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**FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS AND THE NEGATIVE WORD OF MOUTH OF THEIR RIVAL TEAM'S BRAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

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*This article has the objective of identifying whether the loyalty for the team has a negative effect on the word of mouth of the rival team's brand. It has been developed a model based on the works of Fagundes (2013) and Santana and Akel Sobrinho (2010), through the use of Structural Equation Modeling - SEM, which presents three constructions: the identification with the team, the loyalty to the team and the negative word of mouth of the rival's brand. 528 students from two college were interviewed and it has been identified that the emotional involvement of the supporter with his team reflects on the identification of a supporter by his team (KWON e ARMSTRONG, 2004; KAYNAK, 2008; JORDAN et al., 2014), it is thus formed a loyalty for the team (FUNK and JAMES, 2006). It influences other people in their personal relationships through the negative word of mouth communication.*

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**Keywords:** *identification with the team, loyalty, negative word of mouth*

**INTRODUCTION**

Football is considered a national passion. For his team, a support is capable of doing anything, like travelling several hours only in order to watch a simple football match in another country or supporting it even when it is relegated to the second division.

In order to compete in several championships, teams need a big financial structure, because they need to pay players' salaries, displacements, accommodations, food, communication, among many other costs. For this purpose, football clubs have many sources of revenues, such as the negotiation of athletes, collections with games, transmission licenses for TV channels, brand licensing, franchises, sponsoring, among others.

In the United States, the difference between revenues and costs has been calling the attention of club managers for the media and sponsoring revenues (MULLIN, HARDY and SUTTON, 2004). That also happens in Brazil, in the main clubs of São Paulo state, the revenue that comes from sponsors and advertising represents a significant part of the values available in the clubs. Data from the 2013 balances of the three main clubs from the State of São Paulo shows such importance. In Corinthians it represents 21.53% of the total incomes, in Palmeiras 17.87% and in São Paulo 10.79%.

Sponsoring can be a tool of communication that conveys a message about the brand, product or service to potential clients (GWINTER and BENNETT, 2008). If sponsors are a relevant source of income for clubs, for brands having their image bounded to a big and respected football club it can represent more advertising, once they are on the players' shirts, which are seen by thousands of supporters in the stadiums, TV channels, magazines, newspapers and in the internet. In that sense, supporters (team fans), consumers of the product football, might have a positive noticed image of the sponsor's brand (GWINTER and BENNETT, 2008). Companies use the sponsorship in sport

as a way to highlight the image the consumer has about them and to differentiate them from other competitors, once the fan is capable to transfer for the brand its unconditional love for the team (KAYNAK, 2008)

Just like a car or a yogurt, football is a product that is consumed by supporters; thus, in order to deliver the best offer, it is necessary to know it. For Zunino (2006, p. 1), the supporter is “all and every individual that identifies himself as a sympathizer, spectator, encourager or player of any sport, event, athlete and/or sportive club, no matter the way this person exerts such identification”. From this definition, it is possible to conclude that the supporter is not only the individual who attends the stadiums and explicitly express his high degree of interest for the sport, but also those who do not clearly and publicly express their preference for the sport.

Knowing the customer's purchase behavior, more specifically of the football supporter, has become an important task for clubs as well as for marketing departments. In the academy, the bibliometric study developed by Fagundes *et al.* (2012) researched the academic production on sportive marketing in the period from 1994 up to 2011, in the events promoted by ANPAD and in Brazilian journals with extracts A1, A2 and B1, accordingly to the classification of Qualis journals, developed by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* (Capes - Coordination of Higher Education Professionals Improvement), of the Ministry of Education (MEC). 23 articles were found, so that 65% were published more or less five years ago. The authors show that, among the works that were found, only 5% are descriptive works while 73.9 % are explanatory and 37.5% are surveys. About consumer behavior 44.4% of the articles were found. Note that, although the theme had aroused interest, the low production demonstrated the lack of produced studies.

