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HONORS THESIS



An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Literature Review	4
Research Questions	13
Findings	14
Conference	14
Case Studies: Teams, Venues and Athletes	14
Teams	14
Venues	15
Athletes	16
Survey Question Findings	17
Discussion and Implications	18
Appendices	19
Exhibit A	19
Exhibit B	20
Exhibit C	21
Exhibit D	21
Exhibit E	22
Exhibit F	22
Exhibit G	23
References	24

ABSTRACT

The goal of this research-based thesis was to uncover the prominent methods of connecting with fans and recognizing preferences of marketing messages to see if sustainable marketing will increase engagement on game-day or have a neutral impact. Research was conducted through an analysis of case studies from the perspective of teams, athletes, and venues. A survey was distributed to analyze fan behaviors related to the importance of sustainability, engagement preferences with marketing messages and overall impact of the sports space as a platform for sustainable messages. Survey results of sports fans showed that the connection with their favorite teams and athletes is a guiding factor behind the decision to engage with specific marketing messages. A fan will engage with a marketing message if it allows them to feel closer to team goals and missions. These findings conclude that sustainable marketing is best received when it is subconsciously integrated into the game-day experience at the athlete and team levels.

INTRODUCTION

What do the Atlanta Hawks, the Climate Pledge Arena, and former hockey player Andrew Ference all have in common? Each of these teams, venues and athletes are finding value in a growing marketing method known as sustainable marketing. Sustainable marketing is a methodology that promotes an emphasis on social responsibility and environmental awareness. This marketing strategy is represented through products, events, behaviors, and the overall actions of a brand. Sports can be a platform for meaningful change through powerful yet sometimes subtle messages. As of 2017, the global sports market was expected to generate \$91 billion dollars in revenue (Bartos). A few years prior, in 2013, this industry was generating \$76.1 billion (Bartos). This revenue growth of about \$15 billion dollars over four years follows the upward trend in growth as can be seen in Appendix A. There is exponential growth surrounding this high-energy industry due to evolving technology, greater communication with fans and increased opportunities related to brand involvement. Messages can be integrated into game day through a format that adds to the overall experience through a positive outcome.

Now that sustainable marketing has been defined, imagine you are doing some research on tickets so that you can cheer on your favorite team. You go online, buy a few tickets for the game with your family and notice an upcoming brand partnership at this game. This partnership involves an electronic drive and if you bring your unusable electronics to the game, you will receive a one-day discount off apparel at the team store. This is an example of an integrated customer journey from the view of the State Farm Arena in Atlanta. They were “the first NHL/NBA arena to achieve LEED certification for an existing facility” (NHL.com, 2011) and they kicked off the surge in sustainably built venues. Along with the restructuring of venues, there are a multitude of initiatives that can be easily implemented into the sports process that can impact the conservation of water, minimizing waste product and neutralization of carbon emissions. Sustainable marketing is a growing opportunity that sports leaders can implement into their strategies to strengthen fan engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research project outlines several important topics including the definition of sustainable marketing, drivers of fan engagement through specific marketing messages and examines the key players behind messages from the perspective of teams, venues, and athletes.

Sustainable marketing can be accomplished through three techniques. Green Marketing is “developing and marketing more sustainable products and services while introducing sustainability efforts at the core of the marketing and business process” (Gordon, 2011). Social Marketing is “using the power of upstream and downstream marketing interventions to encourage sustainable behavior... An important feature of social marketing is consumer orientation, which can be effective at winning people over, engaging them, motivating them, and empowering them... benefit to the individual and to society” (Gordon, 2011). The issue of government intervention is brought up in this piece of literature as noted by the comment that: “not everyone will necessarily welcome attempts by government departments or others to impose their agendas” (Gordon, 2011). This emphasizes the point that marketing should be done with a purpose to connect and not simply to get something done. A better approach is to avoid commercially sponsored social marketing and “position social good supportively and persuasively. This also applies to the involvement of commercial organizations... partnership with NGO’s which has proved successful in the past” (Gordon, 2011). Lastly, Critical Marketing uses “a critical theory-based approach to guide regulation and control and stimulate innovation in markets with a focus on sustainability... challenging some of the dominant institutions of the capitalist and marketing systems” (Gordon, 2011). Overall, sustainable marketing can be summed up as “seeking a solution in which commercial goods can be marketed in a responsible way that does not adversely impact upon sustainability” (Gordon, 2011). After reading through these three avenues in the direction of promoting sustainability, social marketing will be the focus of this research topic because of the factor of voluntary behavior change.

There is a major connection between the consumer attitudes and beliefs and the effectiveness of marketing. In marketing sustainability, consumers are not fully aware or fully trusting of

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

sustainable issues which poses an opportunity to figure out how to communicate with consumers more effectively (Gordon, 2011). A helpful approach that can be shared with brands and consumers alike is that “seeking more resource-efficient ways of meeting our needs and aspirations does not have to mean a reduction in wellbeing” (Gordon, 2011). This data prompts the question of, how might brands influence their consumers to make positive lifestyle changes that are enjoyable and lead to better impacts on the future? In this study of 9000 consumers across nine countries, “consumers report an increased disposition towards ethical behaviors... green and ethical issues are a significant factor, influencing where consumers shop and buy” (Gordon, 2011). When creating a sustainable message, it is important to understand the consumer so they can be effectively engaged through the marketing techniques.

