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Consumer Socialization and Intergenerational Brand Loyalty in the Context of Soccer

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Consumer Socialization and Intergenerational Brand Loyalty in the Context of Soccer

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the intergenerational evangelization of new supporters. Through the ethnography of two rival football clubs in Brazil, we show how engaged supporters transmit the club mythology through ordinary and extraordinary rituals. We discuss the implications of this process for studies on intergenerational influences, brand loyalty, and family identity.

INTRODUCTION

With few exceptions, the pattern is: you are “Colorado” [Sport Club Internacional supporter] or you are “Gremista” [Grêmio Foot-Ball Porto Alegre supporter] because of your father, your mother or because of your grandfather, isn’t it? I’ll never forget when my father took me for the first time to the Beira-Rio [stadium]. I’ll never forget when my grandfather used to take me to the matches. There is this feeling; it passes through it. This is something I see more and more, fathers and mothers, grandparents, that thing, building that loyalty: I’m Colorado, of course, I’m red, right? (Eduardo, International Supporter and sports sponsor representative).

Studies on intergenerational influences posit that parents pass brand preferences and attachment to brands to their children in the course of socialization process (John 1999; Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002; Grisaffe and Nguyen 2011). In some cases, such influence on brand loyalty can be stronger than those of traditional marketing variables (Gil, Andrés, and Salinas 2007). This suggests an important relationship between the consumption activities within a household and the production of what we understand as “family” (Moiso, Arnould, and Price 2004). Advancing on the scientific enactment of these relationships, studies from different streams of consumer research have demonstrated that objects (Curassi, Price, and Arnould 2004), brands (Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002), and specific family practices (Epp and Price 2010) contribute to the formation of family identity as older passes it to newer generations (Epp and Price 2008).

Despite having generated important insights on the outcomes of intergenerational influences, extant literature falls short on the understanding of the very nature of the processes through which parents socialize children into their preferences, tastes, and consumption values. Extant research generically points out that, as young consumers evolve in life stages, they will learn through observation (John 1999; Gil, Andrés, and Salinas 2007), develop a set perceptions about their parents (Cotte and Wood 2004), and cumulate transmitted information (Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002). Moreover, in cases of products or brands with strong family identity value, the literature remains silent. So, how do families socialize their children to products, brands, or myth markets with strong identity value? And, how does family identity is reproduced by in this process?

We seek to answer these questions through the analysis of the intra-familial evangelization of new supporters of two football clubs in Brazil. In this context, club partisanship –or clubism– is strongly mediated by a passion that one generation pass to the next (Damo, 2005). Through an ethnographic research, we seek to understand how such “passion” is created and kept alive through a careful process of “evangelization” of young supporters by their parents, who need to make sure their children do not support the greatest rival club. This process is rich in “narratives, rituals, social dramas, and everyday interactions” (Epp and Price 2008, p. 61) that include many consumption activities and market-mediated resources, and becomes

central to the family identity itself. As the family socializes children as supporters of one club, they become unconditionally loyal for life.

As we uncover the evangelization process of new supporters and how it co-constitutes family identity, we provide an extreme context to contribute to three important ongoing discussions in consumer research. First, we enhance our understanding of the nature of intergenerational influences. Second, we provide insights to the discussion on the formation of strong brand preferences and brand loyalty (Fournier 1998). And third, we deepen our understanding of the ways in which consumption activities and market resources help in the process of family identity building in the earlier stages of their life-cycle.

CONTEXT AND THEORY

In order to understand the evangelization of new supporters, we dived into the universe of one of the most intense club rivalries in Brazilian football. Grêmio de Foot-Ball Porto Alegre (Grêmio) and Sport Club Internacional (Inter) are among the biggest Brazilian teams, each counting around 6 million self-identified supporters (Globo Esporte 2014). In this context, club “choice” is strongly influenced by family. Damo (1998) shows that 70% of both club supporters have chosen their club by direct influence of family members. In a further investigation, he found an 80% match between son/daughter and father’s club partisanship. To understand the nature of this influence, we trace the main mediators operating in this social space (Latour 2005).

First, it is important to realise that football is a game, a form of agonistic ritual, which separates winners from losers every match. It is a modern sport, early developed within the Romantic ethic of eternal love and amateurship (Campbell 2005; Elias e Dunning 1985)

Football was brought to Brazil by European immigrants, who were among the founders of the first Brazilian clubs (Damo 1998; Mascarenhas 2000). Grêmio was founded in 1903 by a group of young German descendants. Inter, by its turn, raised as two Italian descendants had their membership request in Grêmio rejected because of its rigid (racial/elitist) criteria for association. Offended, they founded Inter in 1909 (Coimbra and Noronha 1994). Rivalry among clubs evolved and made them grow while consolidating their differences in supporters’ imaginary. By the 1950, they were two big clubs with growing capitals, including massive communities of supporters. Supporters, by that time, started to think of themselves as “Gremistas” (Grêmio Supporters) and “Colorados” (Inter supporters) (Damo 2005); two *nations* in the form of imagined communities of feeling (Anderson 2008; Damo 2005).