Based on what has been exposed, this work has the objective to identify whether the loyalty to the team has a negative effect in the word of mouth of the rival team. As an issue we propose: do the supporter, loyal to his football team, performs a negative word of mouth communication of a product brand just because it sponsors his rival team?

The article structure is composed by five sections, including this introduction. In the following topic, it is presented a brief revision of the literature of theoretical concepts that supported this study. In the third section, it is provided the description of the methodology used in the research. The fourth presents and analyses the found results, and it is appointed the main conclusions of the study in the fifth.

## 2. REVISION OF THE LITERATURE

The sportive marketing has been developed by *Advertising Age* in 1978 (CONTURSI, 2000; MULLIN, HARDY and SUTTON, 2004) and represents the “activities of marketing professionals of industrial, consumer and service products that were using more and more the sport as a professional media” (MULLIN, HARDY and SUTTON, 2004, p. 18). With the evolution of marketing throughout the years, this definition has been revised and complemented, what resulted in a newer concept characterized in this way: “all designated activities for fulfilling the needs and wishes of sportive consumers through exchange processes” (MULLIN, HARDY and SUTTON, 2004, p. 19).

The exchange process suggests a service offered to the supporter of a club that, for a matter of sympathy with his favorite team, agrees to pay for the tickets of a match in the stadium. This same supporter can decide to buy a product related to his team, be it a t-shirt, a notebook or another product that carries the team's coat of arms. Sport differs from other types of entertainment because people become emotionally involved with the team and thus cling and identify with it (JORDAN *et al.*, 2014). The fact that a football match is performed by two teams and the result is unpredictable, transfers to the supporter a high emotional load (KAYNAK, 2008). The match's emotion is displaced to the mind of the supporter and the spectator (COSTA, ROCHA and OLIVEIRA, 2008).

The supporter motivates the clubs to the success, he is critical for the team's economic success when he buys the tickets for a match, watches it on TV or buys products related to his team sold in the market (LIU, 2011). Note that there is a psychological connection between the supporter and his favorite team (KWON and ARMSTRONG, 2004), the development of this emotional bound increases the attraction of the supporter for his team (FUNK and JAMES, 2001).

This attraction can be understood as an identification with the team, a psychological connection with the team (WANN and ROBINSON, 2002, FAGUNDES, 2013). From the identification, it is possible to develop a motivation for following matches and other activities of the teams (COSTA, ROCHA e OLIVEIRA, 2008). This psychological involvement is so expressive that the supporter comes to identify himself as an integrating part of the club (LEEUWEN, QUICK and DANIEL, 2002; COSTA, ROCHA and OLIVEIRA, 2008), something that influences his behavior, especially in the consumption (FISHER and WAKEFIELD, 1998; WANN, 2010). When

buying a product that contains the brand of the team, the supporter demonstrates in front of other supporters of the same team and of other teams his identification with the club (COSTA, ROCHA and OLIVEIRA, 2008). The involvement of the supporter helps to explain the different reactions of the consumer towards the sponsor (MEENAGHAN, 2001).

The identification with the team resists over time, which means that it is stable and does not oscillate from period to period; in that way, a commitment is voluntarily accepted by the supporter (FUNK and JAMES, 2001). Accordingly to the need and intensity of the supporter's emotional involvement with the team, there might be a positive reaction of the consumer, because he is able to recognize a benefit created by the sponsor (MEENAGHAN, 2001). Accordingly to the author, the sponsor of a team is able to create its own audience and segment its population when attracting the supporter; as for example, there is a greater involvement of supporters with Philips because it sponsored the Olympic Games.

Based on the theoretical reference, we propose the first hypothesis of the research:

H1: The identification with the team prompts a positive result in the loyalty with the team.

The loyalty with the brand can be defined as a strong intention to buy a product or service, of the same type or brand, which will be preferred by the client in the future albeit occasional influences and the marketing efforts in the attempt to change the behavior of such consumer (JACOBY and KYNER, 1973; OLIVER, 1999; PRITCHARD, HAVITZ and HOWARD, 1999; OLSEN, 2007; SILVA *et al.*, 2013).

