

Sports Fans' Emotional Attachment and Its Impact on Attitude toward Athletic Teams: UH Sports Teams

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Sports Fans' Emotional Attachment and Its Impact on Attitude toward Athletic Teams: UH Sports Teams

Introduction

The University of Hawai'i is the state's flagship institution of the 10-campus UH System. The university's athletic department is also the state's premier organization, with all of its sports belonging to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). There are 21 total teams in the athletic department (7 men's, 12 women's, and 2 co-ed). However, there are just four sports—men's football, men's and women's basketball, men's and women's volleyball, and men's baseball—which generate monetary revenue based on ticket sales (UH Athletic Department, 2017). All other sports teams invite fans to attend their events free of charge.

The UH football team came off of its best season in 2016 after several years of struggling (Connelly, 2017). Hawai'i finished with a 7-7 record and a win in the Hawai'i Bowl, its first in 10 years. UH won its bowl game in front of a crowd of 20,327 people at the 50,000-seat Aloha Stadium (Arnett, 2016). This meager crowd has been the norm for the football team for the past few seasons. Nick Rolovich enters his second season as a head coach in 2017. Also, the Hawai'i men's and women's basketball teams both won Big West Conference championships in 2016, advancing to the NCAA Tournament (McInnis, 2016). This was the first conference championship win for both teams in more than a decade (Keisser, 2016). The Hawai'i women's and men's volleyball teams also had great 2016-2017 seasons with the women winning the Big West Conference Championship and the men finishing third in the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation.

These successful tournament turnouts would make UH athletic department and the teams expect more fans and revenues in future games; and fans also have more positive images of the

teams. Based on the sport-branding framework, this thesis study will explore the sports team-fans relationship. It is important to study the public perception of sports teams because the teams have become a brand. It is a mutual relationship because the sports teams offer something to the fans, whether they would be the excitement of the game or the atmosphere of cheering with other fans; while the fans offer the team support both emotionally and financially.

Therefore, this thesis study will focus on these six fee-based sport teams at the University of Hawai'i and the fans' motivations behind why patrons pay a monetary fee to view these games. The study will also look at how the sports fans perceive the effectiveness of the marketing tactics of the UH athletic department and each individual team to get more fans to watch their events.

Literature Review

What is Sports Branding?

Branding are the ways and methods that companies use to market themselves in order to gain an increased following and an increased amount of consumers who will purchase their product (Boze & Patton, 1995). Branding serves as how the organization wants to be perceived by its consumers, however, it is also how the consumer perceives the organization. The relationship is mutual. Previous research looked at six major multi-national companies, Colgate-Palmolive, Kraft General Foods, Nestle, Procter and Gamble, Quaker Oats, and Unilever, and looked at how these companies operate the many brands that they own (Boze & Patton, 1995). Just focusing on brand names alone, a majority of the products identify with the brand name. This, the study shows, makes it clearer to the consumer as opposed to having a different name across the board, which would make it much more confusing to the consumer. It is noted that “consolidation and management of acquired brands often takes place...but most of the brand names continue” (Boze & Patton, 1995, p. 40). The importance of this is by having consistency in the brand of the company’s products.

It is said that “brands manifest their impact at three primary levels - customer market, product market, and financial market” (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740). There are four aspects of branding that are discussed by Keller & Lehmann (2006): brand intangibles, brand personality, brand relationships, and brand experience. Brand intangibles are not the physical attributes of the brand; however, they are what separate a particular brand from another. They are the qualities that make a particular brand unique. Brand personality contains five categories in which a brand may fall into: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Brand relationships involve how a brand connects with its consumers and how that particular

relationship has grown. Finally, brand experience encompasses a consumer's overall experience with the particular brand and how that experience is fostered when the consumer comes into contact with that particular brand (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

Sports branding has taken on an industry of its own, making it a staple for sports teams, merchandise companies, and even individual athletes. Longtime world number one golfer Annika Sorenstam has turned her name, ANNIKA, into a brand as a golf teaching academy. A recent study looked into the qualities of the ANNIKA brand and why it became extremely successful (Cortsen, 2013). One noteworthy finding is that Annika Sorenstam's brand would not have been successful if it was not for her success on the golf course. Because of her victories and fame on the playing field, she was able to make her brand successful. This is an important finding for sports teams who wish to turn their organization into a brand. Success on the field or court comes first before a brand can become successful. Another finding is that a combination of different parts around the brand, such as media exposure, a great group of employees around Annika Sorenstam, corporate sponsors, and fan interest in her golf game, made the brand successful. Finally, it was clear to the researchers that "Annika Sorenstam's personality and her brand have melted together and adds some 'legitimacy, authenticity and trustworthiness'" (Cortsen, 2013, p. 53).