Sports brands are becoming aware of the impact that their current operations may have on the environment. In addition, they are learning more about the possible solutions that can be implemented to turn the impact into a positive one. A common direction for teams is to create facilities that are built with sustainable attributes. This direction may result from the statistics that current buildings “account for 39% of carbon dioxide emissions, 40% of overall energy consumption, and 13% of water consumption in the United States” (Kellison, 2014). Sustainability is starting to move into the sports world. The New York Times featured a comment from Allen Hershkowitz, a senior scientist with the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) who said “Hundreds of millions of people pay attention to sports. It’s just astounding to me that for decades the modern environmental movement ignored professional sports as an area to mobilize our cause” (Kellison, 2014). There is an opportunity to build plans which create an incredible fan experience coupled with the impact that results from sustainable actions. Brands and teams must ensure that any decisions they choose to make will not only be a beneficial choice for their consumers or fans but also ensure that it is a financially solid investment. Understanding what influences a brand to take the leap and transition their operations into sustainable actions is a helpful conversation to understand. Triple bottom line or TBL, representing the environmental, social, and economic outcomes that accompany sustainable behavior, are concepts that are explored in this literature

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry
Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

(Kellison, 2014). Within this study, it was described that “sport marketers have identified both of these motives for marketing [inspiring social change and increasing revenue] but have not yet effectively addressed them.” There is a gap where this new research proposal will step in to develop and test strategies that can ultimately be used to combine sustainable practices and the marketing strategies for the brand.

The article entitled “Eco Practices for Sustainability” addresses several important components that contribute to the overall game day experience involving a sports brand. Athletes for a Fit Planet created a consulting service with “the Pledge of Sustainability as a do-it-yourself tool for event organizers to integrate environmental practices in their events” (Rayner, 2019). There are 35 initiatives that place an emphasis on reducing waste, carbon, and water footprints. The important concept to keep in mind when planning events and marketing concepts is that the quality of an event can still be maintained even while adding in sustainable measures. In preparing for events, “procure environmentally responsible products and communicate your sustainability practices to participants, volunteers, sponsors and the local community” (Rayner, 2019). Prior to the event, it is important to build the reason why behind sustainable practices and share the purpose that helps people feel connected. In marketing, this can take shape in creative electronic communication, online registration as opposed to mail-in forms, sourcing food from nearby locations and incorporating compostable materials. At the event, waste management can be carefully watched. Specific waste stations can be set up and managed for recycling and compost, unused food can be donated to local charities and reusable signage can be designed to represent the brand in the present and for future events (Rayner, 2019). Another component of an event is to monitor the carbon footprint. Vehicles and equipment at the event and athlete and volunteer travel are specific sources that can be addressed. Sustainable initiatives in this article offer the idea to market “rideshare VIPs” meaning if vehicles drive to the event with more than one person then they can qualify for special parking and this will cut down on emissions. From the team or brand perspective, the power source for generators can be transitioned from gas or diesel to being run by solar or wind power (Rayner, 2019). The final component that can take a sustainable approach is focusing on water conservation. As opposed to individual plastic water bottles,

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry
Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

bulk water is a better option paired with compostable paper cups. The impact of all these efforts can be measured and creates a “waste diversion rate” that represents sustainable efforts. Zero waste would be representative of a diversion rate that is at least 90% or higher (Rayner, 2019). In wrapping up an event in the days and weeks following the actual event, you can further build a connection with participants. Through surveys, internal reports and sharing progress, brands can “gauge their [participants] awareness of and appreciation for the sustainability practices... Transparency is appreciated. Communicate the highlights of your sustainability practices with your constituents: participants, volunteers, staff, sponsors, vendors, and local community leaders” (Rayner, 2019). Brands can see greater effectiveness with their sustainable messages when they listen to their customers.

Sustainable practices are becoming more prominent among brands, consumers, and marketing practices. Both brands and individuals use the word sustainability often simultaneously with the phrases green or environmentally friendly to express the overall theme to carry through on actions benefiting the environment (Minton, 2012). There are many definitions of the term, but one commonly accepted one is from the United Nations and states that sustainability is the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Minton, 2012). This Minton study discusses interactions with green advertising and the attitudes, behaviors, and trends among consumers and additionally ties in the emerging use of social media in connecting these attitudes with the sustainable message. From a brand perspective, 82% of companies planned to increase spending on green marketing and of that percentage, 74% planned to increase their marketing spending through the Internet (Minton, 2012). Online resources are becoming more trusted by consumers: “more than one-third of consumers look to the Internet as a primary source for green products, whereas television and family/friends combined account for just one-quarter of consumers’ sources for green product information” (Minton, 2012). With the growing use of social media, more research can be done to further the understanding of this valuable marketing medium. The response of consumers toward sustainable advertisements differs based on the medium of marketing. Print media induces more analytic or rational responses compared to electronic or virtual communication that appeals to the emotional aspects

