

**Colegio Universitario de Estudios Financieros**

**Grado en Administración y Dirección de Empresas Bilingüe**

**Trabajo de Fin de Grado**



**SPORTS MARKETING, CONSUMER BEHAVIOR FOCUS ON THE**



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**NBA Consumer Behavior Marketing**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This project about sports and specifically about the National Basketball Association will reflect the importance and applications of the Consumer Behavior studies and theory to give not only meaning to what the NBA's marketing strategy is, but also the relative importance of the main factors to the success of the league both on a fan level and on the revenue stream side.

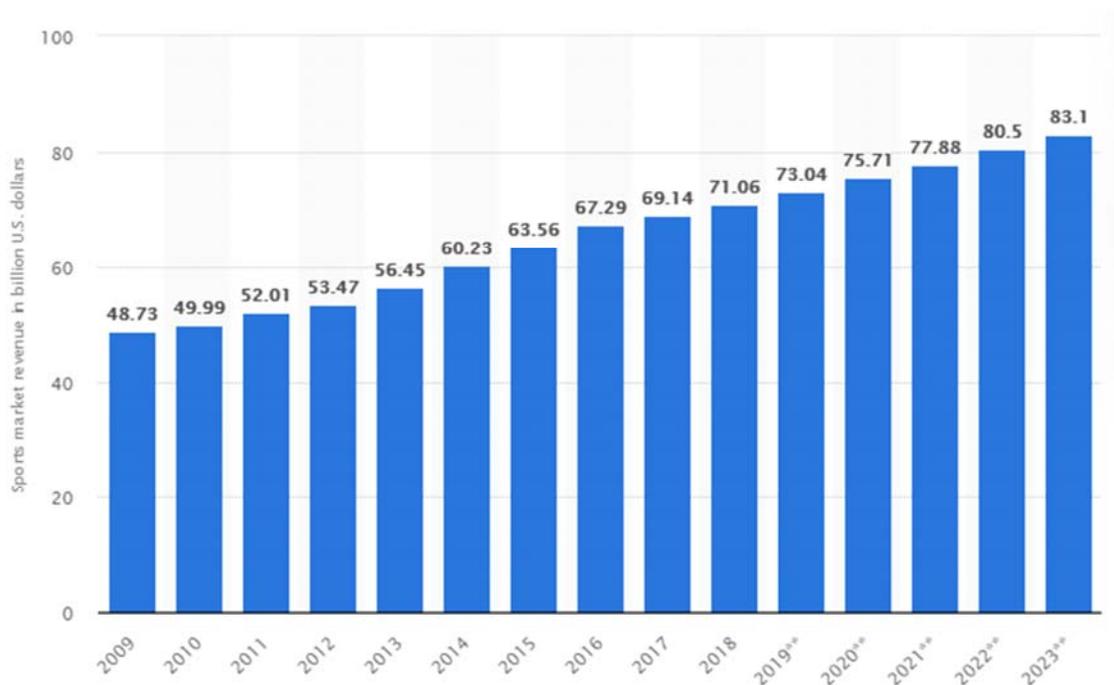
To start there will be an introduction to marketing in sports in general, with a little piece of the history of marketing in sports and its importance all over, then there will be an introduction to the National Basketball Association with history from a business and from a fanbase perspective, just to finish with the league from a business model perspective. The bulk of the subject will come with the consumer behavior concepts and their relationship with the NBA's marketing strategy and later a brief analysis of the Advertising concepts. There will be a short explanation of the current situation about the COVID19 that the league is suffering. And, last but not least, a conclusion of the topic

## **2. INTRODUCTION TO SPORTS MARKETING**

### **2.1 Sports Marketing**

First and foremost, it is necessary to make a distinction between both sports and sporting events consumption. Sport is a form of nonfiction entertainment which unfolds during real time. On the other hand, consumption of sport encompasses not only the viewing of sports through action in the attendance of a live event, but also through traditional and new media, this last one will include any fan's participation in or viewing those sport activities. Those are the main people that we should be focusing or orienting a consumer behavior analysis.

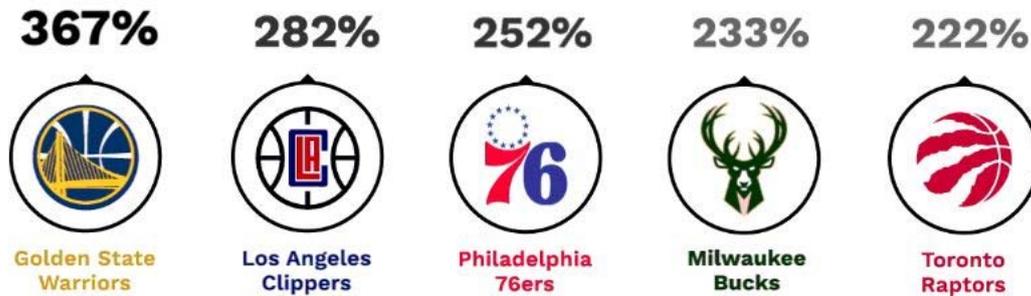
Sports marketing is a subdivision inside marketing that focuses both on sports themselves and also the products or brand names that each sports carry. Since its origin in the 1870s, with the promotion of Tobacco cards featuring baseball players, it has been gaining a considerable market size as we can see in the numbers and statistics in recent years (USA)



Statista - Sports Market Revenue in billions U.S. dollars 2009-2023

The benefits do not only affect the United States, but rather the entire globe, with a wide range, and it is interesting to know that business, media and other promoters of the sports and related products receive immense contributions revenue. This makes it an interesting but challenging opportunity for them to enter and be able to benefit from such.

One of the greater challenges in the sports marketing business is to maintain and be able to keep pace with the constant and rapid changes in both sports and their environment. Main sport events costs have increased (like for example the World Cup \$13.3 billion or the \$18 billion estimated by Merrill Lynch). Also franchises in the industry have skyrocketed (For example Steve’s Ballmer LA Clippers record \$2 billion, after the Donald Sterling’s scandal)



Largest NBA franchise value increases in % over the past 5 years

Athletes salaries have continued to rise as well, the top athletes of the 2010-2020-decade score:

- Floyd Mayweather: \$915 million
- Cristiano Ronaldo: \$800 million
- Lionel Messi: \$750 million
- LeBron James: \$680 million
- Roger Federer: \$640 million
- Tiger Woods: \$615 million
- Phil Mickelson: \$480 million
- Manny Pacquiao: \$435 million
- Kevin Durant: \$425 million
- Lewis Hamilton: \$400 million

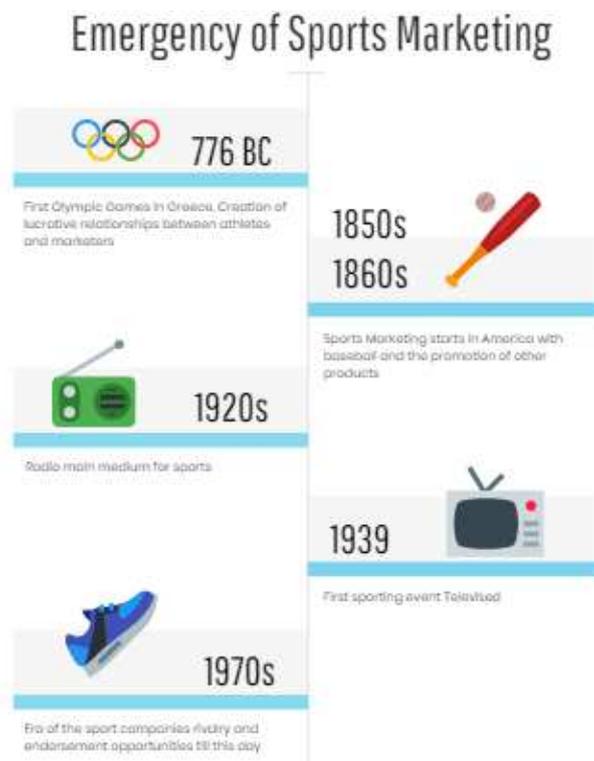
And the payroll of teams and franchises have also risen with staggering numbers like the MLB (baseball) LA Dodgers \$235 million while the New York Yankees estimate about \$204 million.