Emotional Attachment to Sports Teams

When an organization attempts to achieve their goals through branding their company, one of the outcomes that the organization may strive to achieve is when the consumers form an emotional attachment to the company's brand. In sports, this may involve enthusiastically cheering at the sporting event, or wearing the team's apparel. Attachment theory is a concept started by Bowlby (1979), which illustrates how humans respond when their relationships are

hurt, separated, or they are perceiving a threat. Attachment theory focuses on small children and how they form a bond with their familiar caregivers (Bowlby, 1979). They want to maintain a close proximity to their caregivers, and when that is not able to be achieved then they exhibit distress.

The concept of attachment also spreads to consumers and how they grow an attachment to different brands. The new idea is called brand romance and it is defined as “a state of emotional attachment that is characterized by strong positive affect toward the brand, high arousal caused by the brand, and a tendency of the brand to dominate the consumer’s cognition” (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011, p. 299). In one study, the researchers explored the relationships between brand romance, brand attitude, and brand loyalty. One of the findings was that brand romance is a better predictor of brand loyalty than brand attitude. However, it is worth noted that “consumers may be committed to a brand for reasons other than romance, like lack of competing alternatives or moral or contractual obligation” (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011, p. 299).

To take this concept about sports teams and branding further, the next article focuses sports fans and their view of their favorite teams as a brand (Abosag et al., 2012). The researchers targeted two Norwegian football clubs and their supporters. Before surveys were administered to the supporters, the researchers conducted interviews with managers and directors of marketing, communications, and media relations involved in both clubs. The interviews were to discover brand strategies for both teams. Then, the researchers formed both qualitative and quantitative questions for the supporters of the teams. 842 total supporters completed the survey. The themes that were discovered from the qualitative interviews with those involved with the teams were: club as a brand, tradition and history, emotional attachment, and brand extension

and the importance of commercialization for football clubs. Under emotional attachment, it was clear to the researchers that “their (supporters) sense of identity, care and belonging help to maintain their relationships with the clubs” (Abosag et al., 2012, p. 1242). After analyzing data for the study, it was evident to the researchers that the stronger the fans’ emotional attachment to the team, the stronger their perception to the team as a brand.

Impact of Sports Fans’ Emotional Attachment

As mentioned before, a sports brand becomes successful when the team or individual performs well in the playing arena (Cortsen, 2013). However, what happens when the once successful team begins to lose? All sporting events usually end in one team winning and the other team losing. For fans who attend events in favor of one particular team, the outcome does not always end in a victory for that particular team. Therefore, coping with a loss is something that the fan needs to deal with. One study examined how college student sports fans coped with a loss by their favorite team (Partridge et al., 2010). The researchers used the ‘Compass of Shame Scale-Fan’ designed to assess whether a fan utilized which of the four maladaptive shame coping styles: attack other, attack self, avoidance, or withdrawal (Nathanson, 1992). The researchers found that avoidance was the most used coping style as compared to the three others. Avoidance is defined as a coping mechanism in which individuals deny that shame exists and use distracting techniques to avoid negative feelings (Nathanson, 1992). Results indicated that there were no significant differences between responses showing attack other and attack self, and withdrawal was the least common coping method. This means that the respondents did not tend to acknowledge the negative situation but try to hide from it.

Another study examined the effects of distancing tactics on a sport fan’s self-esteem and emotions after the fan’s favorite team won or lost a game (Bizman & Yinon, 2002). The study

surveyed 135 male participants who were fans of a popular basketball team in Tel Aviv, Israel. The fans were first asked to rate their degree of ‘fanship’ toward their team on a scale from 1-9, with 1 being very low and 9 being very high. Then, the participants were asked a series of questions which measured their willingness to associate with the team, their state self-esteem, and their emotional responses at the moment. However, the order of the questions was varied. Half of the participants were asked questions regarding their willingness to associate with the team first, before the questions on self-esteem and their emotional responses. This provided the participant the opportunity to use distancing tactics with the team before indicating their self-esteem and emotional responses. However, the other half were asked the self-esteem and emotional responses questions first and thus were not able to use distancing tactics. The researchers concluded that there were two findings from the study: 1) after a team’s win, fans exhibited higher self-esteem and positive emotions, and fans tended to associate more with the team and 2) the levels of self-esteem and emotional responses were higher when the questions were asked after the questions of associating with the team than if the questions were asked before. For the second finding, the researchers concluded that the responses were higher when asked after the questions of associating with the team because the participants were able to use distancing tactics to either identify themselves more with a winning team or distance themselves more with a losing team.