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry
Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

(Minton, 2012). Emotional stories connect people to a cause and create some meaning. Looking at specifics of who may view a sustainable message and respond through new their behaviors, there is some discussion of gender and age. Research has shown that “there is no significant difference in participation in sustainable behaviors between males and females, although females’ trend toward having greener shopping habits than males” (Minton, 2012). In terms of age there is a negative correlation between environmental knowledge and age meaning the older a consumer is, the less environmental knowledge they may have (Minton, 2012). This previous research suggests that age is an important variable to consider in green advertising research because young and old consumers may have different definitions for what green and sustainability represent. These consumers will effectively engage with a message through differing methods.

There are three main underlying attitudes that can be used to build support for a cause and those are, compliance or responsibility, identification, and internalization (Minton, 2012). Compliance or responsibility is the category for when the sustainable behavior is enforced through laws. Identification involves additional extrinsic motivation like a financial reward or benefit for a change in behaviors. Internalization means that the choice to actively engage in this behavior does not need much motivation because it is already a part of the individual’s identity and comes as second nature (Minton, 2012). Knowing these attitude commitment levels will benefit sustainability-related advertising “to create better targeted advertisements based on consumer wants and needs” (Minton, 2012). After understanding how to create a message that will resonate with the consumer, it is time to determine the best outlet for this communication. In the sense of sports teams and athletes, fans voluntarily choose to follow the branded social accounts because they want to be connected to initiatives that are being shared by these brands. When an advertisement is being shared it can be persuasive but should never be pushy. Because of social media’s ability to build personal interactions with fans the persuasive appeal of a message can be incredibly effective.

A brand can only see growth into the future if it has a devoted fan base and customers who are united. In the past, communication of information would flow from businesses to consumers in a one-way format (Jovevski, 2019). As a result of the Internet and social media, businesses

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

can reach the consumer and the consumer can now reach the business. This two-way communication “creates a huge opportunity for creating deeper and more meaningful interactions between enterprises and their customers, i.e., the possibility of building closer and long-term relationships between them” (Jovevski, 2019). This concept of improved communication has been brought to light in several other research articles and proves to be an important benefit of social media networks. This literature source tested a few hypotheses surrounding social media and long-term loyalty in relationships. General trends in daily usage among respondents included “16.7% of the respondents from the sample spend less than an hour per day in total, most of the respondents spend one to three hours, 45.8%, from four to five hours a day they spend 26.2%, while more from six hours a day spend 11.3%” (Jovevski, 2019). In terms of when social media is most prominently used, there are three components that were analyzed. This method is “mostly used for informing (39.3%), then for communication (35.1%) and ultimately for entertainment (25.6%)” (Jovevski, 2019). When creating content, a brand must be clear about the message they want to convey and pairing this clarity with an understanding of their audience will lead to effective relationship building.

As a result of this study, respondents were in partial agreement that social media is the right platform where a marketing message can build long lasting relationships but something additional must be added. It is recommended that “companies should use social media in combination with other, more traditional media, tools and methods for building long-lasting relationships” (Jovevski, 2019). Brands can integrate their marketing methods to promote the overall message. Consistency is valued by consumers. The next area in developing communication is to determine who the audience is. Brands often have a goal to build long-lasting relationships and so they “mainly need to focus on customers who already decided to follow their posts (they “follow” or “like” their page), as well as on those customers who are more interested in actively engaging and communicating with the brands” (Jovevski, 2019). In understanding that there is value in using social media, it is also critical to ensure that communications on this platform are being shared in a format that keeps the human touch. Humans are social creatures, and they value the personal connection that comes with talking and connecting with other humans. Respondents “don’t agree that the companies are “being

human” towards their customers on social media. That means that the companies should... [create] more personalization on social media especially what they are providing content to consumers, in their day-to-day communication” (Jovevski, 2019). Personalization is one of the most important factors that can determine if a consumer feels connected to the brand and their goals.

When initiating a new sustainable project within a community, it is important to gain support for the cause to be effective. An athlete’s position and voice “is being touted as an increasingly powerful tool for influencing the public to do good” (Campelli, 2018). Sports brands “that attempt to further sustainable development have always tried to convince athletes to become ambassadors and demonstrate their cause to the wider public. With the ubiquity of social media increasing the reach of the already high-profile sport stars, there’s never been a better time” (Campelli, 2018). Right now, there is an opportunity to build engagement among brands, athletes and the community and this article breaks down four steps to be successful in this effort. The first step is to find athletes whose values, following and credibility fall in line with the cause and potential impact (Campelli, 2018). This then prompts the question of how might athletes be encouraged to support sustainable causes? The second step after finding athletes is to figure out how to convince these athletes to get involved. It has been observed that once an athlete from a specific team joins in, there is a domino effect for other teammates to join in the effort. To gain support from athletes it is beneficial to create a way to get involved that has little effort for them. Andrew Wisniewski is the strategic communications lead at Common Goal which is an initiative asking professional footballers to donate 1% of their wage to sustainable development causes (Campelli, 2018). Wisniewski commented on presenting the ask in a simple format. He said, “If a footballer comes in to talk about the project, we ask them what their passion points are... we then develop some recommendations” (Campelli, 2018). In another example, Katia Juárez Dubón has developed sustainability plans specifically for the world of motorsports and she echoes this need to create simplicity. She began her program “with very simple activities, like videos, that don’t take too much time... We focused on simple messages, like how to save water and putting plastic bottle in the proper recycling containers” (Campelli, 2018). With these ideas, the

