ABSTRACT

The variables observed in this research are brand loyalty, perceived quality, perceived value and brand sustainability. The study focused on American and Chinese consumers. The National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and English Premier League (EPL) were chosen for this study because of the differences in their traditional fan base. A survey was distributed, and difference between means and a regression analyses were conducted. The difference between means tests indicated the following: 1) Chinese consumers feel they are more loyal to the NBA and the EPL than Americans, 2) Americans feel the NFL and EPL positively impact society more than Chinese consumers do, and 3) Chinese consumers feel being a fan of the NBA provides social acceptance more than Americans do. The second test, the regression analysis, found the following: 1) there is a correlation between Chinese consumer perceptions of the NFL’s brand sustainability and brand loyalty, but not Americans’, 2) there is a correlation between the EPL’s perceived value and overall brand equity, and 3) there is a correlation between Chinese consumer perceptions of the NBA’s perceived value and brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

The professional sports industry has gone through waves of change in the past decade. Increased attention on cultivating an international fan base and a shift in consumer awareness of a brand’s social responsibility are all factors that influence this change. Due to these changes, it is a challenge for sports industry professionals to continuously understand fans’ perceptions of the various sports leagues. Two of the largest and most opportune markets for professional sports leagues to expand their presence are in the United States and China, therefore this study will focus on those two markets. The National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and the English Premier League (EPL) are the three professional sports leagues that this study will focus on. Focusing on three very distinct professional sports leagues will assist in uncovering the differences between American and Chinese consumer perceptions. While past studies have attempted to discover fans’ perceptions of an individual team’s brand, there has been no focus on professional sports leagues’ brand equity. This raises the question: how do American and Chinese consumer perceptions of professional sports leagues’ brand equity differ?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A 19-question anonymous survey was administered using Google Forms to individuals in Shanghai, China and Michigan, United States. The data collected was acquired through the in-person intercept method and online distribution. The researcher spent a total of 10 days collecting data in Shanghai, China. First, measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) were calculated. The average total brand equity score was calculated. Then, a series of nine difference between means and four correlation tests were computed using Microsoft Excel. Each of these tests was then further examined for statistical significance. The nine difference between means tests focused on three specific statements reflecting perceived loyalty, impact on society and social acceptance. All difference between means were evaluated with a two-tailed 95% confidence level test. The four correlation tests focused on the average overall scores of the four dimensions of brand equity. The first number calculated was a correlation. A t-test was administered from the correlation number, the P-Values found, and then the significance of the correlation was determined. The null hypothesis was then tested using the series of analysis results.

RESULTS

A total of 168 responses were collected, and of the responses 161 were viable for analysis. The results were as followed: 1) American and Chinese consumers’ perceived loyalty to the NBA is not equal and is statistically significant 2) American and Chinese consumers’ perceived loyalty to the NFL is not equal, but is not statistically significant, 3) American and Chinese consumers’ perceived loyalty to the EPL is not equal and is statistically significant, 4) American and Chinese peoples’ opinion on the NBA impacting society in a positive way is not equal, but is not statistically significant, 5) American and Chinese peoples’ opinion on the NFL impacting society in a positive way is not equal and is statistically significant, 6) American and Chinese peoples’ opinion on the EPL impacting society in a positive way is not equal and are statistically significant, 7) American and Chinese peoples’ opinions on the NBA providing an individual social acceptance is not equal and is statistically significant, 8) American and Chinese peoples’ opinions on the NFL providing an individual social acceptance is not equal but is not statistically significant, 9) American and Chinese peoples’ opinion on the EPL providing an individual social acceptance is not equal but is not statistically significant, 10) there is a significant, positive correlation between Chinese consumer perceptions of the NBA’s perceived value and brand loyalty, 11) there is a significant positive correlation between American consumer perceptions of the NBA’s perceived value and brand loyalty, 12) there is a significant positive correlation between American consumer perceptions of the NFL’s brand sustainability and brand loyalty, 13) there is no significant correlation between American consumer perceptions of the NFL’s brand sustainability and brand loyalty, 14) there is a significant positive correlation between Chinese consumer perceptions of the EPL’s perceived value and brand equity, and 15) there is a significant positive correlation between American consumer perceptions of the EPL’s perceived value and brand equity.

CONCLUSIONS

There are a number of similarities and differences between American and Chinese consumer perceptions of professional sports leagues’ brand equity. This study highlighted these similarities and differences that show how American and Chinese consumers possess different views on sports. This research informs marketing managers and business strategists how consumers view the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL) and English Premier League (EPL), and what they need to focus on in order to improve their league’s equity. While there were many takeaways in this study, three relevant findings are: 1) Chinese consumers correlated brand sustainability with loyalty to the NFL, 2) Chinese consumers perceive themselves as more loyal to the NBA and EPL than Americans, and 3) Chinese consumers feel being a fan of the NBA provides social acceptance more than Americans. Therefore, when professional sports marketers and strategists are looking to increase their leagues’ brand equity in the US and China, they should focus on the four dimensions of brand equity in this study to see an overall increase in their league’s brand equity.

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