The only constant remaining in this industry is the constant appetite of consumers for sports. We view sports via cable TV, network, read them in newspapers and magazines, talk about them with friends, family and coworkers... It creates jobs, there are careers for it, and as the demand increases so does the interest for the study and dedication for sports marketing. It surrounds us in our lives.

## 2.2 Emergence of Sports Marketing

The AMA defines marketing as “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” (American Marketing Association, 2017).

Sports marketing is “Sport marketing is a social and managerial process by which the sport manager seeks to obtain what sporting organizations need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others” (Shilbury, D., Westerbeek, H., Quick, S., Funk, D., Karg, A, 2014). The study of its market is very complex and diverse, yet the nature of the industry makes it interesting to analyze it.



The origin of sports marketers mounts back to year 776 BC with the first Olympic Games (Olympia Greece) where marketers came to the realization that affiliating with well-known athletes could

create a lucrative relationship. In America it starts in the era of the 1850s and 1860s when many businesses created relations with sports (baseball) to enhance and promote their services and products. During the 1920s it was the radio as the main medium to promote sports and with them their products (first broadcast of baseball games). In 1939 the first sporting event was televised, a baseball college game, and with this it would be the start of the greatest tool of expansion for the sports industry. In 1956 the revenues of MLB generated from radio and Television rose to 16.8% of total revenues. There was the identity era of the 1960s with the Chuck Taylor/Converse, Muhammad Ali/Adidas and the NFL as marketable entities, these products that are still famous till this day. And during the 1970s there was a high increase in consumer demand for sports while main companies like Nike, Puma or Adidas fought to snatch up endorsement's opportunities

### **3 INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION**

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is a professional basketball league that was formed in the United States in the year 1949 by a merger operation between two rival organizations: The National Basketball League (1937) and the Basketball Association of America (1946). During the year 1976 the NBA absorbed 4 teams to form the ABA (American Basketball Association), disbanded that same year.

During the early years of the 1980s the NBA had many franchises losing money, with low attendance, low television ratings and a limited National reach. David Stern took lead of the organization in 1984 as commissioner of the NBA and help transform the league and also reach for an important expansionary project to make it international. The strategy followed an aggressive marketing strategy, highlighting star players like Magic Johnson, Larry Bird and especially and most importantly, Michael Jordan, especially remark on the Dream Team of the Olympic Games of Spain 1992 which will lead the NBA to its biggest and most impactful international expansion. More innovations where the league limits on players' salaries (Salary Cap), lucrative TV rights and network cable television, also events like All-Star Game.

The NBA is divided in 2 conferences, each with 3 divisions. There are 30 teams in total:

## Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division: Boston Celtics, Brooklyn Nets, New York Knicks, Philadelphia 76ers, Toronto Raptors

Central Division: Chicago Bulls, Cleveland Cavaliers, Detroit Pistons, Indiana Pacers, Milwaukee Bucks

Southeast Division: Atlanta Hawks, Charlotte Hornets, Miami Heat, Orlando Magic, Washington Wizards

## Western Conference

Southwest Division: Dallas Mavericks, Houston Rockets, San Antonio Spurs, New Orleans Pelicans, Utah Jazz, Memphis Grizzlies

Northwest Division: Denver Nuggets, Minnesota Timberwolves, Oklahoma City Thunder, Portland Trail Blazers, Utah Jazz

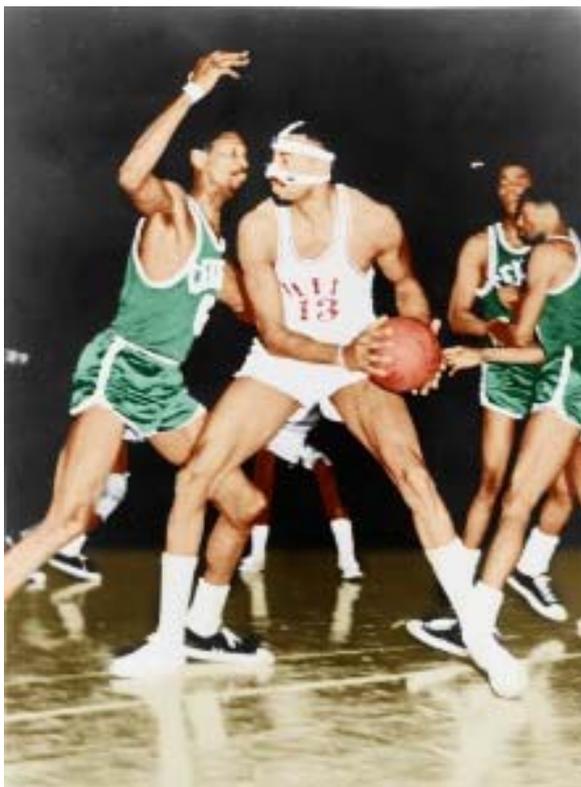
Pacific Division: Golden State Warriors, Los Angeles Lakers, Los Angeles Clippers, Sacramento Kings, Phoenix Suns



The top-ranking teams, specifically 8 first teams per division, records at the end of the regular season will engage in a play-off system to determine the NBA champion, claiming the title of world champion, one of the most important, if not the most important, Title or accomplishment in the league. The Finals are the end goal of every franchise.

### 3.1 Creation of the league

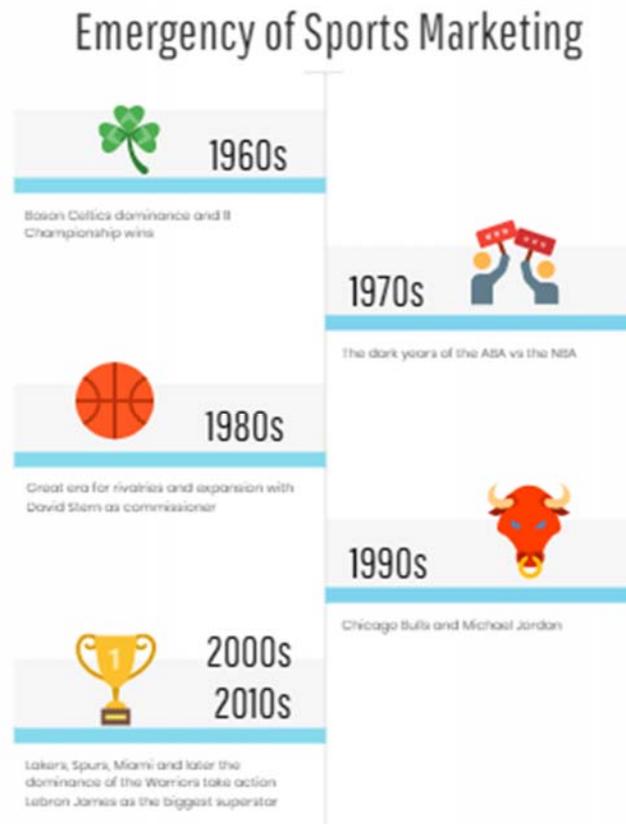
The creation of the league occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1946, under the name of Basketball Association of America (BAA). Not long after the II World War, a group of sporting event owners



joined to diversify the sports industry, as the main ones were boxing and hockey. Basketball was an alternative to be able to attract more public. Maurice Podoloff was appointed as the BAA's first commissioner. Eleven cities were chosen to host a team: Toronto, Cleveland, Detroit, Washington, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Providencia, Boston, Chicago, San Luis and New York. It wasn't easy, as there were many other leagues of basketball in the United States, but the BAA had more resources and money, but they lacked players. They created the recruitment system of college players, thus boosting the growth of the league considerably for the next years. They divided the season in three: regular

season, play-offs, and the finals. In the next years the NBL, other of the main leagues, cannot bare the success of the BAA and both decide to join to form what is currently the National Basketball Association (NBA)

### 3.2 NBA history till this day



It all begins with the 1960s Boston Celtics, 11 rings or Championships with Bill Russell at the head of the team, which started with Wilt Chamberlain one of the biggest rivalries between teams that still persist till this day with the Los Angeles Lakers vs the Boston Celtics, this lead to great expectations of development for the NBA.