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

messages begin to build credibility and build trust with followers. The third step is to begin training for these athletes to “positively address” societal issues that the brand is trying to promote in their campaigns or actions (Campelli, 2018). This step provides tools, so they are comfortable and prepared to answer questions and be a brand ambassador as well as global ambassador. The final step is to create a way to measure impact. As is important with any new concept, you will be most effective in setting goals if you create benchmarks to observe results through the process. Aspects like fan engagement and behavior change can be measured over time (Campelli, 2018). Athletes have the power to encourage steps in the right direction with the goal of fans joining in. There is a foundational concept in this article of trying to determine “the best way to actually motivate fans to change their individual behavior. Is there such a thing as a universal message that is very effective when provided by the top athletes in a particular sport, or do we have to look for effective messaging along the lines of being very sport specific, very region specific?” (Campelli, 2018). These questions are foundational questions in this upcoming capstone project and will be explored.

Abraham Madkour is an Executive Editor for the Sports Business Journal. In one of his published articles, he provides a discussion centered around the Green Sports Alliance Summit in 2016. This yearly conference brings together sports executives to discuss important concepts and opportunities affecting day to day engagement (Madkour, 2016). Madkour moderated two panels at this event: one conversation with sports executives leading various teams and the second with present and past athletes. He kept hearing similar messages and reported that “Environmental and sustainable programs are working on the team level; fans want and appreciate them; and they are good business. Most importantly, CEO’s and ownership largely believe it is the right thing to do. But it was said time and again that to increase effectiveness of these efforts, players must become more involved”. (Madkour, 2016). He addresses the idea that there is support for sustainability in sports but the way of communicating this message can be thoughtfully enforced with the help of athletes. For the project to be successful, it is helpful to create engagement within the team before promoting the idea to fans. By creating transparent communication and sharing the overall goals of the organization with their athletes, that will be most effective plan. Brody Leven, a professional

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

adventure skier, spoke at this Summit and he noted that athletes “can use your voice for good, but if you don’t really care about the cause or believe in it, it’s not worth trying to force it” (Madkour, 2016). Andrew Ference, who was a leader in the National Hockey League, was honored at this event with the “GSA’s Environmental Leadership Award” and he is a prime example of an athlete representing their team in a positive light while promoting sustainable change. Leven has an optimistic outlook for the future of sustainability in sports and said, “If the industry is willing to look, it’ll find that there isn’t a shortage of athletes concerned with the environment and willing to speak out on its behalf” (Madkour, 2016). There are many approaches that can be taken to bring athletes aboard. Understanding what is important to every individual is a very beneficial step.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research project aimed to define the background of sustainable marketing, examine how this strategy is showing up in the sports industry and ultimately find out how fans are engaging with sustainable content.

The first step in this research process was a literature search using databases, books, and scholarly articles to gain a better understanding of what shapes the idea of sustainable marketing. Sustainability is a growing topic across many facets of life from textbook cases to business strategies and news headlines. It was necessary to define sustainable marketing in an effort to formulate further research questions.

The next step was to follow sports conversations being held around sustainable marketing. Through case studies of teams, athletes, and venues, it became possible to see who is integrating sustainability and marketing into their everyday behaviors. This step was accomplished by reading news articles, observing messages through official team and venue websites and conversations in press releases to dive into the positives, problems, and further research possibilities.

The final methodological step was to create a survey to be sent to a sample of respondents to gain a first-hand account of how fans prefer to engage with their favorite teams. The survey

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

was built through Qualtrics so that one system can be utilized to create, distribute, and analyze the data results.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research project aims to answer several guiding questions:

- What is sustainable marketing and why is this an important concept?
- How is sustainability marketing being presented within the sports world?
 - What is the impact on fan engagement?
- What are current sustainable marketing practices in the sports industry?
- What motivates an organization to act sustainably?
- Should messages about sustainable practices stem from a brand (team or venue) or an individual athlete?

