Summary Brief

**Superstars or No Superstars on Professional Sport Team Rosters: How Teams can adapt to Fans with Varying Levels of Preference for Consistency**

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*In the sport and entertainment industry, consumers can have significantly different perceptions of sports teams based on their team composition. Participants who had a superstar on their team had higher levels of excitement than those without a superstar. A cross-over interaction effect was observed between team composition and preference for consistency on the willingness to pay for a ticket to a sporting event by consumers. When there was a superstar on the team, consumers with a low preference for consistency were willing to pay significantly more than those with a high preference for consistency. This effect reversed when there was no superstar on the team. Findings provide sport management professionals insights into roster building and the impacts on consumers within their fan base.*

**Introduction**

In the NBA, star power of the players is one of the most intriguing aspects of the league. Many players host camps in other countries, allowing them to connect with fans and further the reach of the NBA. When Kobe Bryant announced 2015-2016 would be his farewell season, ticket sales for Los Angeles Lakers games skyrocketed. People did not want to miss the opportunity to see Kobe Bryant, in all his greatness, play live before he retired. Ticket prices for his final game climbed from $103 to $552 for the cheapest tickets on the secondary market (Novy-Williams 2015). People were willing to spend considerably more money to see an NBA legend play in his final game. While ticket and merchandise sales can surely bolster the financial success of a professional sport team, there are some teams who have had more success without a superstar on the roster and instead embraced more of a holistic team approach. For example, the San Antonio Spurs have achieved large amounts of retail success without the presence of a true superstar with a large brand personality for quite some time (Coyle 2018). Owners, general managers, and sport business professionals would benefit from understanding how fans react to the team based on their team composition. This could lead to more optimal consumer behaviors such as excitement towards the team or willingness to pay prices for team tickets, merchandise, and other goods. Additionally, we examine consumers possessing varying levels of preference for consistency. This is directly related to the team composition as professional sport franchises control whether their roster has high or low turnover from previous seasons.

**Background**

The research examines professional sport teams varying in composition of having superstars with prominent brands to teams with no superstars and athletes with less recognizable brands. Personal branding is defined as “a strategic process of creating positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery (Gorbatov et al. 2018, p.6).” Humphreys and Johnson (2020) examined how the presence of a superstar on a team affected that team’s attendance finding that games in which one or more superstar athletes participated resulted in higher attendance levels. Michael Jordan bolstered attendance the most by generating between 4,000 and 5,000 more fans in attendance per game. Overall, there is a complex relationship between superstar athletes and team success. Based on the previous findings of fans desiring superstar athletes, we expect teams possessing a superstar on their roster will have higher levels of excitement from their fan base than those teams lacking a superstar. This may be due to the superstar having a recognizable personal brand image fans can identify and relate to themselves as well as the team they root for on game days.

Preference for consistency is “a tendency to base one’s responses to incoming stimuli on the implications of existing (prior entry) variables, such as previous expectancies, commitments, and choices (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom 1995, p. 318).” Consumer levels of preference for consistency has been found to influence how they react to celebrity endorsements (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom 1995; Guadagno & Cialdini 2010; Shaffer 1981). Previous research has examined how consumers with varying levels of preference for consistency respond to brands. Kocher, Czellar, and Usunier found consumers with high levels of preference for consistency and strong self-brand connection had more positive attitudes toward a brand action of increasing consistency between brand logo and name. With consumers possessing higher levels of preference for consistency desiring stability and reliability, we anticipate they would want a team with no superstars on their rosters resulting in less team member turnover. The opposite would be true for those with lower levels of preference for consistency since they would desire to have the best athletes on their team.

**Key Findings**

We found a significant main effect of team composition on excitement (*F* (1, 228) = 5.01, *p* = .03). Participants had significantly higher excitement levels when presented a team with a superstar (*m* = 5.77, *SE* = .11) than a team with no superstar (*m* = 5.43, *SE* = .11).

A significant interaction effect of team composition and preference for consistency on willingness to purchase (*F* (1, 174) = 4.13, *p* = .04) was observed. Participants with high preference for consistency were willing to pay higher amounts when no superstar was on the team (*m* = $300.98, *SE* = 102.94) than when there was a superstar on the team (*m* = $133.84, *SE* = 102.94). Participants with low levels of preference for consistency were willing to pay higher amounts when a superstar was on the team (*m* = $345.54, *SE* = 121.80) than when there was no superstar on the team (*m* = $65.67, *SE* = 111.18).

**References**

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