The most difficult moment for the league were the 1970s years, dark years for the association competing the ABA to take reign over the NBA. Although finally it would be the NBA that will be victorious due to having a better vision for business. But the ABA left a great legacy to modern basketball (3-point line, possessions of 30 seconds between other things). Thanks to the merger the NBA managed to overcome economic difficulties due to low audiences. During the 80s, the NBA would experience one of the most glorious and important epochs of their sport history. Yet again another incredible rivalry between Celtics Lakers with superstars Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. In addition, there was the arrival of the new NBA commissioner David Stern, which helped

to expand the business globally. Most of the measures that David Stern took helped to manage the clean, balanced, and interesting franchises and league that the NBA now like to show off. During these years, the NBA expands to 27 teams with 4 divisions. During 90s, it was the Chicago Bulls



player Michael Jordan that almost single handed pushed the league to become one of the most solicited sports by being an icon for years and years to come. The first years of the new millennium carried the rivalries between the Lakers and the San Antonio Spurs, Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neil against Tim Duncan maintaining the interest of the league. It

is in the year 2004 when the league reaches its current 30 teams with the incorporation of The New Orleans Hornets (Later the New Orleans Pelicans).

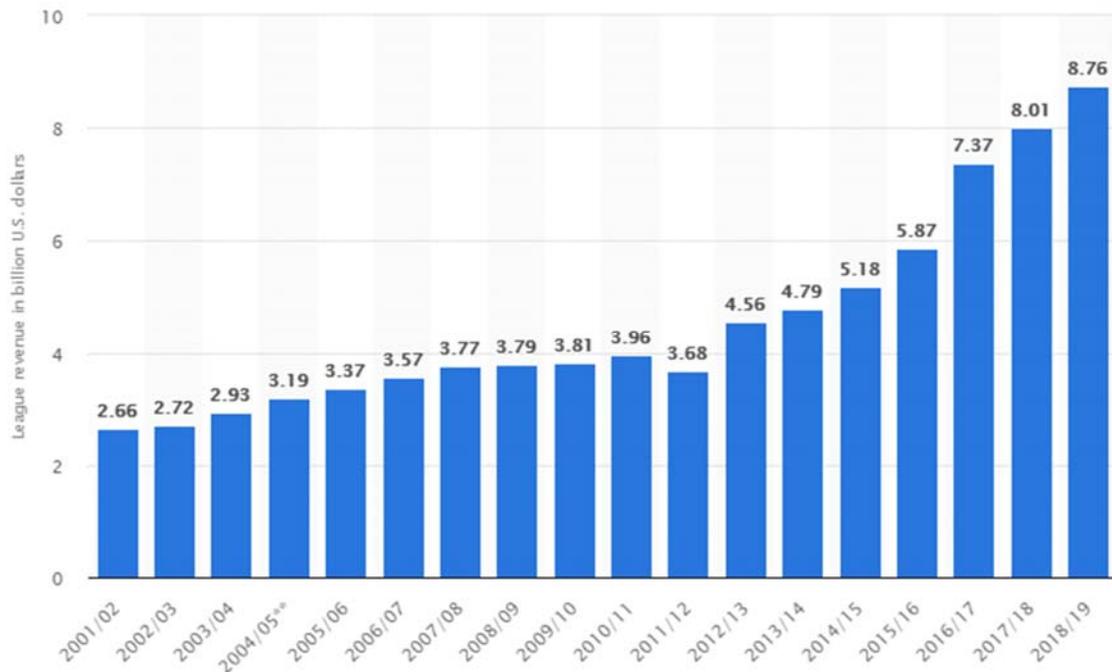
The last years of the league have been one of the most boosted or best moments economically speaking, as international broadcast has expanded thanks to the famous and successful franchise of the Golden State Warriors and their attractive that hooks fans by destroying records and winning several titles. It is the now finished rivalry era of LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers vs the Golden State Warriors (Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson and Kevin Durant between others).

### **3.3 NBA as a business model**

The NBA as many other sports leagues in the United States of America, is focused towards business models. It is a clear example of self-management, an organization divided into 30 franchises that at the same time are themselves individual corporations. This makes us talk about a large holding company made up of different corporations. NBA teams are not clubs, but rather franchised societies, with a total of those 30 franchises in contrast to the 11 upon the creation or origin of the league. There is a process to acquire a franchise via investment and with the accord agreement of the society league manager and fees of \$300 million.

Different from other sports leagues, this league, as explained earlier through David Stern, provides fairness and balance for every team thanks to a salary cap per team and a Draft system (how new players enter the league) so that every team can manage their way with the same resources as to win a championship.

In recent years, the NBA has managed to follow a very lucrative and successful marketing strategy. Thanks to this it is highly considered worldwide as a reference and model of leadership in its sport that serves as example to other sports leagues.



Statista 2020 Total Revenues of the National Basketball Association 2001-2018

## 4. CONSUMER BEHAVIOR CONCEPTS

As we know from the consumer behavior theory, NBA consumers use their products (merchandise, games,) to help identify their identities. The NBA has been the want to satisfy the need for entertainment, this case becoming an interest for the sport of basketball at its highest level.

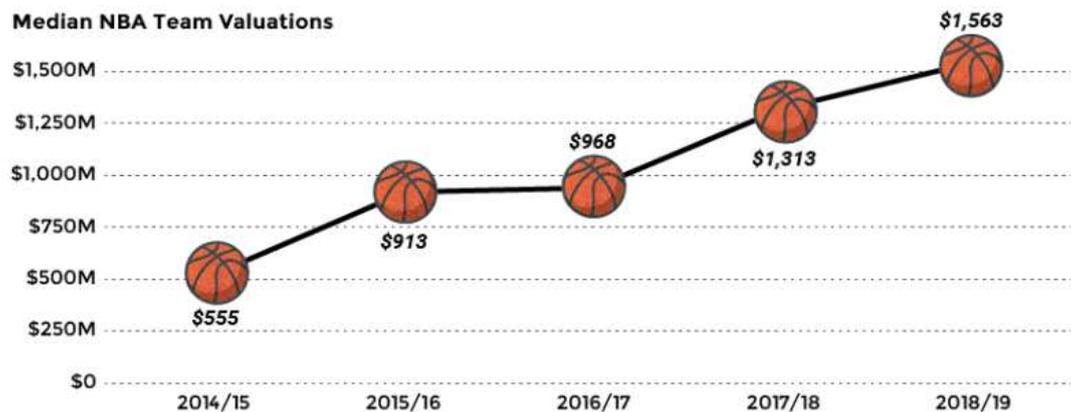
From the Consumer behavior theory, the sports industry has an estimate value globally of about \$488.5 billion, with a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) increase of 4.3% since the year 2014. The expectations for this mark are to reach a growth of 5.9% CAGR, reaching with it \$614.1 billion.

Franchises value have risen in 2020 to:

1. New York Knicks: \$4.6 billion
2. Los Angeles Lakers: \$4.4 billion
3. Golden State Warriors: \$4.3 billion
4. Chicago Bulls: \$3.2 billion
5. Boston Celtics: \$3.1 billion
6. Los Angeles Clippers: \$2.6 billion
7. Brooklyn Nets: \$2.5 billion
8. Houston Rockets: \$2.475 billion
9. Dallas Mavericks: \$2.4 billion
10. Toronto Raptors: \$2.1 billion
11. Philadelphia 76ers: \$2 billion
12. Miami Heat: \$1.95 billion
13. Portland Trail Blazers: \$1.85 billion
14. San Antonio Spurs: \$1.8 billion
15. Sacramento Kings: \$1.775 billion
16. Washington Wizards: \$1.75 billion
17. Phoenix Suns: \$1.625 billion
18. Denver Nuggets: \$1.6 billion
19. Milwaukee Bucks: \$1.58 billion
20. OklahomaCity Thunder: \$1.57 billion
21. Utah Jazz: \$1.55 billion
22. Indiana Pacers: \$1.525 billion
23. Atlanta Hawks: \$1.52 billion
24. Cleveland Cavaliers: \$1.51 billion
25. Charlotte Hornets: \$1.5 billion
26. Detroit Pistons: \$1.45 billion
27. Orlando Magic: \$1.43 billion
28. Minnesota Timberwolves: \$1.4billion
29. New Orleans Pelicans: \$1.375 billion
30. Memphis Grizzlies: \$1.3 billion

Forbes The Business of Basketball data of NBA Franchises value in 2020

With the growth of the industry (specifically the NBA), with other models of consumption, the formation of a highly loyal and involved fan base has increased the importance and significance of organizations in sports. Creation and maintenance of those franchises, organizations and foundations is key for organizational level sustainability. Choices of individual consumers is what drives the sports industry, similarly to every sports business.