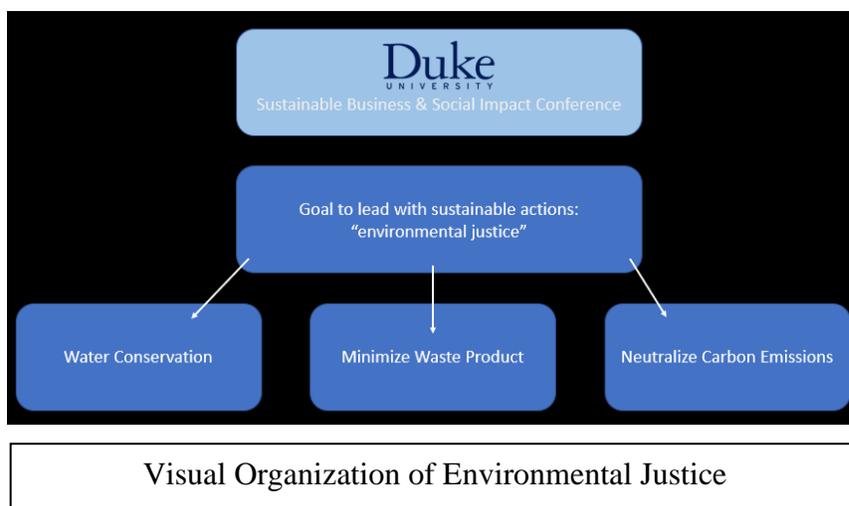
The sports industry covers a wide reach from little league teams to college level, professional level and beyond. Each level uses various strategies of bringing fans together and leading change. This Thesis dives into the world of professional sports to analyze the environment and loyalty of fans. In understanding this specific environment, sustainability can be effectively marketed.

The golden question that this Thesis will aim to answer is, how might a sports manager market sustainability and increase engagement and profits while positively impacting the environment? The overall purpose of this research is to provide a set of strategies to managers and executives within the sports industry that outline how they can market sustainability while increasing engagement and overall profits.

FINDINGS

Conference

On February 26th, 2021 there was a virtual event hosted by Duke University called the Sustainable Business and Social Impact Conference. This conference suggested a format to organize sustainable efforts through a method called environmental justice, shown in the created chart to the right. Environmental justice covers the components of water, waste, and carbon emissions to focus on each part that shapes the overall goal of sustainability.



Case Studies: Teams, Venues and Athletes

Teams

When a team decides to develop sustainable actions and lead new marketing initiatives, it is so important to make sure that team members are on board. The Atlanta Hawks have placed an emphasis on marketing their sustainable stadium and community involved initiatives and they are able to succeed due to the effort of all members. The Hawks brought together a “core group of interested staff members from operations, event planning, and marketing to work with a local green building consultant called Southface. This green team led the charge on greening and LEED process... which ultimately also relied on feedback and buy-in from all staff” (NRDC). The Atlanta Hawks have learned the value in building partnerships as a way to encourage engagement and be more successful in promoting their marketing messages. Barry Henson is the Vice President for Operations at the State Farm Arena and he spoke to the importance of integrating messages through subconscious messages. He said “We try to

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

help as much as we can locally. Many of these issues, environmental and social, should carry over into peoples' home lives" (NRDC). By involving themselves in the surrounding community, the Atlanta Hawks are going to keep building a fan base that is excited about all the new progress toward sustainable goals.

Venues

The Climate Pledge Arena was being analyzed as an ideal type sustainable model as it has an incredible goal "to be the most progressive, responsible, and sustainable arena in the world" (Climate Pledge Arena, 2021). This overall goal is being broken down into measurable mini goals:

1. Carbon Zero

Plan: No fossil fuel consumption across all areas from mechanical systems to cooking, solar panels have been installed across two locations and carbon emitting activities will be reduced.

2. Zero Single Use Plastic

Plan: "First arena and NHL team to announce intention to eliminate single use plastics". The plan is to eliminate single use plastic across the whole arena by 2024.

3. Water Conservation

Plan: "Rain to Rink" system to collect water from the roof and turn it into ice for the rink, have water-less urinals and efficient showers and have water bottle filling stations across arena

4. Zero Waste

Plan: simplify supply chain, develop consumer education (infographics) to gain support and composting waste and increasing recycling efforts

This process has been made possible by the partnership of Amazon and the Seattle Kraken NHL team. See Exhibit C in the Appendix to view former Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos, Instagram post regarding this unique venue construction and goals. In addition to these four goals, the Climate Pledge Arena has developed an Advisory Committee that has the ambition to strengthen the commitment to these sustainable arena goals. They value transparency in operations and will share the progress of initiatives and measurements of progress. In terms of

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

engagement in the arena, they will host “arena events that celebrate the environment and our commitments to green operations” and the ultimate initiative is to create “partnerships with educational institutions to utilize the arena as a classroom for environmental education” (Climate Pledge Arena, 2021). The arena started as a renovation of an existing venue and is officially opening in 2021 in Seattle, Washington. This arena is acting as a large convention center that will hold concerts, two anticipated NCAA tournaments and seasonal games. The consciousness of acting sustainably matched with marketing the venue goals will lead to an incredible fan experience for game-days.