Emotional attachment to the sports teams can also be found in their rituals when watching the team’s games that would spark fans’ support for the teams’ victory. For example, at the University of Hawai’i, fans cheer “Let’s Go Bows” as the pep band’s drummer drums to the beat. At UH sporting events, the fight song is played by the pep band, or fans dress in green and white, the colors of the school. These are some rituals that are unique to Hawai’i fans.

Fans of sports teams do not always physically attend their favorite team's games. Instead, they may view the game on television. A study looks at the rituals and behaviors of University of Nebraska football fans whenever they conduct 'watch parties' to view the football game on television (Aden et al., 2009). The researchers visited dozens of parties inside and outside the state of Nebraska which were hosted by alumni. There were three characteristics in these parties: decoration of the site, fan attire, and collective activities of relating and collecting. In terms of decoration of the site, the watch parties would transform the location into a Nebraska football feel. For example, at a watch party at a bar in Chicago, although most of the people there wanted to watch the Purdue football game, 22 televisions were turned to the Nebraska game. In other watch parties, such as the one in Portland, organizers held up signs that read 'Welcome Nebraska fans' at the exterior of the building. In terms of fan attire, at nearly all of the watch parties across the nation, more than 80% of the attendees were wearing red, the color of the university. Wearing red also helps to distinguish the Nebraska fans from other people who may also be at the location. Finally, collective activities of relating and collecting symbolize having the game pretty much come to you. For example, at the watch party in Chicago, the bar played the school's fight song whenever a score was made. Or, at a watch party in Fargo, the location served unique food from Nebraska. With the existence of these fan rituals, the researchers concluded that "sufficient evidence exists to illustrate that Husker football fans share a community that is located in an intermediate place" (Aden et al., 2009, p. 33).

Sports Fans' Engagement on Team's Social Media

Mobile phones are becoming more prevalent in today's world. Millions of people around the world own a smartphone, and many sports fans take their phones to sporting events for various reasons. Most carry their smartphones wherever they go; therefore it is only suitable for

them to take their devices to the sporting events. However, many fans use their smartphones for unique actions that can only be done at the sporting event that they are attending. For example, at UH baseball games, the public address announcer reads “baseball fans, check us out on Instagram @HawaiiAthletics and tag photos from tonight’s game using #HawaiiBSB and #GoBows”. At the University of Hawai‘i, each of the six ticket-revenue generating sport teams have their own unique Facebook and Twitter pages, with the men’s basketball, men’s volleyball, and women’s basketball teams also having their own unique Instagram page. This is in addition to the main Hawai‘i Athletics Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages.

Previously, several studies suggested the role of media, particularly interactive form of media, on its effects on sports fans. Kang (2015) explored how professional sports fans use mobile content to develop fan support surveying 665 college students. Kang (2015) grouped the content into four categories: information (ex. roster, schedule, standings), service (ex. game-day rules, stadium, sponsors), and interaction (ex. calling, emailing, texting). The results found that “the information dimension was positively predictive of attitudinal loyalty. The service dimension was positively related to behavioral loyalty. Information and interaction dimensions were significantly associated with team identification. The information dimension positively accounted for sport fandom” (Kang, 2015, p. 468). Phua (2010) also looked at the relationships between sports fan identification, self-esteem, and media use among 203 college students, who were fans of the school’s football team. Some of the major findings of the study showed that media use has a positive effect on both self-esteem and fan identification. Using media to communicate “allows sports fans to bond with other like-minded fans, create a positive social identity through positive in-group distinctiveness and out-group derogation, and reinforce their fan experience by letting them more vividly experience their team’s wins and losses throughout

the season” (Phua, 2010, p. 199). Some of these types of media consumption include watching their favorite team on television, or communicating with other fans on blogs. There were four types of media tested and researchers found that online media had the greatest effect on self-esteem and fan identification, followed by broadcast media, mobile phones, and print media. The researchers argue that online media provides the user with the most flexibility in having the information and contributing to the information at their convenience.

UH Sports Teams and the Fans

Six revenue-based Sports Teams

As mentioned in the introduction, the six sports that charge entry fees are men’s football, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s and women’s volleyball, and men’s baseball. Of these sports, the football team is the most attended game of the athletic department. The Stan Sheriff Center, the venue where UH basketball and volleyball play their games, seats a capacity of 10,300 people. Aloha Stadium, the venue where UH football plays its games, seats a capacity of 50,000 people. Les Murakami Stadium, the venue where UH baseball plays its games, seats a capacity of 4,312 people. Therefore, each season, hundreds of thousands of people may potentially view a UH sporting event. In 2016, the football team played seven games at the 50,000 seat Aloha Stadium. Of the seven games, the football team had an average home attendance of 24,328 (UH Athletic Department, 2016). Although this is a large number compared to the other sports on campus, if you match it with the capacity of the stadium, it is less than 50% of the seats filled. The figure is also much less than the 110,468 average fans per game that the University of Michigan had in 2016 (Solomon, 2016). The football team reached its peak in 2007 when UH went undefeated in the regular season and earned a bid into the Bowl Championship Series Sugar Bowl, where the Warriors then lost to Georgia. During the 2007 season, around half

of the games were sold out at Aloha Stadium meaning that all available tickets were sold. The football team has not seen this kind of success, meaning both in season wins and fan attendance ever since (UH Athletic Department, 2007).