Median of Team valuations from 2014-2018 of the NBA in Millions of Dollars

#### 4.1 Self-concept, sports, and sporting events

Despite all the advances in studies and analysis over the centuries on experimental psychology, the self remains something that it is yet to be fully understood. Plato defined the self as fundamentally an intellectual entity whose nature exists separately from the physical world. There is also the belief of separation between id, ego and superego as in Freud's theorizing and many other theories and concepts for other discussion. What concerns us for the study of its relation to the subject, is to know that the self is what distinguishes a person from others, it is the identity, and is considered as the object of reflexive action.

An individual's self-concept can be composed of many things, and each influence on that self-concept can fluctuate depending on the context (environment). Memberships and the importance given to every influence underlay many of the individuals conception of what they are and how they should have them. Fans are defined as supporters of both their teams and individual athletes

related to their sport. Sports affiliations can relate through sports via self-definition (social categorizations). It is the importance of being not only a fan of basketball, in the case of our topic, but also the relation to a fan of the NBA, which team are you fan of, which individual players are you a fan of... and the sum of all of those can create and modify your self-concept. This process of relations and influence often begins in childhood or adolescence, but other phases of life are not ruled out to have such an impact.

For this last point, it is interesting to remark that consumers can also aspire to an Ideal-Self, in which they can transcend from their actual-self, basically the set of values and attributes that are more realistic of who they really are, through impression management, which in the case of the basketball lifestyle would refer to choosing and buying products that will show what they aspire or want to be (ideal-self) like for example buying certain sneakers or jerseys merchandise, attending games for their home team, etc. This last concept is related to managing what other people think of us.

Sports consumption is one end of self-definition because it can present a challenge, or challenges, for individuals. This challenge can help them determine both limits and comparisons with other people, thus creating communities. It is also well known that sports do not limit only to participation activities but also can be by attendance, viewership, etc. There are feelings of belongingness thrown by consumers to the sports and teams, as well as distinctive and unique individual characteristics.

The more a fan becomes involved with basketball, the more prominent increases the consumption experience in their self-definition. Funk (2008) presented a hierarchy of consumption in which a consumer firstly becomes aware of a sport, then will later develop attraction, and as the hierarchy progresses, the feeling of attachment appears and takes over creating the self-definition of the individual related to the sport. The final level is the consumer creating an allegiance with the sport, internalizing its values and impacting their everyday life.

It is important to take into account the impact and importance of the image of the NBA, because with this information it is clear the relation and loyalty that many of the fans/consumers feel towards it. The relation between the league and its fans is personal and of the highest importance, and it ends up making the fans not only fans but also transcribes into the consumption of products (merchandise, etc.) which agrees with the 20/80 rule of consumer behavior, which says that it is

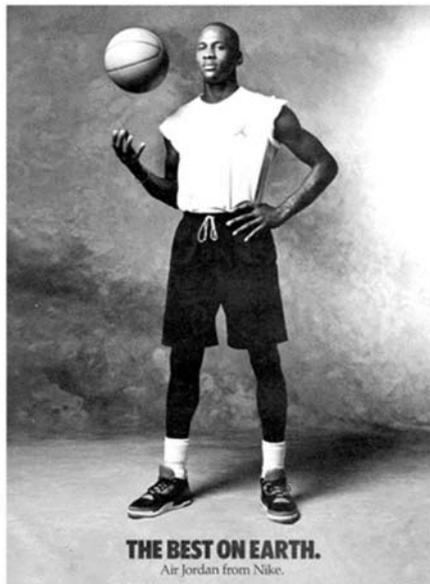
the 20% of consumers who will account for the 80% of sales, thus making it a priority to maintain happy those consumers/fans of the NBA.

(Patrick Vyncke, 2002) (Gina Schampers, 2015) (Belk, R. W., 1998) (Forgas, J. P. and Williams, K. D. 2003) (Lynn R. Kahle, Angeline G. Close, 2010)

## 4.2 Identification and Internalization

The model of motivation of sports fans, describes the internalization of values (the values of the sport of basketball) that will make the consumers adopt a similar set of values and beliefs shared by the fans of the NBA creating what was mentioned above and it is of extreme importance to know and study for the success of the league: communities. These attributes and the meaning that they carry with their members identity are a narrative created from the beginning. Highly identified and internalized fans can access and increase their knowledge of the NBA. Consumers can gather the meanings (of their players, teams, etc.) to develop their own and individual self-definitions and express them to others.

Consumers rely on the affiliation to their basketball team to express their self-concept aspects to



others. As an example of the affiliation, in 2008 the sporting equipment for the United States amounted to \$47.76 billion, and most of those items did not end up being used for sport competition, but rather used as fans jerseys and other sport merchandise to express one of two things: the membership to a group of sports, such an NBA team, or to distinguish themselves as individuals with as set of preferences and characteristics different from others, this last point is highly boosted by the sneaker mania that is part of the United States Culture and that has its origin thanks to the NBA (like the first Jordan's sneakers). The meaning of every product is diverse and has a symbolic meaning beyond records and

numbers, it drains its significance and value from the consumers perceptions. For example, the sneakers that Michael Jordan wore the day he played with the Flu and won was a phenomenon

and, even till this day, both that meaning, and symbolism has elevated the value of the brand and specially of that product.

Consumer involvement is a person's perceived relevance of an object based on one's needs, values, and interests. There are 3 main levels of consumer involvement in functional theory: compliance, identification, and internalization. Internalization is the highest level, with deep-seeded attitudes that become part of the value system of the consumer. Identification are the attitudes to comfort another person or group. And compliance, the lowest level, is a formation of attitude to gain reward and avoid punishment. Fans can react on any of those levels and deal with theories different for the study of those behaviors. Not all connections are the same, so they require different analyzes methods or approaches. Fans of the NBA normally tend to relate to high product involvement (meaning at least the internalization or identification), experiencing strong bonds with the sport, rather than a simple inertia from low levels of consumption. The NBA also profits from the many faces of involvement: For example, according to the purchase situation involvement you can not only buy sport equipment for sports but also to wear as part of social outfits or at home.

There is also the principle of cognitive consistency that helps individuals to seek harmony in feelings and behavior, it is the coherence, for example it is a reason why individuals do not normally change teams so promoting each team in key areas would be interesting and essential for marketers. This principle is based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, which explains that when a person confronts inconsistencies among attitudes or behaviors he will take actions to restore consistency, for example, you are fan of a player but if he leaves your team and goes to the rival team you will no longer like the player and thus will affect your consumption patterns and behaviors.

(Gina Schampers, 2015) (Belk, R. W., 1998) (Forgas, J. P. and Williams, K. D. 2003)

### **4.3 Sports and self-esteem**

The level and extent of feelings towards teams and athletes of consumers mold their perspective of the events that unfold on the field. There is the BIRG or bask in the reflected glory that fans experience when their teams win, and on the other hand the CORF or cutting off reflected failure.

These two phenomena have been conceptualized as ways of protecting and enhancing de self-esteem.