Athletes

The topic of athlete involvement in sustainable marketing messages is becoming very prominent. In the specific case of Andrew Ference, he showed the world that athletes can use their platforms to be a catalyst for action. He played for 16 seasons in the National Hockey Leagues (NHL) and not only made an impact on the ice, but he began to impact sustainability efforts for the sport too. Sustainability was an area he grew to believe in. Ference began to make some changes at his house in terms of recycling and composting and then this moved into the NHL where he helped to “create a carbon neutral practice” that addressed travel emissions that his teammates and League-mates were dealing with (Benjamin, 2017). He helped develop NHL Green which places a focus on sustainable actions for the league (Benjamin, 2017). NHL Green promotes sustainable actions among the hockey league, and this has started to translate into other sports leagues like the NBA. Omar Mitchell, the Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility for the NHL commented on the foundational philosophy that Ference has: "He's tremendously important as an ambassador because of the fact that he genuinely believes it [sustainable impact]. If you talk to him, what you'll hear him say is he does this because it's all about respect -- respect for yourself, for your family, for your local communities in which you play. When you boil it down to that, it's hard for people not to want to engage. It's hard to argue with that" (Benjamin, 2017). Finding the right people to market sustainability in everyday behaviors is an important task for any brand.

Sustainability is a full picture concept and it “is important, but so too is marrying that with good business practices, finding the sweet spot where companies can survive and thrive and make money all while using and creating the right technologies” (Benjamin, 2017). Of course,

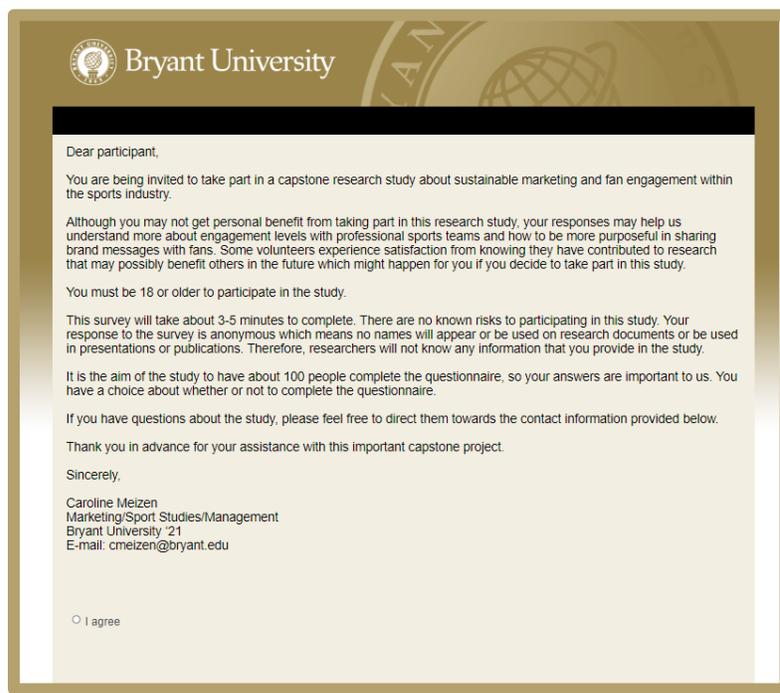
An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

with any initiative, a business wants to ensure that they are making a worthwhile investment. Sustainable actions may increase short term costs but lead to long term benefits.

Survey Question Findings

The above case studies uncovered various factors that helped to build a follow-up survey. See Exhibit B in the “Appendices” section below to read through the layout and structure of these survey questions. The survey was split into several subsections for the participant. There were 120 total responses, with 85 participants completing every survey question. First, the questions gauged their level of interest in sports. Out of the 85 completed responses, 25% of survey respondents watched sports almost every day, 32% were avid to moderate sports fans and 13% were engaged occasionally. For sustainable marketing strategies to be

effective, these three segments will need to be targeted differently. See Exhibit D to see breakdown of respondents and their viewing behaviors. Next, the survey dove into understanding the importance of sustainability in their lives. It was observed that 62% of respondents believed that sports and sustainability can be discussed together, 27% said maybe and a low 11% said no they do not see any correlation. Ultimately, the following questions uncovered perspectives of various sustainable initiatives and preferences in engaging with marketing methods. Through this survey, it was found that the connection between sports fans and their favorite teams and athletes is a guiding factor behind the decision to engage with



Survey Introduction

specific marketing messages. Sustainability is not a prominent topic in the minds of many fans, but they are willing to soak up sustainable messages if engaging with a marketing message will allow them to feel closer to team goals and missions. Fans have preferences in terms of how they wish to receive marketing messages with the first preference being through social media, followed by public figures, team websites and Google, and then sponsored partnership events (see Exhibit G). This survey brings up the major conclusion that sustainable marketing is best received when it is subconsciously integrated into the game-day experience at the athlete and team levels.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Due to restrictions of fan attendance within venues, marketing managers faced the challenge of building engagement from afar and marketing methods have changed. It is critical to think about sustainable efforts on a long-term scale as there has been a setback due to personal protective equipment and single-use cleaning materials. The pandemic had a major impact on sustainable impact and is not on the forefront of individual's minds. The sports industry has been greatly affected by COVID throughout 2020 and 2021. According to the conducted survey, a high percentage of responses to the question "Describe a memorable experience with your favorite team", involved an in-person relationship with their team or an individual athlete on game-day. Sustainable marketing is best received in person as it can be seamlessly integrated into the overall experience. Stadiums are starting to allow more fans back into their stands and there is eagerness from fans to leave their homes and support their teams. There are major opportunities that marketers can capitalize upon to continue building fan engagement and team loyalty. The conducted survey through this project, represented a high ratio of college aged men to women due to a convenience sampling at Bryant and represented a higher ratio of females to males who were older than 40, most likely due to the link being shared on the social media platform of Facebook. In future studies of sustainable marketing perceptions, the demographics of respondents can be monitored more closely.