The women's volleyball team is the next highest attended UH sporting event. The team plays around 20 games per season in the Stan Sheriff Center located on campus. The capacity of the arena is 10,300 people and for the 2016 season, UH averaged 6,759 fans in its 19 home matches. Each year, the team is among the top 25 collegiate teams in the United States. However, the women's volleyball team won the last of its four national championships back in 1987 (UH Athletic Department, 2016).

The UH men's basketball team saw an average of 6,234 fans in its 19 home games in the 2016-2017 season in the Stan Sheriff Center. UH is not known as a perennial powerhouse across the nation, however, the team arguably had its best season in 2015-2016 when it won its first NCAA Tournament game in program history. The men's basketball team has sent several players to the National Basketball Association (NBA), including Anthony Carter, who was arguably the greatest men's basketball player to wear a UH uniform (UH Athletic Department, 2011).

The UH men's volleyball team saw an average of 3,599 fans in its 17 home matches in 2016 in the Stan Sheriff Center. The team finished with a 16-12 record. The best season, arguably, came in 2002 in which Hawai'i defeated Pepperdine University to win the program's first and only national championship. However, the title was later vacated after reports surfaced that one of Hawai'i's players was ineligible (UH Athletic Department, n.d.).

The Hawai'i baseball team plays its games in Les Murakami Stadium and saw an average of 3,021 fans in its 35 home games in the 2016 season. The team's most successful season in recent years happened in 2010 when UH won the Western Athletic Conference Tournament and

made it to the NCAA Tempe Regional. The team featured Hilo native Kolten Wong, who eventually went on to play in the Major League Baseball (MLB) for the St. Louis Cardinals (UH Athletic Department, 2017).

Finally, the women's basketball team saw an average home attendance of 2,547 fans in the Stan Sheriff Center in the 2016-2017 season. Hawai'i came off one of its best seasons in 2016-2017 after the team won the Big West Conference Championship and played in the NCAA Tournament. The winningest coach in program history was Vince Goo, who coached from 1987-2004, with a 334-166 record (UH Athletics, n.d.).

The football team is a member of the Mountain West Conference. The women's volleyball, men's and women's basketball, and baseball teams are members of the Big West Conference; and the men's volleyball team belongs to the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: How much are UH sports fans (any member of the UH community who paid a monetary fee to enter a game) emotionally attached to the UH sports teams, in particular, UH football, men's basketball, women's basketball, men's volleyball, women's volleyball, and/or baseball teams?

H1: The level of UH sports fans' emotional attachment to the teams will be related to their positive attitude toward the teams.

H2: The level of UH sports fans' emotional attachment to the teams will be related to their ticket purchasing intent for future games.

RQ2: How much are the UH sports fans engaged in the UH sports teams' social media pages?

H3: UH sports fans' social media engagement on the UH sports teams' social media pages will be related to their positive attitude toward the UH sports teams.

H4: UH sports fans' social media engagement on the UH sports teams' social media pages will be related to their ticket purchasing intent for future games.

Method

Sampling procedure

The researcher gathered the survey data through Qualtrics, an online-based survey tool, from a total of 120 participants. These participants were gathered through a convenience sample. The respondents were targeted because they have attended at least one fee-based University of Hawai'i sporting event during the 2016-2017 season. The population also included non-UH students, since non-students do not pay the mandatory athletic fee. These non-UH students may comprise of faculty, alumni, or the general public. All of these groups need to pay admission fees to attend sporting events from the above-mentioned six teams. The participants were recruited by word of mouth through UH fans that the researcher personally knows, as well as through an online post on the researcher's Facebook page. The researcher welcomed a wide range of demographic details from the respondents, according to income level, education level, and age.

Measurements

Emotional attachment

Emotional attachment toward a brand "induces a state of emotion-laden mental readiness that influences his or her allocation of emotion toward a brand" (Abosag et al., 2012, p. 1238). A six-item scale from Dwyer et al. (2015) was used to measure emotional attachment. The questions are: 1) I would consider myself to be a "real" fan of the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games. 2) I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games. 3) Being a fan of team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games is very important to me. 4) I would be willing to defend team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games publicly, even if it caused controversy. 5) I would watch team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games

regardless of which team they were playing against at the time. 6) Given the choice, I would increase the amount I spend following the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games (i.e. reading, watching, attending) during the season. These six questions were measured using a five-point likert scale with 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.