And the extent of BIRGing and CORFing in basketball appears related with the level of affiliation towards a team. The fans that have higher levels of affiliation or internalization with their team demonstrated to have more BIRGing attitudes but at the same time less of CORFing attitudes, those normally followed the attitudes of less engaged or less affiliated fans. This can be demonstrated as fans that feel more identified make it also part of their self-concept. It is a way of escape from reality and BIRGing helps them boost their self-esteem by reinforcing them as winning when their team succeeds. However, the attitude of CORFing would be a devaluation of the self-esteem and would create distances between the relation of the individual and their team. Again, for marketers these are interesting observations as for they need to identify those fans that have either strong BIRGing or CORFing attitudes and decide which to market or find their consumer targets adequately.

Yet again it appears that basketball, same as many other sports, becomes more important as to define a persons self-concept, and it is interesting to analyze and create empirical research investigation for those called true fans with high and strong bonds with their team and those who simply don't.

(Forgas, J. P. and Williams, K. D. 2003)

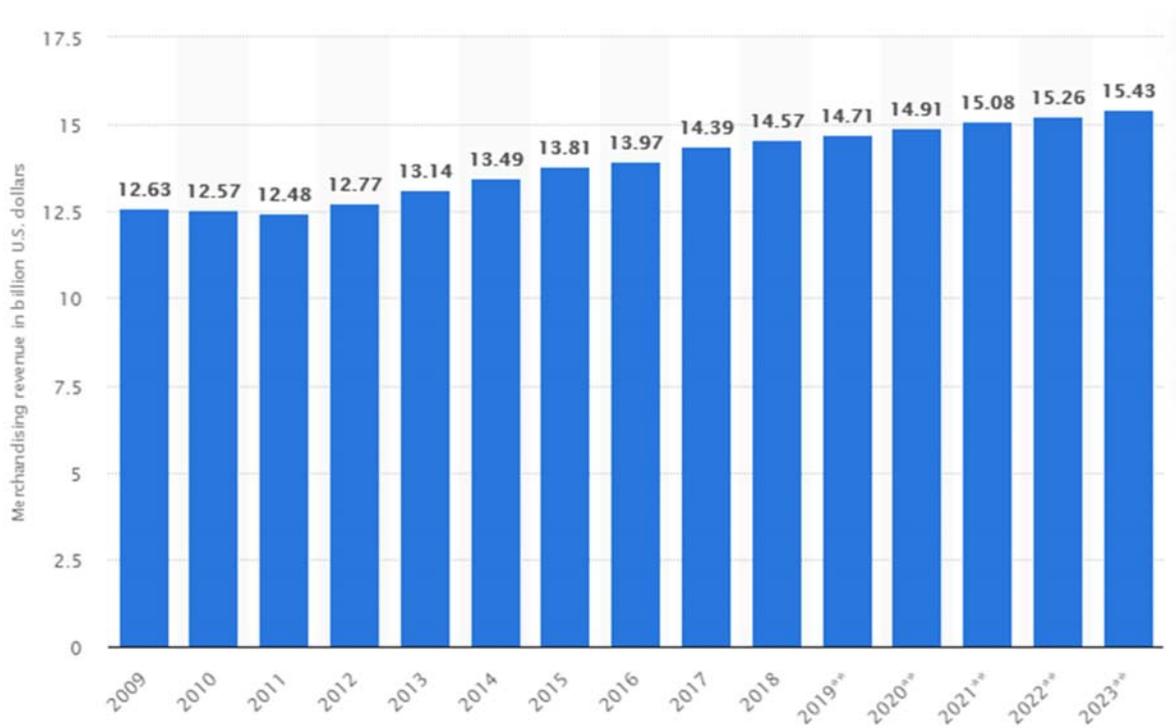
#### **4.4 Sports Consumption**

Between the branches of consumption, sports consumption is distinguished both by the emotion intensity and by the high level of self-definition, as previously mentioned, by their followers.

Most studies done in consumer behavior are applicable exclusively to high involvement products, but in reality, most purchase occasions refer under conditions of low involvement consumption. Rather than this low involvement condition, fans of sports such as basketball reflect a high-involvement, but, linking both lower and higher involvement products could create a rub-off effect that results to creating attributes in marketable basketball products that attract fans.

Most consumer behavior marketing research is conducted under mundane conditions in controlled environments. The problem with studies of sports is that, although they can be closely controlled, they could benefit (or have added benefit) from situations and conditions of varying levels of involvement. It is necessary then to explore situations of extreme conditions to look for boundaries at the emotional level, which in the end, is what moves fans. Sports are intangible, variable, perishable and inseparable, making these findings largely generalizable for other context of studies.

(Mark Andrew Davis, John Miller, 2019)



Statista, Merchandising revenue of Sports in billions U.S. dollars 2009-2023

#### 4.5 The role of Sports in Event Marketing and Promotion

In many regards to the application of marketing theories and studies to sports, they are intuitive. Sports marketers can implement classic segmentation joined with differentiation strategies to boost ticket sales and sporting events. This can be done by using product-specific behavioral attributes segmentations, in which basically the focus is set upon classifying product category or benefits with the purchase behavior of the consumer. There is also the option of creating segmentation to create homogeneous target markets related to criteria such as: geographic, demographic, or socioeconomic variables. The Golden State Warriors are the most popular team in the Bay Area, so it would make sense to target their marketing to the Bay Area (San Francisco, Oakland...) rather than New York. And it is also useful to use psychographic segmentation to analyze lifestyles and find out what we have been talking in most points: consumers self-concept.

A rational case can also be made for the use of professional NBA athletes and teams to promote or use merchandise promotion for other products different from their respective sport, and reflects the importance of what star athletes and teams are in the sense of meaning for fans, which is much



more than basketball, and thus it can generate even greater value apart from the sport. For example, it would be obvious for a team such as the San Antonio Spurs and their players to promote NBA season tickets, sports apparel, etc. but they are well known for their partnership and promotion with the

Texas supermarket HEB and their products, making many commercials for them in what is a wealthy partnership oriented to the Texas market segment. Many of the sporting events and players promotions (both on their own or directly promoted by the team) have little to do with basketball.

Almost every sponsorship for sporting events are expensive, like the All-Star Game, which supposes a high cost every year. However, those high costs come also justified as the number of studies have evidenced the positive effects to firm value, on purchase intentions and on brand recall thanks to sponsorship. It not only appears to be highly effective, but also basketball

consumers comprise a high demographic segment, making sponsorship a more attractive option despite the high costs.

The functions of sponsorship go way beyond just attracting fan awareness or improving their attitude towards teams and or products (both domestically and internationally). Consumers use their affiliation to their NBA teams to express their identity or elements of such to their fellow peers, friends and family, and NBA franchises and athletes use the sport to communicate their brand image. That meaning is not only promoted or communicated by basketball as a sport, but also can be promoted through the products and services teams relate to and partner with. It has been proved to be a most effective strategy, to promote image through products and other means, when it is done on a congruent basis of their image. Basically, that congruency is what was previously explained as the principle of cognitive consistency (seeking harmony a coherence) but



now related to the franchise's promotions. This congruency can exist between many things: event and sport, brand, and endorser, etc. And marketers and organizations have to be careful, as any incongruent or incoherent matchup will produce weak associations in memory and the effort to overcome that same incongruence,

explained again by the theory of cognitive dissonance through the balance theory is hard for consumers and it produces serious damage to that same team-consumer relation, sometimes irreparable. Promotion and sponsorship can make a consumer aware of the relationship, but the structure of that same sponsor should push and strive to highlight the congruence areas to create positive aspects that benefit the relation between brand and fans.

So, the end goal of franchises and the NBA as a whole for promotion, is to strengthen their brand image through favorable associations via sponsorships. The key is the memory, one associative memory theory that is normally applied to sponsor is that balance theory. The balance theory balances the attitudes to create consistency in the memory and minds of consumers.

Emotion, another key aspect for sponsor, can come both as a great potential facilitator and also a possible inhibitor of sponsor effectiveness. Theories and studies of information processing have suggested that increased emotion can help the process of information retained in memory of

sponsorship by consumer, because emotion generates the consumer to be highly engaged. But it is also true that, if fans are too aroused by the basketball game, they may not have enough cognitive resources to process other non-essential information, like for example the promotions and sponsors. There is an optimal or moderate level of engagement in which sponsors reach the highest level of intake by the memory of fans, and that is the key of study and promotion. For example, ads during NBA games are most effective during the half-time break rather than in the middle of a game winning shot.