When understanding the consumer of a sportive product, Wakefield and Sloam (1995) and James, Kolbe and Trail (2002) consider the loyalty for the team as a fidelity or devotion for a team, based on the interest of the spectator, which has been developed over time. It can also be considered as the bond a person bears with a sportive team (MATSUOKA, CHELLADURAI and HARADA, 2003). It is the most important factor that determines the supporter's intention to participate in sportive events, because it exerts a strong influence in the spectator's desire for watching new matches (WAKEFIELD and SLOAM, 1995). In that sense, the work of Matsuoka, Chelladurai and Harada (2003) proved that the identification with the team and the satisfaction with the match have a significant effect in the intention of watching new games.

The loyalty for a team represents a commitment with it, which is persistent, resistant to changes and influences thoughts and behaviors, a psychological connection (FUNK and JAMES, 2006). The supporter keeps with the team a strong, stable and permanent relation based on attitudes and behaviors that are expressed, for example, when buying a ticket, a load or when following the matches of the team on the TV on Sundays. It is necessary to build a psychological involvement of the spectator with the sport itself, thus creating loyalty to the team (HILL and GREEN, 2000). When the supporter buys a ticket for a match of its favorite team, for him this is not only an appointment, there is a sense of belongingness to the team (JAMES, KOLBE and TRAIL, 2002, MATSUOKA, CHELLADURAI and HARADA, 2003).

The supporter can be much more convincing when trying to influence other people to become supporters of his team, specially relatives and close friends (JAMES, KOLBE and TRAIL, 2002). That becomes particularly important for a company that, when supporting a team, can count on a group of consumers with a strong psychological connection with the team and that is able to influence other people. Thus it arises the second hypothesis of the research:

H2: the loyalty for the team prompts a negative result in the word of mouth of the rival team's brand.

Personal relationships can influence the purchase decision (BLACKWELL, MINIARD and ENGEL, 2005). Groups formed by friends or members of the family, known as reference groups, exert influence in the behavior of the consumer. (BENTIVEGNA, 2002). The personal communication between two or more people with no commercial interest, the means used for exerting influence, is popularly called word of mouth (BENTIVEGNA, 2002; BROWN *et al.*, 2005; SANTANA and AKEL SOBRINHO, 2010). Westbrook (1987, p. 261) defines word of mouth as the "act of transmitting to other consumers informal communications on the propriety, use or characteristics of specific products and services and/or their vendors". In this sort of communication, there is no association between the emitter with a brand, product or organization, consisting in a personal advertising (COSTA, 2007).

Positive recommendations on a company, the study subject of Brown *et al.* (2005), may highlight the quality of a product. On the other hand, negative recommendations, a negative word of mouth, come from a dissatisfaction

experience and aims at denigrating the company which is the subject of the communication, differently from alerting other people on the risks of consuming (HUEFNER and HUNT, 2000).

Dissatisfied people tend to make a negative word of mouth with more people than satisfied people would do with a positive word of mouth. Thus, a study on word of mouth is important due to the fact that it can influence future purchasing decisions; in case there is a negative word of mouth, it can represent a threat due to its quick spreading effect (NAYLOR and KLEISER, 2000).

As we intend to verify whether the loyalty to the team has a negative effect on the word of mouth of the rival team's brand, we will test, based on the formulated hypothesis, a model composed by three constructions (identification with the team, loyalty to the team and negative word of mouth of the rival team's brand), adapted from Fagundes (2013) and Santana and AKEL Sobrinho (2010) accordingly to the following image 1.

Image 1. Proposed model



Source: adapted from Fagundes (2013) and Santana and Akel Sobrinho (2010)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to identify whether the loyalty to a team has a negative effect in the word of mouth of the rival team's brand, embracing the models of Fagundes (2013), which deal with the supporters satisfaction in the stadium and his intention to come back to the stadium and, Santana and Akel Sobrinho (2010), which researched whether the love for the brand produces meaning difference on the customer's behavior (loyalty and positive word of mouth).