The researcher checked Cronbach's alpha score to measure the internal consistency of the emotional attachment multi-items, since this has multiple questions to measure each variable. Cronbach's alpha scores were tested using SPSS. The emotional attachment six multi-items received a score of 0.795.

Social media engagement.

To measure UH sports fans' social media engagement, one question was asked: how often do you visit the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games, social media pages? (1=never, 2=once in a while, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently, 5=almost daily).

Additionally, to explore participant's social media use in general, the following questions were also asked: Which social media sites they have (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and/or YouTube); whether they have liked/followed the teams' social media pages of the sports; and how often they post on the team or teams' (which they have paid money to attend their games) social media pages? (1=never, 2=once in a while, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently, 5=almost daily).

Positive attitude

One outcome of an organization to public relationship is the consumer to have a positive attitude about the brand. "A positive relationship with the organization can lead to a positive attitude, which can be an important indication of likelihood to interact or engage with the organization" (Watkins, 2017, p. 166). The researcher modified the questions involving attitude

presented by Watkins (2017). The researcher asked the UH sport fans to rate their attitude about the particular sports team(s) that they have paid money to attend the games and to rate their perception of the public's attitude toward that particular team. The positive attitude item, however, was measured using only the question of: rate your general attitude toward the team(s) that you paid money to attend their games (1=very negative, 2=somewhat negative, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat positive, 5=very positive).

Ticket purchasing intent

This was asked using one question: How likely are you to purchase a ticket for a future game for the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games previously? (1=definitely not, 2=probably not, 3=neutral, 4=probably will, 5=definitely will).

Results

A total of 120 responses were collected from the online-based survey. All 120 respondents answered all of the survey questions, therefore all 120 entries are deemed valid. Among the participants, majority were between the ages of 25 and 40: 19-24 (11.7%), 25-30 (33.3%), 31-40 (21.7%), 41-50 (12.5%), 51-60 (5.8%), and 61 years or older (15%). A majority of the respondents were male (58.3%) compared to female (41.7%). A majority of the respondents' hometown were in the state of Hawai'i (90%), compared to the U.S. Mainland (8.3%), while (1.7%) some did not list a hometown. A majority were also UH Manoa alumni (53.3%) compared to those who were not (46.7%) (see Table 1). Among the different UH sports teams, the most popular teams from the respondents were: football (62.5%), women's volleyball (42.5%), men's basketball (35%), baseball (35%), men's volleyball (16.7%), and women's basketball (7.5%) (see Table 2).

Research Question #1 asked "How much are UH sports fans (any member of the UH community who paid a monetary fee to enter a game) emotionally attached to the UH sports teams, in particular, UH football, men's basketball, women's basketball, men's volleyball, women's volleyball, and/or baseball teams?" A descriptive analysis showed that there was a majority of respondents that they were somewhat emotionally attached to the UH sports teams that they have paid money to attend their games ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.69$) (see Table 3). Respondents level of emotional attachment were not affected by gender (Male $M = 3.84$, $SD = .67$; Female $M = 3.83$, $SD = .72$) ($t(118) = .025$, $p > .05$) or alumni status (UH alum $M = 3.94$, $SD = .63$; non-UH alum $M = 3.72$, $SD = .74$) ($t(118) = 1.76$, $p > .05$).

The first hypothesis proposed that UH sports fans' emotional attachment to the teams will be related to their positive attitude toward the teams. A correlation analysis using SPSS was

conducted to see the relationship between the two variables. The correlation between emotional attachment and positive attitude was statistically significant ($r = .509, n=120, p < .001$) (see Table 4), supporting H1.

Then, the second hypothesis proposed that UH sports fans' emotional attachment to the teams will be related to their ticket purchasing intent for future games. A correlation analysis using SPSS was also conducted to see the relationship between the two variables, and the correlation result between the emotional attachment and future ticket purchasing intention was statistically significant ($r = .403, n=120, p < .001$) (see Table 4). H2 is supported.

Research Question #2 asked: "How much are the UH sports fans engaged in the UH sports teams' social media pages?" A descriptive analysis showed that UH sports fans are little engaged in the UH sports teams' social media pages ($M = 1.83, SD = 0.90$) in terms of how much they visit those social media pages (see Table 3). Respondents level of social media engagement were not affected by gender (Male $M = 1.89, SD = .91$; Female $M = 1.76, SD = .89$) ($t(118) = .752, p > .05$) or alumni status (UH alum $M = 1.95, SD = .88$; non-UH alum $M = 1.70, SD = .91$) ($t(118) = 1.57, p > .05$).