The substance of sponsorship is normally very simple. Such as for example a simple brand name or logo embedded within the event. It is because the capacity of communication of these messages is little or minimal, and the effects of sponsorship on attitude change are most likely to manifest through peripheral route processes. One of the theories of consumer behavior, Pavlov's classical conditioning, explains that if a stimulus, like a promotion or advertisement, that in the beginning does not elicit a response on its own, is paired with an unconditioned stimulus, the emotion or moment of an NBA game, it can create or transform that stimulus into a conditioned stimulus with a linked conditioned response linked to the unconditioned stimulus. For example, this image of LeBron James imitating exactly one of the famous Kobe Bryant dunks, has resulted into a great image promoted by the NBA that shows in the back an NBATickets.com advertisement in game, this image would perpetuate in history and with it the promotion advertisement. Many sponsorships rely undoubtedly on this low-level processing theory principle to strengthen memory associations to their brand.

(Scott R. Swanson, Kevin Gwinner, 2002) (Stephen R. McDaniel, 1999) (Gina Schampers, 2015)

#### **4.6 Approach-avoidance**

The approach-avoidance motivational conflict occurs when there are positive and negative aspects of a product or service, so the consumer has both desire for those positive aspects and guilt on the negative side. Marketers would try for this consumer to overcome the guilt of the negative aspects.

There is an importance, referred to the servicescape (model that would be explained later), given to the extended amount of time spent in attendance or following a sporting event or news. This is

in fact the negative or avoidance aspect that NBA marketers want consumers to overcome as less time spent in those events, etc. supposes less ways of receiving information and promotion for wants of the consumers. According to Mehrabian (1974) and Russell (1976) any response demonstrated to a physical setting or environment, servicescape, can be categorized as an approach-avoidance behavior. Those behaviors can be attributed to emotional states, with 42 variables of stimuli are intervening in relation to the environment both approach and avoidance related. The approach would be the increase of time spent, the length in the environment, thus increasing affiliation, and with increased communication. On the other hand, avoidance behaviors are the ones reflected by a decreased time spent in the environment, avoiding contact and communication, these behaviors are related to the emotional states of pleasure and arousal. So, the idea would be to increase the levels of pleasure/arousal in contrast to having displeasure, as pleasure decreases, the approach behaviors are inversely related.

In a level of study among NBA game attendees, they were measured using an adapted version of that Mehrabian (1974) and Russell's (1976) theory. The result helped understand that there are multiple elements within the servicescape of the professional basketball NBA to create that experience. It was demonstrated that it is necessary to follow a holistic approach to the approach-avoidance theory when investigating those elements of the servicescape, so it does not happen in isolation and thus interpreted alone. All of the elements of the environment are related with each other and will therefore have an effect on consumers. The conclusion would be to have a look and investigation to the environment in total as follows in the next point of the consumer behavior concepts.

#### **4.7 Servicescape**

The servicescape of the NBA encompasses all the elements and physical factors that go along the service of the consumer setting. Those physical factors that affect consumer behavior can be controlled by the franchises in order to elicit preferred consumer responses. It is, in the case of the NBA, the construction of multimillion dollar arenas and venues, with technological advances that has made it possible for the NBA organizations and teams to customize and generate a better

control of their entertainment value for the sport product. The success or failure of these franchises is often determined by the mix of the entertainment experiences of the sport of basketball and the individual needs and expectations of consumers. Therefore, the NBA servicescape is of the highest importance and must be taken into consideration when evaluating the consumer behavior. Everything must be taken into account: restroom lines, arrangement of seats, aisles and walkways, restrooms, entrance and exits and many other elements of the spatial layout of the arenas. There are also the elements related to aesthetic appeal (clean, scents, atmospheric music...) and there are all related to the levels of excitement of consumers. Those excitement levels were also jointly and positively related to excitement levels of satisfaction with the servicescape, and the end was an increased purchase intention and increased likelihood related to attending more games. Many studies have been conveyed in relation to that likelihood to attend more games with respect to the state of the servicescape and it has been proven many times by the data that they are positively related and has an enormous impact. The data also reflects that the perception of crowding, an arena full of fans, impulse the spectators desire to stay and come back.

In conclusion, servicescape for arenas and for the NBA is a way to influence the perceptions of quality and value and all will positively influence the perspective of the consumer. It is a tool to increase levels of involvement among spectators.

(Crystal Southall, 2012)

#### **4.8 Atmospheric Music**

Given that emotion responses to the environment can and will influence consumer attitudes and behaviors, there are certain elements of the environment that can be greater than others. The servicescape has over 44 elements contained in the sports arena, but one that shines as a particularity important aspect of basketball consumption is atmospheric music as a way to influence and enhance the experience of the consumer. Atmospheric music has been studied and investigated and many and various service setting such as hotels, malls, banks, restaurants... and have been demonstrated that those conscious designs of space and music can evoke effects on buyers. Given the lack of research in various service settings, a study tried to fill the gap in sports

marketing by investigating perceptions of consumers of atmospheric music within the NBA servicescape. It was also investigated because of the strong presence of it in NBA presentation games. Those atmospherics, as explained before in the servicescape, can be used to evoke, create or manipulate responses of consumer behaviors. Atmospheric music in definition “is a stimulating facet of the in-store environment that presents cues to consumers that are processed and interpreted by consumers” (Kotler’s, 1973). That resultant information will be used by consumers to form attitudes and behaviors within the sporting consumptive environment. The atmospheric music can lead to the creation of beneficial responses for franchises and organizations, such as the NBA league, such as repeat purchase and attendance intentions. It is an aspect that has been studied according to a wide variety of consumer behaviors, as music has been shown to influence both the amount of money and amount of time spent in various service settings. A study by Shilcock and Hargreaves (2003) of restaurant patterns found that the style of music, that was being played in each restaurant, impacted the amount of money spent by consumer on them. In the authors study, it was the presence of background music which resulted in that amount of money spent by customers of those particular restaurants. There was contextual congruency present in all the 3 studies as to accomplish a reasonable explanation for the atmospheric music behavioral impact. It was indeed classical music which created an upscale, due to the consideration of itself, and its presence created that atmosphere that attracted clients. The congruency itself represented an important impact on the response of consumers, the theory states that when the perception of music is consistent with the perceptions of consumers, the money spent will be greater. In another study, this time in a wine store North, Hargreaves and McKendrick (1999) found that also the results of atmospheric music influenced not only the overall spending, but also the products themselves, as people would buy specific wine according to the music that played. French music sold more French wine, same with German music, and so forth and so on. When the music played is congruent with products and services presented to the consumer, results suggests that it influences positively on the impact of purchasing behaviors. So, it makes sense to select the music accordingly, as the NBA does in their games and advertisements to both increase sales in amount and to sell specific products or services.

There is also the problem of the consumer of being distracted by the music, which tends to happen, as some studies suggest, when the atmospheric music is incongruent with the message being sent or trying to be sent. Consumers will find themselves distracted by the music and thus decreasing

purchases. Atmospheric music finds to be most effective when used to enhance experience and not to attract the complete attention of consumers. Therefore, music that plays during a basketball game should also be congruent with the sport and its environment, as well as enhance the experience and make the consumer draw attention to the products and services that are trying to be promoted by the NBA.

It is also related to the different levels of involvement, explained before, and to have different effects on each level. For low level involvement of consumers, music can have a greater impact in introducing stimuli to the consumers minds, this is when there is little cognitive investment towards the product or service. Therefore, it is the music presented in the live basketball games and events that display lower levels of involvement. Organizations cannot aspire to control all of the effects of the servicescape or environment to elicit responses of more consumerism from their fans, but one that they can control and actually is a common tool for the NBA games is the atmospheric music. It also has a huge influence in the sport entertainment product itself and can create with it a unique sport brand, for this last thing it is well known that there are certain types of music played during the games in different basketball NBA arenas and those music elicit the response as knowing the brand of the team.