Overall, the community behind sports makes for a platform that provides an open conversation format. Marketing messages at the athlete level followed by the team level are

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry *Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen*

most successful as compared to messages stemming from a venue. Integrating sustainability into marketing strategies and overall operations may involve an increase in short term costs but will lead to long term benefits. Through this research project, it became clear that is critically important for the departments of marketing, operations, and leadership to all agree on a common purpose and goals for their team regarding sustainability as a first step before gathering fan support for these goals. There are several strategies that sports leaders can implement into their marketing methods within their sports teams and venues. Sustainable marketing strategies are best received when athlete involvement in the cause is showcased. This involvement is best shared with fans through social media platforms that provide visuals and captions following the sustainable journey. An overall piece of advice when implementing these strategies is to start out small and build into the bigger vision. Each step will create momentum and these steps will benefit the sports space and surrounding community in a very positive way.

APPENDICES

Exhibit A: Global Sports Market

Global sports market - total revenue from 2005 to 2017 *(in billion U.S. dollars)*

Sports market revenue in billion U.S. dollars	
2017*	90.9
2012	78.2
2013	76.1
2009	58.4
2005	46.5

Showing entries 1 to 5 (5 entries in total)

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Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

Exhibit B: Survey Questions

1. How often do you watch sports within a month?
2. What is the name of your favorite sports team?
3. Please share a memorable experience involving your favorite team (through televised games, advertisements, in-person, or online connections). Describe the details that helped you feel connected.
4. How important is sustainability to you?
5. Do you think sports and sports venues are beneficial platform to promote sustainability?
6. Would you be more or less enthusiastic about sports if they emphasized sustainability?
7. Would you be more or less supportive of your favorite team(s) if you knew they valued:
- matrix table (very unsupportive, slightly unsupportive, neutral, slightly more supportive, extremely supportive)
 - a. Minimizing electricity use in stadiums
 - b. Incorporating reusable plastic/materials into uniforms
 - c. Events on game day with sustainable education
 - d. Initiating waste management systems surrounding concessions
 - e. Donations to sustainable causes
 - f. Team involvement in local community efforts (i.e., planting trees)
8. How do you prefer to learn about a company message? (1 being most favorable and 7 being least favorable)? – rank order question
 - a. Personalized mail
 - b. Social media platforms
 - c. Sponsored partnership event
 - d. From a public figure (athlete, captain, etc.)
 - e. Website/Google
 - f. Billboards
 - g. Giveaways
9. Where did you grow up? Please type state or country.
10. How old are you?

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry

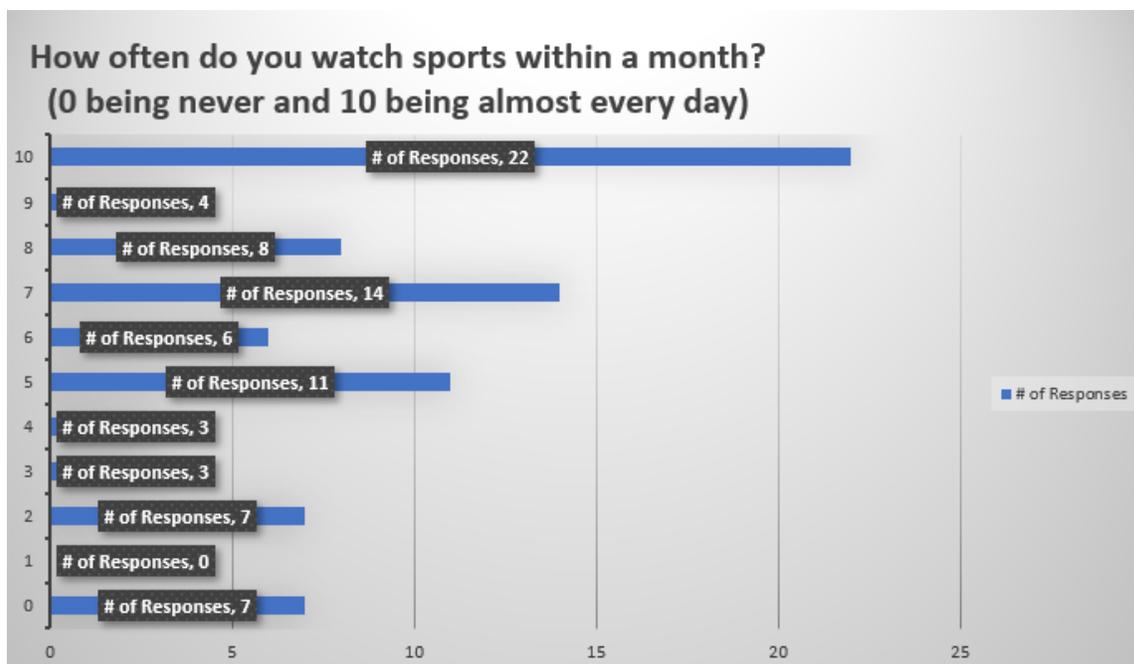
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11. Gender