Moreover, survey results showed that about 82% of respondents have at least one social media channels: Facebook (78%), Instagram (63%), YouTube (48%), and Twitter (19%). However, participants said that they have not liked or followed any of them (59%), then others said they have liked or followed some of them (32%), a few liked or followed all of them (8%), and a minimum amount said they do not remember (0%). This data shows that although a majority of respondents have social media accounts, less than a majority of respondents have visited the teams' social media accounts, which was the question measuring social media engagement.

Then, the next hypothesis proposed that UH sports fans' social media engagement on the UH sports teams' social media pages will be related to their positive attitude toward the teams. To test this hypothesis, the researcher took the score for the item used to measure social media engagement and compared that with the score for the item used to measure positive attitude using a correlation analysis on SPSS was conducted to see the relationship between the two variables (see Table 4). The result showed that there is no significant correlation between social media engagement and positive attitude ($r = .171, n = 120, p > .05$). Hence, H3 is not supported.

The final hypothesis proposed that UH sports fans' social media engagement on the UH sports teams' social media pages will be related to their ticket purchasing intent for future games. A correlation analysis was also conducted to see the relationship between the two variables and a significant correlation was found between participants' social media engagement and their ticket purchase intention. Hence, H4 is supported ($r = .259, n = 120, p < .05$) (see Table 4).

Discussion

The findings of this research study showed that UH sports fans who attend games are somewhat emotionally attached to the teams. In terms of social media engagement, fans are not very engaged on social media in regards to the teams' social media accounts. This is not to say that the respondents are not engaging on social media in general. Most of the respondents have social media accounts, however, they are not engaging on the social media accounts pertaining to the UH sports teams. Moreover, in the relationships between emotional attachment and social media engagement, and positive attitude and ticket purchasing intent, this current study suggests that emotional attachment is the stronger predictor of both positive attitude and ticket purchasing intent.

Theoretical Implications

This study and its focus on the University of Hawaii athletic department have many theoretical implications, none more important than its effects on sports branding. In his sport branding study, Cortsen (2012) said that a combination of different parts around the brand, such as its employees, corporate sponsors, and fan interest in her golf game, made the brand successful. One of the most important components, however, in the brand's success was Annika Sorenstam's performance on the golf course. She was one of the most successful female golfers in history. Moreover, Cortsen (2012) also highlighted the critical role of media exposure in creating a successful brand. Media exposure can be a variety of different methods, including the mainstream media through TV and radio, as well as social media channels.

This study serves as a prime example when looking at the theories related to emotional attachment. Under the umbrella of emotional attachment is brand romance and by the survey responses, it is clear that UH sports fans have a large brand romance to the teams. Brand

romance is defined as “a state of emotional attachment that is characterized by strong positive affect toward the brand, high arousal caused by the brand, and a tendency of the brand to dominate the consumer’s cognition” (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011, p. 299). The six items used to measure emotional attachment were great examples of brand romance and serves as an explanation of why fans attend these games. As evidenced, emotional attachment is extremely important for teams and organizations looking to have fans come to their games. Looking at the study which focused on two Norwegian football clubs and their supporters, it was clear that the stronger the feeling of emotional attachment toward their teams, the stronger their perception to the team as a brand (Abosag et al., 2012).

The relationships provided between emotional attachment and positive attitude, as well as emotional attachment and future ticket purchasing intent were very strong. These findings are groundbreaking in the study of sports marketing and examining theories to discover how to get influence more fans to purchase athletic tickets.

In terms of social media engagement, the findings of this study did not support the relationship between social media engagement and a positive attitude. However, the findings did support the relationship between social media engagement and ticket purchasing intent. These findings add supportive evidence to the previous scholarships that highlighted the role media in affecting public opinion and their behavioral intention such as self-esteem and fan identification (Phua, 2010).

Practical Implications

The University of Hawai‘i Athletic Department can use these results to improve their marketing department and their outreach to games. Fan attendance has always been one of the top priorities for the UH Athletic Department. Therefore, one of the most striking outcomes of

this study is the strong relationship between emotional attachment and positive attitude, and emotional attachment and future ticket purchasing intent. The next implication is likely the most valuable to the athletic department. If they were able to increase the fans' emotional attachment toward the UH sports teams, then they almost guarantee that the fans will purchase tickets in the future. As described earlier by previous research, there are many ways that the athletic department can help to increase emotional attachment toward teams. Brand loyalty and wearing a team's brand is very important. The UH Athletic Department recently launched its collection of H-Zone apparel and merchandise. By increasing the merchandise sales, it will likely help to increase the fans' emotional attachment and fans will buy more tickets in the future.