(Crystal Southall, 2012)

#### **4.9 Hedonic consumption**

Related to products, in this case sports products and related to basketball, hedonic consumption relates to the facets of the consumers behavior and refers to the multiple emotive, fantasy and related facets of the experience with those products.

There are different types of needs inside the consumer behavior spectrum: biogenic (needs to maintain life), psychogenic (needs for status and power as we become part of cultures), utilitarian (needs with a functional or practical benefit) and last but not least hedonic (needs that generate experiential, involving emotional responses). Within Abraham Maslow influential hierarchy of needs, the NBA products would rank on the top levels of the pyramid, as they are not needs for security or to maintain life like the physiological needs, but rather for self-actualization

experiences and or need of the Ego to generate prestige and status, and could also stick to the belongingness category to support relations with friends and family.

Consumers purchase goods and services based on two main basic reasons: from the emotional perspective (hedonic) and a more instrumental perspective (utilitarian); but hedonic and utilitarian consumption are not necessarily the only two ends. Products can have different levels of hedonic and utilitarian attributes; one can be more hedonic but still have a utilitarian attribute. Like for example some basketball shoes, in the end it has a greater meaning and hedonic purpose for the consumer, and it also possesses the utilitarian aspects of a shoe. Thus, the measurement of both aspects of the reasoning behind consumption of individuals is of greater importance for marketers, because in conclusion it can provide researchers and marketers solutions to problems about focusing these different areas that heavily affect consumer behavior when consuming basketball services and goods.

The main point is related to Hedonic consumption, which includes aspects such as experiences and feelings generating emotional responses. Hirscham and Holbrook (1982) defined hedonic consumption as “those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products” (Hirscham and Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic products categorized by fun, pleasure or enjoyment emotions, are inclined to produce even fiercer emotional responses. The NBA produces hedonic products: basketball events and games. Consumers tend to allocate more importance to hedonic attributes and products rather than more utilitarian ones. This happens because the assessment of hedonic products is associated directly with the value of happiness, that may include building identification, socializing with friends and the excitement of the experience. Hedonic consumption has another important aspect which is the sensation of guilt, that when mitigated (thanks to good marketing) the hedonic consumption increases. It is also true that people also help to create reasons for buying hedonic products, even though in nature it is easier to give good reasons for buying utilitarian products rather than hedonic ones.

There are two types of factors in the sense of hedonic consumption. First of all, intrinsic factors which basically are the ones related to the individual and correspond to levels of satisfaction, they are the subjective determinants of leisure entertainment for the individual. And secondly, there is the extrinsic factors, which are the tangible elements incorporated to the service, like the NBA

game, and are related to the experience. An example of this last one would be the servicescape and includes all of those important elements mentioned before.

The individuals that choose the hedonic rationale over the utilitarian one, want something that can give them an experience and attractive affection. There is a sense of drama, action and many other emotions that surround the hedonistic experience that consumers experience when consuming an NBA game. Basketball creates high hedonic values, it is the main source of NBA revenue, the game themselves are the hedonic product delivered to the people.

(Yaromir Muñoz Molina, 2004) (Hirschman, E. C. and Holbrook, M. B. 1982) (Voss, K. E., Spangenberg, E. R., Grohmann, B. 2003) (Richins, M. L. 1997) (Okada, E. M. 2005)

#### **4.10 Structural Constraints related to attendance**

There are many structural constraints, many and diverse, that can affect the attendance of NBA games. These normally are under control by marketers and managers of the league, but as it will be explained, there needs to be a balance between the constraint and the attendance levels that work both for consumers and the revenues of the league.

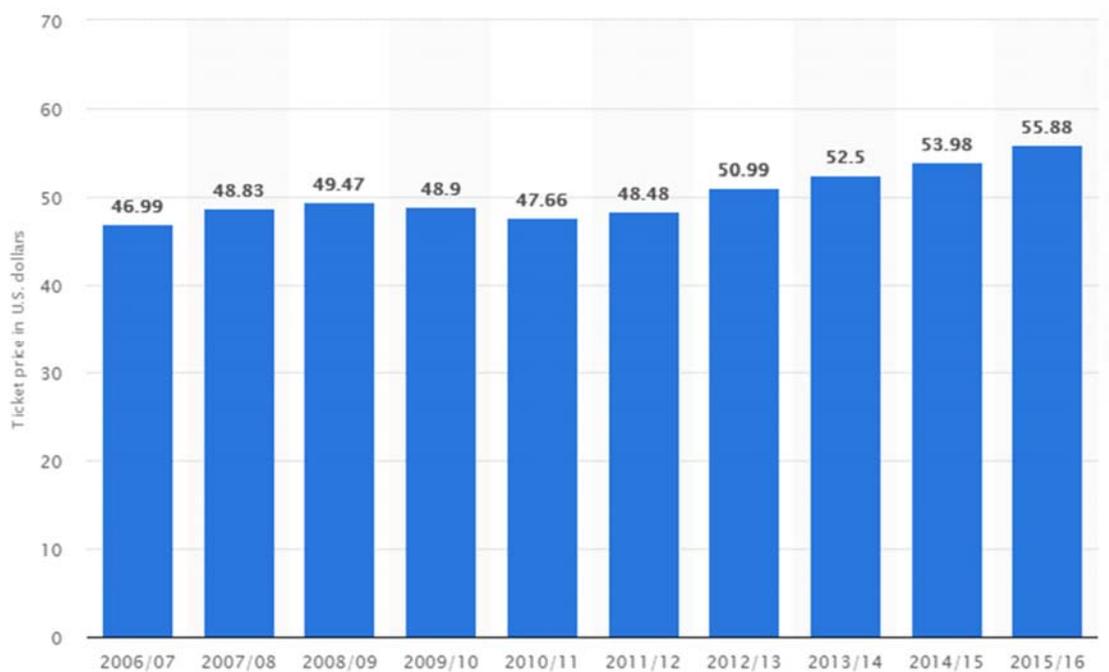
There are three main categories of structural constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural barriers. Intrapersonal refer to the persons psychological states and the effect on preferences such as reference groups or religiosity. Interpersonal are referred to the individual and its relationship with others. And last but not least, structural barriers are referred to interfering factors between leisure preferences and participation.

There is a need to organize, develop and categorize these structural constraints for spectators and potential ones of basketball games. For example, one structural constraint can be game ticket prices, that can suppose a negative effect on attendance of NBA games for consumers in the case that overpasses the expectation and demand for the games, in the sense of money spent. Also, another constraint found is the alternative and extra entertainment found in the sporting events such as NBA games, this refers to half-time shows, extra entertainment during games, entertainment during time-outs and even products given to attendants. This last example of leisure and entertainment extra activities hold a positive relation effect with attendance (and future

attendance) that normally tends to help with overpassing the expectations of attendees, which are expecting normally just a game of basketball and feel overwhelmed with more experience. Also, it can help increase demand for the games and with-it ticket prices. Sometimes for important events these half-time shows are marketed and promoted beforehand. Other examples that suppose negative effects on attendance are poor seat location, location or distance to the stadium, lack of team success, etc.

The conclusion is for marketers to analyze and categorize the relative importance of these constraints so that the impact can be controlled and reduce the lack of future attendance, marketers need to know the strengths of the constraints they posses an advantage in so that they can promote it and increase attendance levels.

(Galen T. Trail, Matthew J. Robinson, Yu Kyoum Kim, 2008)



Statista Average NBA ticket prices 2006-2015

#### 4.11 Reference Groups

Reference groups are the heart and soul of the NBA's marketing strategy, as of many other sports in the world. In theory, reference groups are a determinant of the consumer behavior. Reference groups are in fact actual or imaginary groups conceived as having relevance upon individual's evaluations, aspirations or behaviors. Such as for example basketball players and or teams, especially players, there is a modeling effect with these groups in the sense that consumers of the NBA want to imitate the same behaviors as the reference groups.