Exhibit C:



Exhibit D:



An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry

Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

Exhibit E:

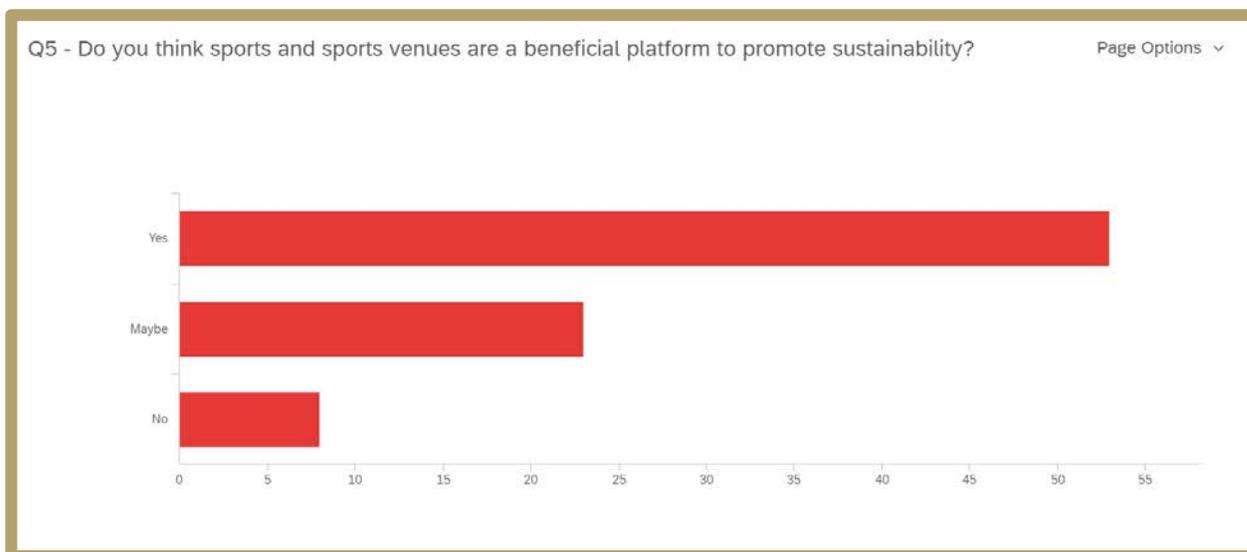


Exhibit F:

Would you be more or less supportive of your favorite team(s) if you knew they valued:

#	Field	Very unresponsive	Slightly unresponsive	Neutral	Slightly more supportive	Extremely supportive	Total
1	Minimizing electricity use in stadiums	2.04% 1	2.04% 1	26.53% 13	40.82% 20 ★	28.57% 14	49
2	Incorporating reusable plastic/materials into uniforms	0.00% 0	2.04% 1	24.49% 12	40.82% 20 ★	32.65% 16	49
3	Events on game day with sustainable education	0.00% 0	4.08% 2	42.86% 21 ★	34.69% 17	18.37% 9	49
4	Initiating waste management systems surrounding concessions	0.00% 0	4.08% 2	16.33% 8	40.82% 20 ★	38.78% 19	49
5	Donations to sustainable causes	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	24.49% 12	32.65% 16	42.86% 21 ★	49
6	Team involvement in local community efforts (i.e. planting trees)	0.00% 0	2.04% 1	20.41% 10	30.61% 15	46.94% 23 ★	49

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry
Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

Exhibit G:

How do you prefer to learn about a company message?

#	Field	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Personalized mail	6.33% 5	10.13% 8	8.86% 7	13.92% 11	12.66% 10	13.92% 11	34.18% 27 ★
2	Social media platforms	45.57% 36 ★	27.85% 22	12.66% 10	7.59% 6	1.27% 1	2.53% 2	2.53% 2
3	Sponsored partnership event	8.86% 7	12.66% 10	16.46% 13	26.58% 21 ★	25.32% 20	5.06% 4	5.06% 4
4	From a public figure (athlete, captain, ect.)	10.13% 8	29.11% 23 ★	27.85% 22	8.86% 7	6.33% 5	13.92% 11	3.80% 3
5	Website/Google	12.66% 10	12.66% 10	24.05% 19 ★	16.46% 13	20.25% 16	8.86% 7	5.06% 4
6	Billboards	2.53% 2	0.00% 0	5.06% 4	13.92% 11	11.39% 9	41.77% 33 ★	25.32% 20
7	Giveaways	13.92% 11	7.59% 6	5.06% 4	12.66% 10	22.78% 18	13.92% 11	24.05% 19 ★

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An Examination of Sustainable Marketing and Fan Engagement Within the Sports Industry
Honors Thesis for Caroline Meizen

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