It has been performed a survey because this is the main method of getting information on the motives and preferences of consumers (MALHOTRA, 2012). Thus, this work is characterized as a quantitative research, because it involves a great quantity of people, and with a descriptive nature (MALHOTRA, 2012), because it described the characteristics of the situation that involves an issue (BOYD, 1978).

Based on the literature on the loyalty to a team and the word of mouth of a brand and bearing in mind the works of Fagundes (2013) and Santana and Sobrinho (2010), we raised the study hypothesis present in the literature revision, as well as the employed questionnaire. It has been divided into two parts, the first one, composed of 7 questions, tried to identify the supporter and the second one, composed of 14 questions, tried to raise the identification with the team (Q1 to Q7), the loyalty for the team (Q8 to Q10) and the word of mouth communication (Q11 to Q14). In order to answer to this second group, it has been used a Likert bipolar scale with ten points, varying from total disagreement (0) to total agreement (10). Questions 6 and 7 were taken out of the model.

The sample we used was not probabilistic. In this sort of sample, the results cannot be projected for the population once the chosen elements do not statistically represent the population and it is not possible to measure the sampling deviation (HAIR *et al.*, 2005). According to the author, the researcher uses subjective methods for the selection of sampling components. Specifically in this case, it has been used a convenience sample for selecting people that are more available for researchers (HAIR *et al.*, 2005). 528 students from two public college institutions were interviewed. The approaches happened in the initial period of the lessons and the questionnaires were applied by researchers in the students' classrooms. The collected data was tabbed and the software IBM-AMOS was used in order to calculate the proposed model.

The SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) was used because it is a "statistical model that aims at explaining the relations between multiple variables" (HAIR *et al.*, 2009, p. 543). Considered a confirmatory analysis because it serves for testing and confirming a theory. From the model developed by the researcher (group of relations), SEM is used in order to estimate how well can the model be adapted to the data (HAIR *et al.*, 2009). It is a multivariable technique that combines aspects of the factor analysis and a multiple regression, enabling the researcher to simultaneously examine the relations between the measured variables and the latent variables, as well as between latent variables. One of the advantages of using SEM is the possibility of representing variables we cannot see and that can be measured by variable indicators (HAIR *et al.*, 2014).

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

In this first part, it is described the profile of the sample being studied. The data describe that the sample is 57% composed of men and 43% of women, accordingly to chart 1.

Chart 1. Respondents' gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	302	57%
Female	226	43%
Total	528	100

Source: research data

When it comes to the marital status, 61% are single, 31.8% are married, 3.8% are divorced, 0.4% is widowed and 3% consist in other marital statuses, accordingly to the chart 2.

Chart 2. Marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	322	61,0%
Married	168	31,8%
Divorced	20	3,8%
Widowed	2	0,4%
Other	16	3,0%
Total	528	100

Source: research data

The teams that respondents support are: Corinthians with 51.1%, São Paulo with 29.5%, Palmeiras with 11.7%, Santos with 5.7%, Portuguesa with 0.8%, São Caetano with 0.4% and other teams with 0.8%, accordingly to the chart 3.

Chart 3. Respondents' teams

Team	Frequency	Percentage
Corinthians	270	51.1%
São Paulo	156	29.5%
Palmeiras	62	11.7%
Santos	30	5.7%
Portuguesa	4	0.8%
São Caetano	2	0.4%
Others	4	0.8%
Total	528	100

Source: Research data

#### 4.1 Revised and adjusted model

This second part presents the revised model of final structural equation (image 2). The obtained results for the model adjustment index are presented in the chart 4 and described below.