This also creates communities, because individuals seek out others who share the same interests in products and services. There are different types of reference groups: First of all Brand Communities, in which groups of consumers share a set of social relationships based on the usage an interest for a product, for example the NBA it self has created a community that distinguishes from others in the sense of being fans of the sport and fans of the league, and also individuals have several ramifications into different team communities (being fan of a specific team) or player ramifications (being fan of certain players). People that participate in these communities create positive feelings and embrace loyalty for the brand, thus highly affecting their consumption patterns in behavior. Other type of reference group relative to the subject are Positive and Negative Reference groups, one for consumers to model after and the other to avoid, this can be for example fan team vs the rival team and the creation of both a positive reference group vs the negative group.

These reference groups create significant effects on consumers that affect the actual and future behaviors such as conformity, which is the change in beliefs or actions as a reaction to group pressure. These aspects of conformity that affect NBA reference groups are:

- Fear of deviance: in which individuals fear sanctions of not following the behaviors group, like for example not liking certain players and or products of the reference group but later accepting in order to avoid punishment or to gain social group acceptance.
- Commitment: the more people to dedicate value for the reference group the greater their motivation.
- Group unanimity, size and expertise: the more power the reference group has, the greater the compliance and it is harder to resist the demands of a larger group.

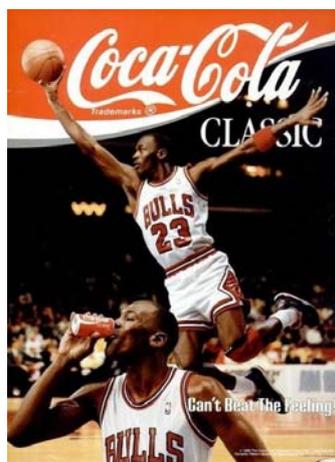
- Susceptibility to interpersonal influence: it is the need of recognition from other members of the reference group.

Social power has several ramifications, but the one that can be exemplified to the NBA is the referent power, in which a person admires another, like admiring and following your favorite NBA player, and will copy and follow the referent behaviors. So, if one of those players promotes a certain product or service, the consumers that see that player as a referent, will tend to those same products and services due to the referent power effect of social power.

(Bearden, W. O. and Etzel, M. J. 1982) (Cocanougher, A.B. and Bruce, G. D. 1971) (Escalas, J. E. and Bettman, J. R. 2005)

## 5. ADVERTISING MARKETING

Advertising has become one of, if not the most, important commercial activities in the sports environment. Franchises and organizations assign a large portion of those advertising budgets to create and maintain their brands (brand awareness and loyalty) to maintain their consumers entertained and hooked to the sport. It is common for a consumer to repeat purchases when he is exposed to effective advertising campaigns, and those campaigns have created long lasting memories that jump even generations of consumers, specially in the NBA. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise the significant effect and resources invested towards advertisement marketing in consumer behavior



Coca-Cola Commercial sponsored by Michael Jordan

To understand how to create effective advertising campaigns, a number of scholars have relied on a dichotomy approach:

- 1) An emotional appeal
- 2) A rational appeal

Emotional appeals are used to activate those feelings that fans have towards their favorite teams and players. Historic wins, fans images celebrating, highlights of top plays etc., are what comprise emotions of excitement, pride that help maintain and create an image very attractive for sports consumers. The NBA uses these kinds of promotions every day, they promote and sponsor the best athletes every year giving them the image that will attract consumers.

Rational appeals are used to provide information about teams: locations, dates of games, information of trades of players, new coach and staff etc. This would seem less relevant to elicit great responses from consumers but in reality they do not need to be exclusively separated from the emotional ones, for example when a trade occurs on paper it follows the rationale appeal when presented to the fans, but it is that same rational appeal that evokes an emotional appeal from the fans as there are different reactions that follow certain trends to the trade.

While the studies of the target of emotions or cognition in marketing advertising have shown inconsistent and conflicted findings about which one is more effective, both have been acknowledged to contribute strongly to the understanding of the appeal of advertisement on consumer behavior.

## **5.1 Consumer Advertising Schemas**

The notion of advertising schemas is a new stream of marketing research. It holds that new advertising will be processed by people efficiently by comparing it to memories of prototypic ads.

A schema a cognitive structure in the mind of consumers that guides the persons perception based on previous knowledge and information that has been gained through experience or other sources

like media exposure. One key feature of schemas is the ability to combine affective and behavioral response to stimuli, like for example advertising schemas.

In this paradigm, the consumer processes a marketing communication or message by observing visual contextual cues from a specific advertisement, and this same type had already been saved in their memory thanks to experience, so they relate both concepts messages more rapid.



For example, the NBA uses on most of their commercials for League Pass and Tickets of NBA or even events like the All-star, quick highlights of recent and past impactful plays that occurred during NBA games, with well-known basketball athletes, to attract the instant attention of consumers. What happens is that as soon as you view in a commercial and NBA player or a similar schema, the thought recovery

memory process reveals instantly the communication of the advertisement to out comprehension. You will in the end recognize almost instantly the content that is promoted. This advertisement method tends to be very effective, but it has a downside of its repetition method, which is the advertisement wear-out effect that happens when the consumer is exposed to excessive repetition and grows tired and indifferent of the advertisement. What marketers do is small cosmetic variations to maintain the same schema but at the same time avoid that negative advertisement wear-out effect so that consumers keep hooked and instantly recognize the advertisement.

(Seunghwan Lee, Bob Heere, 2018)

## 6. CORONAVIRUS AND THE NBA

(a remark for the current global pandemic crisis and its situation with respect the NBA)

It all started the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, when two players of the Utah Jazz tested positive: first Rudy Gobert and later on Donovan Mitchell. Following these events, starting on Thursday the NBA would cancel the season indefinitely. It all happened surprisingly fast and unexpected, as there was no

talk about a lockdown for the US until later, and followed with decisions from teams like the Warriors to play with no fans when at home games, and not later the 11<sup>th</sup> of March events. The decision was to ensure the safeguard, health, and well-being of everybody (fans, players...). Commissioner Adam Silver posted a letter directed to NBA fans to update on the situation.

The NBA knows the situation and is looking for solutions for everything: the remainder of the season, the playoffs and finals, revenue streams, money refund to clients... For the moment to cushion the effect of having no entertainment the NBA has used many things like for example a 2K (basketball videogame) tournament between players, a HORSE challenge through videocalls between players (a competition of basketball shots), podcasts and other news sources of sports have kept up to date with current situations and other entertainment talks, and the NBA has been posting classics games almost every day for fans to freely watch.

Players individually are getting creative and are filling their time doing livestreams to entertain and connect with fans of the sport. Q&As, Videogames and social media have been ways for players to keep entertaining.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Sports marketing is a subdivision inside marketing originated formally in the 1870s in the USA, it is providing a large source of revenue (about an expected 83.1 million just for the USA) and its main challenge is to adapt to future situations. On the other hand, within sports, the NBA is a professional basketball league of the United States formed in the year 1949 and its main expansion process was thanks to commissioner David Stern. It follows a franchise business model with 30 franchises in the form of basketball teams that all belong to one single league association.

In terms of consumer behavior concepts: the more involvement a consumer has with the NBA, the more loyalty and consumption will be linked to the business, also it represents a way for individuals to express themselves and their deep seeded attitudes. Sponsorship and promotion go way beyond just attracting new consumers, but rather can redefine attitudes and behavior of individuals for the future. The NBA's marketing follows an approach-avoidance approach in

which the main factor is time spent consuming (games, entertainment...) and the approach to watch more and the avoidance to spend unnecessary time watching the sport. Concepts like structural constraints and more specifically the servicescape and atmospheric music are controllable factors with a great importance on consumers that marketers from the NBA focus on. The NBA promotes and sells hedonic products and services, so it is necessary the understanding of its concepts and applications towards consumers. Reference groups represent a greater importance and reference point for the NBA as a tool to heavily promote their business and image of such.

And about advertising, one of the most used ways of the NBA to promote their business, products and services is through advertising schemas, that possess a heavy impact for consumers.

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