A majority of respondents who completed this survey are UH Manoa alumni; therefore, they have some sort of connection to the school. However, the UH Athletic Department may want to look at how to influence those that do not have a connection to the school. Fans may just enjoy watching sports and that is an avenue for the athletic department to harness in and to help to influence this group of people to attend games and have an emotional attachment to the UH sports teams. One of the advantages that the UH Athletic Department has over other schools on the mainland is that the UH sports teams are the only Division I teams in the state of Hawaii. This is the premier game in the state. Therefore, they are not competing with other teams in the same state; and there are no professional teams in Hawai'i as well. Therefore, the University of Hawai'i is truly the only game in town with a high quality of athletics.

For social media engagement, one of the important signs is that fans are visiting and looking at the UH sports teams' social media accounts. However, the level of engagement on the social media pages was somewhat low. Perhaps one of the goals of the athletic department is to have more engagement on social media. Therefore, it is good information for the athletic

department to know that fans are visiting the pages. They are now able to take it to the next step and figure out how to influence fans to engage on the social media accounts more actively (i.e., like/share the posts). They may think about hosting giveaways on the social media pages or host live question and answer sessions with their favorite players. However, it is valuable to know that although social media engagement may be a goal for the athletic department, this study shows that social media engagement does not influence future ticket purchasing intent and positive attitude. Fans are still encouraged to buy tickets and to have a positive attitude toward the sports teams based on other sources.

Future Research and Limitations

One limitation to this study is that perhaps the positive attitude perceived of the teams may have been influenced primarily by other sources, and not social media engagement. These sources may be mainstream media coverage of the athletic teams, performance by the athletic teams, or fan experience at the games. The results do not conclusively show that engaging on social media leads to a positive attitude toward the teams.

Another limitation to this study is that perhaps the future ticket purchasing intent for the teams' games may have been influenced primarily by other sources, and not social media engagement, as well. These sources may include the fan experience at the games, performance by the sports teams, the obligation that fans may have as season ticketholders, or the obligation that fans may have to accompany their family members or friends to the games. These results do not conclusively show that engaging on the teams' social media channels leads to purchasing a ticket in the future. Future research may look at other forms of media consumption, including television, radio, and the athletic website. These other forms of media consumption may be a positive indicator of positive attitude or ticket purchasing intent. If this study was conducted in the future, the researcher may decide to target only those that have engaged on the UH sports teams' social media accounts. Therefore, this eliminates the idea that the respondent may not even have a social media account to begin with.

One of the options of future research may be to examine all of the possible reasons for fans to purchase tickets in the future. We can look at future ticket purchasing intent as the dependent variable and the independent variables may be the reasons fans would or would not purchase tickets in the future, including the team's win-loss record, the facilities that the teams play in, the fan experience at the games, the prices of the tickets, the sacrifice fans make to

attend the games, etc. If the researcher decides to focus solely on ticket purchasing intent, then the researcher is able to thoroughly examine all reasons why fans may purchase tickets in the future.

Another aspect of future research may also look at the fan experience at the games and figure out if fan experience at the games leads to enjoyment. Some fans may attend games just for the food, or for the camaraderie with their family and friends, or some are there to root on the home team. These are different ways to examine why fans attend games and how they feel their experience at the games is.

Conclusion

This study focused on fee-based sporting events at the University of Hawai'i and why fans pay money to attend these games. It is clear that fans are emotionally attached to the UH football, women's and men's volleyball, men's and women's basketball, and baseball teams, which in turn leads to a positive attitude toward the teams and a higher ticket purchasing intent in the future. In terms of social media engagement, results of this study showed that UH sports fans are a little engaged on UH sports team's social media pages in terms of how much they visit the sports' teams pages. The results of this study also discovered that social media engagement is related to future ticket purchasing intent.

As a result, this research contributed to expand our understanding on sports marketing and branding focusing specifically on the outcomes of emotional attachment and social media engagement. The results will also help the UH Athletic Department in determining where to focus its resources in trying to build up its fan base and ramp up the support for its teams.

