. One way to study these moderators is through qualitative research. Researchers can conduct case studies that examine how sports fans manifest their avidity when different moderators are present and formulate the data that they collect to draw conclusions based on the commonalities that they uncover between the different cases.

Conclusion

It is not easy for a franchise to rethink and refine its methods for engaging fans, especially when current methods seem to be working well. However, continued success and revenue growth requires that franchises constantly evaluate the marketplace, anticipate changes, and transform their practices to capitalize on the different shifts and trends. One such trend that requires the attention of sports marketers is the increasing difficulty to maintain and develop sports fan avidity as a result of the growing competition in the industry. As fans are presented with more and more entertainment options, their interest, passion, loyalty, and involvement is

diffused across many activities, which reduces how much time and money they can dedicate to a single team. In order to combat this problem, franchises must improve their methods for maintaining and developing the avid fan behaviors that drive the organization's bottom line.

Franchises must possess an understanding of the psychological underpinnings that drive avid fan behaviors if they wish to effectively encourage them. The identity and motivational theories discussed in this thesis examine four different entryways through which fan avidity can be developed. Social identity theory explores how categorization into social groups contributes to an individual's identity, while identity theory takes a closer look at the effect of the specific roles an individual holds on identity formation. Identity formation is of particular interest because there is ample evidence that links high sports fan identification with avid fan behaviors and avid fan behaviors with increased spending habits. Self-determination theory and two of its subtheories, cognitive evaluation theory and organismic integration theory, examine the innate human psychological needs that cause people to act out and internalize specific behaviors. These theories are relevant to the development of sports fan avidity because they give franchises an understanding of how to facilitate natural fan avidity and craft external motivators so that they are integrated into fans' identities and lead to consistent revenue-generating behaviors.

In order to increase fan identification with team-related social groups and fan roles, franchises must implement strategies to activate the identities. A fan's team-related social group identity will be activated when the group's behavioral standards are clearly communicated, the fan has strong emotions for the team, and the social environment is conducive to its activation. Sports fan role identity activation requires defining the fan role to incorporate avid fan behaviors tied to revenue generation, promoting cooperation with interrelated roles to facilitate role negotiation, increasing the number and strength of connections with interrelated roles, and

attaching desired behaviors to fans' other salient role identities, such as relative, friend, co-worker, and community member. Finally, franchises can support intrinsic motivation and ensure that extrinsic motivation is internalized by incorporating mechanisms to support the fulfillment of innate human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness when crafting social contexts and using external drivers to encourage specific avid fan behaviors.

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ACADEMIC VITA

MAX WENDKOS

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EDUCATION

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE **State College, PA**
Bachelor of Science in Marketing and Business Psychology **2006-2010**

- Honors Thesis: “Developing Sports Fan Avidity for Increased Revenue Generation”
- Sapphire Honors Business Leadership Track

WORK EXPERIENCE

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL ADVANCED MEDIA **New York, NY**
Summer Intern **5/10 – 8/10**

- Analyzed company opportunities in online gaming and social media and presented findings to CEO
- Conducted legal reviews of advertising and promotional materials for trademark clearance and compliance with FTC regulations, MLBAM contractual obligations, and applicable law
- Created sweepstakes contract templates for use by Major League Baseball Clubs

PENN STATE ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT **State College, PA**
Lead Marketing Associate **5/09 – 9/09**

- Led a team of 15 interns on the design of innovative marketing strategies for six collegiate sports programs
- Developed social media marketing as a core promotion strategy for Penn State Athletics
- Coordinated with coaches, athletes, and university administrators to ensure that all parties were satisfied and that marketing plans fell within the guidelines set forth by the NCAA

WILMINGTON BLUE ROCKS **Wilmington, DE**
Assistant Director of Community Relations **6/07 – 8/07**

- Increased the team’s Kid’s Club subscriptions over 150% by implementing new outreach strategies and improving the marketing materials
- Marketed and executed summer baseball clinic for over 200 kids
- Handled and fulfilled hundreds of corporate donation requests

LEADERSHIP

INTERFRATERNITY COUNCIL **State College, PA**
President **12/09 – 12/10**

- Elected leader of the nation’s largest fraternity community (50 fraternities and over 2,500 members)
- Served as the spokesman for the Greek community to University administrators, local officials, all media outlets, and other entities such as the Penn State Board of Trustees and State Senators
- Facilitated vertical and horizontal communication across many levels including National Headquarters, University offices, alumni groups, fraternity presidents and executive boards, and fraternity members
- Instituted a program that encouraged and organized fraternity efforts in community service, philanthropy, and educational programming and produced significant improvements in these areas
- Designed and implemented a new judicial system that corrected existing procedural flaws, increased transparency, and afforded critical rights to all fraternities summoned for policy violations

THETA DELTA CHI FRATERNITY
President, Treasurer, and THON Chairman

State College, PA
4/08 – 12/09

- Spearheaded the creation of a more personalized fraternity marketing approach that triggered a 196% increase in active members in its first year
- Constructed, monitored, and managed the fraternity's \$260,000 annual budget, which included the payment of facility bills and the funding for philanthropies, recruitment activities, and social events
- Under my leadership, the Sigma Triton Chapter was named Penn State's Chapter of Excellence (Top Fraternity at Penn State), the Top Chapter of Theta Delta Chi nationwide, and the top service and philanthropy-performing chapter of Theta Delta Chi nationwide

HONORS

- Recipient of the Davenport Foundation Scholarship (largest scholarship offered by Theta Delta Chi), 2009 & 2010
- Undergraduate of the Year for Theta Delta Chi International Fraternity, 2009
- Interfraternity Council Selection for Penn State Greek Man of the Year, 2008
- Recipient of the Pennsylvania State University "Living the Ritual" Award (for demonstrating outstanding values), 2008
- Inductee into Beta Gamma Sigma International Honor Society for Recognizing Business Excellence, 2008
- Recipient of the Pennsylvania State University President's Freshman Award, 2007

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **Technical Skills:** Adobe Photoshop, basic HTML and Javascript, Microsoft Office Suite
- **Interests:** Sports business, social media, technological startups, traveling, working out, movies