Chart 4. Model adjustment indexes

GFI	AGFI	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
0.963332	0.939147	0.971099	0.959416	0.98167	0.974146	0.981589	0.056527

Source: research data

The analysis of the adjustment allowed to verify that the Normed Chi-square (2.683907) presents a value smaller or equal to 3.0 and bigger or equal to 1.0 (HAIR et al., 2009). GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) varies from 0 to 1, considering that the bigger a value, the greater will be its adjustment (HAIR et al., 2009). For Marôco (2010), values bigger or equal to 0.95 represent a very good adjustment. We can thus notice that the index present by the sample has a great adjustment.

NFI (Normed Fit Index) represents a supplementary adjustment measure, so that the value 1 is taken as the perfect adjustment (HAIR et al., 2009). Yet, values above 0.90 are accepted (PREARO, 2013). The settled value expresses a great supplementary adjustment measure.

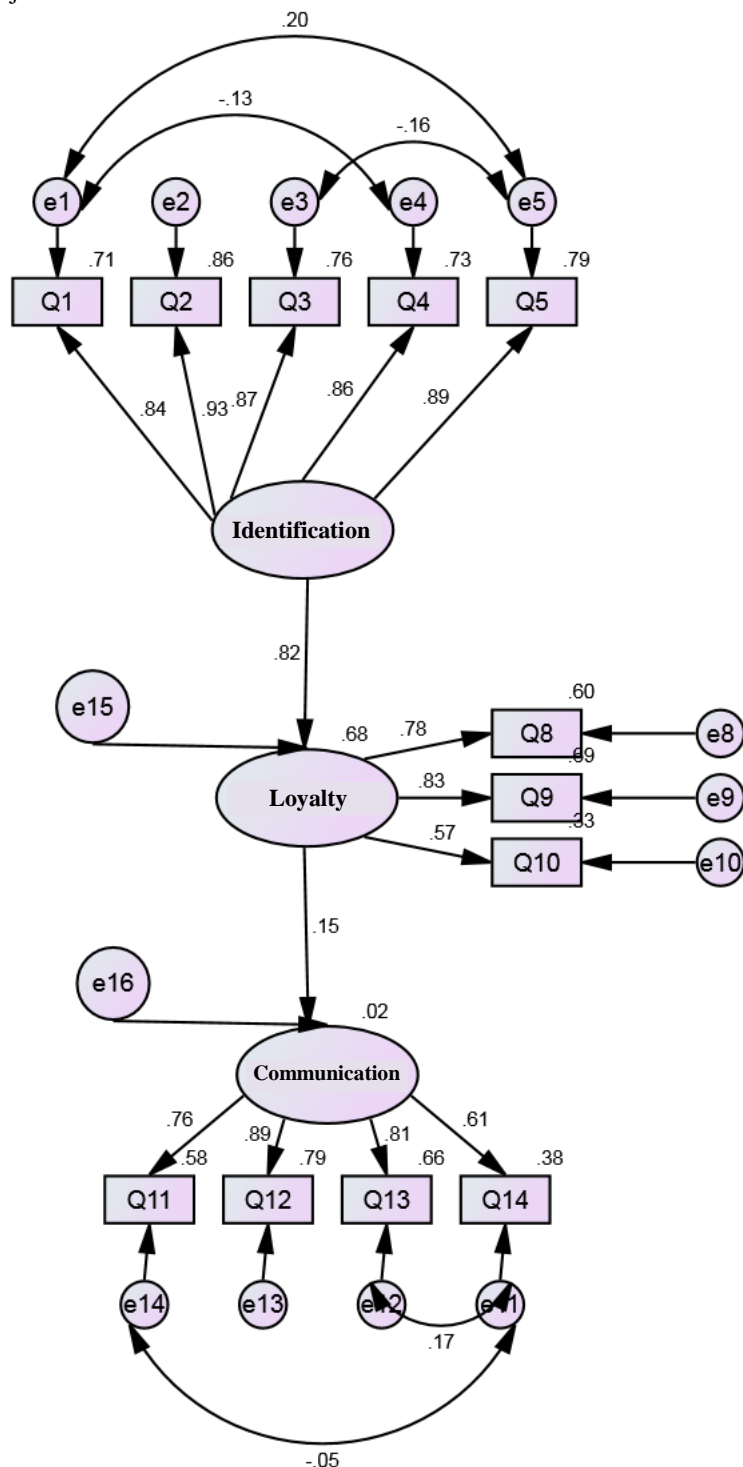


Image 2. Diagram of paths  
 Source: research data



TLI (Tucker Lewis Index) and CFI (Compared Adjustment Index) are good if superior to 0.9 (HAIR *et al.*, 2009). Note that, both indexes present values that indicate that the model is very well adjusted.

When it comes to RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), values smaller than 0.10 indicate a greater adjustment, so that the most acceptable is between 0.03 and 0.08 (Hair *et al.*, 2009). For Marôco (2010), a great adjustment is between 0.05 and 0.08. We verify that the RMSEA of the sample presents a great index.

CFI (Comparative Adjustment Index) varies between 0 and 1, so that greater values indicate a better adjustment. The value used as parameter is bigger or equal to 0.90.

For the test of the hypothesis, we considered the testing values T, whose value, in order to meaningful, must be inferior to 0.01 (HAIR *et al.*, 2009). The observed values, accordingly to the chart 5, enable to accept the hypothesis formulated in this study.

Chart 5. Result of the hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Result	
H1: The identification with the team prompts a positive result in the loyalty with the team.	< 0.001	Accepted
H2: The loyalty for the team prompts a negative result in the word of mouth of the rival team's brand.	0.002916	Accepted

Source: research data

The model developed for this study enabled the verification that the emotional involvement of the supporter with his team reflects the identification of the supporter for the team (KWON and ARMSTRONG, 2004; KAYNAK, 2008; JORDAN *et al.*, 2014), a psychological connection with the team (WANN and ROBINSON, 2002, FAGUNDES, 2013); which influences his behavior, specifically in consuming (FISHER and WAKEFIELD, 1998; WANN, 2010). It is thus formed a loyalty for the team, a commitment (FUNK and JAMES, 2006).