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Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

	%
Age	
19-24	11.7
25-30	33.3
31-40	21.7
41-50	12.5
51-60	5.8
61 or older	15
Gender	
Male	58.3
Female	41.7
UHM Alumni	
Yes	53.3
No	46.7

**Note: Number of respondents = 120*

Table 2. Percentage of Participants who attended different sports' events

Sport	%
Football	62.5
Women's Volleyball	42.5
Men's Volleyball	16.7
Men's Basketball	35
Women's Basketball	7.5
Baseball	35

**Note: Participants were given the option of selecting 1-6 sports according to their attendance in academic year 2016-2017.*

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of all four variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Average of six Emotional Attachment items	3.83	.69	2.00	5.00
Social Media Engagement	1.83	.90	1.00	4.00
Positive Attitude	4.28	.58	3.00	5.00
Ticket Purchasing Intent	4.53	.59	2.00	5.00

**All variables were measured with a 5-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree and (5) Strongly Agree.*

Table 4. Correlation Table for Independent and Dependent Variables

	1	2	3	4
Average of six Emotional Attachment items	1			
Social Media Engagement	.352**	1		
Positive Attitude	.509**	.171	1	
Ticket Purchasing Intent	.403**	.259*	.490**	1

**All variables were measured with a 5-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagree and (5) Strongly Agree.*

*Note: ** $p < 0.001$, * $p < .05$*

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

- 1) Email Address (will not be used to associate with answers) _____
- 2) Age: <18, 19-24, 25-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61+
- 3) Gender: Male, Female
- 4) Hometown: _____
- 5) Are you a UH Manoa alumni? Yes or No
- 6) Which of these sports teams have you paid an admission fee to view their games within the 2016-17 season? If selected yes, please put approximately the amount of games you viewed by paying an admission fee in the 2016-17 season?
 - Football _____
 - Women's Volleyball _____
 - Men's Volleyball _____
 - Men's Basketball _____
 - Women's Basketball _____
 - Baseball _____
- 7) I would consider myself to be a "real" fan of the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games.
 - Strongly Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Somewhat Agree
 - Strongly Agree

8) I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

9) Being a fan of team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games is very important to me.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

10) I would be willing to defend team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games publicly, even if it caused controversy.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

11) I would watch team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games regardless of which team they were playing against at the time.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

12) Given the choice, I would increase the amount I spend following the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games (i.e. reading, watching, attending) during the season.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neutral
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

13) Rate your general attitude toward the team(s) that you paid money to attend their games.

- Very Negative
- Somewhat Negative
- Neutral
- Somewhat Positive
- Very Positive

14) What is your perception of the public's attitude toward the team(s) that you paid money for to attend their games?

- Very Negative
- Somewhat Negative

- Neutral
- Somewhat Positive
- Very Positive

15) Which social media sites do you personally have? Select all that apply:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Instagram

16) Have you liked/retweeted the teams' social media pages of the sports that you attended by paying a monetary fee?

- Yes, I have followed all of them
- Yes, I have followed some
- No, I have not followed any of them
- I don't remember

17) How often do you visit the team or teams which I have paid money to attend their games, social media pages?

- Never
- Once in a while
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Almost Daily

18) How often do you post on the team or teams, which I have paid money to attend their games, social media pages?

- Never

- Once in a while
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Almost Daily

19) How likely are you to purchase a ticket for a future game for the team or teams which you have paid money to attend their games previously?

- Definitely Not
- Probably Not
- Neutral
- Probably Will
- Definitely Will

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

University of Hawaii Consent to Participate in a Research Project

Marc Arakaki, Principal Investigator

Title: Motivations for University of Hawaii athletic fans to attend fee-based sports events

Aloha,

My name is Marc Arakaki and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the School of Communications. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am doing a research project. The purpose of my project is to investigate the motivations for UH sports fans to pay a monetary fee to view sporting events. I am asking you to participate because you recently attended one of the fee-based sporting events and you are at least 18 years old.

Project Description – Activities and Time Commitment: If you decide to take part in this project, you will be asked to fill out a survey. The survey questions are mainly multiple choice. The survey is accessed on a website to which I will provide you with a link. Completing the survey will take approximately 10 minutes. I expect around 200 people will take part in this project.

Benefits and Risks: There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this project. The findings from this project may help the UH Sports Marketing Office to better tailor its communications toward the fee-paying sports fan. There is little risk to you for participating in this project.

Confidentiality and Privacy: I will not ask you for any personal information, such as your name or address. Please do not include any personal information in your survey responses.

Voluntary Participation: You can freely choose to take part or to not take part in this survey. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits for either decision. If you do agree to participate, you can stop at any time.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study, please email me at marcra@hawaii.edu. You may also contact my adviser Dr. Ji Young Kim at 808.956.3353 or jkim22@hawaii.edu. You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions, obtain information, or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/information-research-participants> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

To Access the Survey: Please go to the following web page: https://manoahawaiiiss.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cYjG61QFDcf6tUh. You should find a link and instructions for completing the survey. Going to the first page of the survey will be considered as your consent to participate in this study.

Please print a copy of this page for your reference. Thank you!