The group of loyal supporters for the team may influence other people in their personal relations through the negative word of mouth communication of the rival team's brand (HUEFNER and HUNT, 2000; BENTIVEGNA, 2002; BROWN *et al.*, 2005; SANTANA and AKEL SOBRINHO, 2010). The work of Toledo and Andrade (2014) noticed that consumers with a greater involvement present a smaller intention to buy products that sponsor their rival team. Otherwise, Santana and Akel Sobrinho (2010) verified that the loyalty to a brand generated a positive word of mouth.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results allowed to appropriately answer the research problem. It is evident that the supporter that identifies himself with his team is loyal to it and, due to this loyalty, he exerts a negative word of mouth communication about the product brand that sponsors his rival team. This is affirmed based on tests applied to the two hypothesis proposed, which the results enabled their acceptance.

It is proposed to team sponsoring companies, while planning the communication with consumers, to consider the word of mouth communication channel. In that way, it will be due to such companies to plan ways to try the neutralization of negative communication made by rival team's supporters.

As a reference for the academic contributions of this work, we highlight two factors: 1. Widening of the knowledge related to the three constructions: identification, loyalty and negative word of mouth communication; 2. Empirical verification of the loyalty theoretical proposition that the team produces a negative word of mouth result of the rival team's brand.

As the research has been performed in public college institutions, it is suggested for the new studies trying to replicate it in private college institutions and football fields, in order to verify whether there is a difference in the results obtained through this work. It can also be applied in other states besides São Paulo, the survey sample's site, with the objective of verifying whether there are differences with supporters from other football teams in other states. It is also suggested its application to products like smartphones, vehicles and white goods, which

have loyal clients to their brands. With that, it is possible to verify whether consumers do a negative word of mouth communication of other brands to which they are not loyal.

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