The more elitist, racist and rigid criteria for participation in Grêmio, compared to Inter, made this two imagined communities evolve, think and feel themselves through basic social dichotomies (rich/poor, elite/working class, white/black, arrogant/humble). Notwithstanding today’s social similarity among both supporter’s communities, their historical agonistic constitution remains central to supporters identities and club partisanship meaning. Clubs represent and enact social differences circulating in society through club partisanship –the myth– in a form of modern totemism, with clubs being the totems (Damo 2005).

Second, the agonistic nature of the football game and of Grêmio and Inter imagined communities historical constitution, imply that every match may become an opportunity for joking with each

other (also when they play against other teams). Joking relationships (Mauss 1979) enact the circulation of emotions that constitute club partisanship (pride, honor, glory, shame, infamy, ruin). In Brazilian football, jocosities get a strong sexual connotation. This might be a source of tensions when family members support rival clubs (Damo 2005).

As shown before, the “choice” of the “club of the heart” by young supporters is strongly influenced by family members who are fanatic supporters. This connection suggests that the strong fidelity of club partisanship is in part due to the drifting of kinship mediations (Damo 2005). Kinship is constituted by “blood ties” that are bonds of solidarity “deeply affective, deeply binding, actually breakable but to be broken under the most unusual, tragic, unforgivable circumstances” (Schneider 1992, p.195). In a space strongly mediated by parents/children blood ties, the jocosities with sexual connotation evoke symbolic incest, a taboo in Brazil. Here we have an important mediation for club fidelity: parents who are fanatic supporters do not want to “passivize” or be “passivized” every week by their children. They avoid that by evangelizing their beloved ones have the same club passion.

All these mediations (game as agonistic ritual; historical rivalry; clubism as a form of modern totemism; supporters as imagined communities of feeling; the flow of jocosities that get sexual connotation; and the strong influence of family in child club choice), contribute to the notion that club partisanship *must* be passed from generation to generation in the context of engaged supporters of Grêmio and Inter. But, how does it happen? What are the practices, the consumption activities, and market resources that form the network of actors that enact the evangelization process? Before answering this question, we turn to methods.

METHOD

We conducted our research following the onto-epistemological tenets of actor-network-theory (Callon 1998; Latour 2005; Law 2004). We collected data from the universe of two big Brazilian clubs as part of broader research program on the interrelated uncertainties about marketing, consumption and emotions. As natives of Brazilian clubism (first and second author are respectively Grêmio and Inter supporters) we have been evangelized and evangelized other sup-

porters. This embodied condition colored our data interpretation and made us possess the basic knowledge to become able to “speak to the natives in their own language” (Geertz 2012). Having the native condition as a point of departure, we tried to reassemble the wider network of mediations that constitute this universe.

First author has conducted the two main fieldworks, one in each of the focal clubs. The main concern during Inter fieldwork was with the understanding of club passion itself and the possible relations it has with consumption. Grêmio fieldwork was oriented towards tracing the specific mediations of marketing to club passion. In both cases, the mutual constitution of club partisanship, family and market resources were observed. We collected data through participant and non-participant observation in supporters’ homes, football matches, marketing action, formal and informal interviews, and document/historical analysis. First author wrote a total of 254 pages of observations across the two fieldworks; conducted twenty-eight interviews of one hour of duration on average with supporters (8) and producers who are also supporters (20); took and analysed more than 300 hundred photos and shot more 40 hours of video.

For this paper, evidences of the mutual constitution of family and club partisanship came mainly from the first fieldwork. These evidences were selected and kept in a separate archive. Inspired by the hermeneutic approach (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995; Thompson 1997), we fluctuated through parts and the whole data set, challenging interpretations, and generation insights about what we called the evangelization of new supporters.

FINDINGS

I will make a huge effort for her to be Colorada (Inter supporter). I know that afterwards at school [she will suffer other influences], but no way. Today she looks at Inter’s emblem and talks “Inter, Inter”. It is a brainwashing, I know. (Ricardo, supporter)

For engaged supporters, club partisanship is emotionally embodied and becomes central to their individual and familial identity. In this context, transmitting the club mythology from generation to generation becomes a social obligation, as consequence of the mediations above elaborated. Supporters do so through a series of ordinary and extraordinary rituals, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Rituals of Socialization

	Rituals	Characteristic	Human actors	Non-human actors
Ordinary	Association	Early conditioning to like club’s motives	Parents	Red (x blue) stuff, songs, chants, stadium, etc.
	Interacting with the media	Daily watching, reading and listening to sports’ shows	Parents, journalists, players	Media, TV sets, newspapers, radios, house, cars, etc.
	Joking and mocking	Jocosities usually directed to rival supporters	Parents, older relatives, parent’s friends, classmates	Jokes, history, championships, matches, etc.
	Storytelling	Narratives about the glories of the past	Parents, past players	Past games, books, DVDs, museums, etc.
Extraordinary	Going to the stadium	Extraordinary experiences of match day on the stadium	Parents, players, fellow supporters, referee, rival supporters, vendors	Stadium and surroundings, ball
	Materializing the club	Special interactions with the club	Parents, players, shops’ personal, club’s employees	Club products, especially shirts, stadium, museum, etc.
	Celebration of victories	Celebrations of important wins and championships	Parents, players, fellow supporters, journalists	Cars, honks, streets, trophies, etc.

Ordinary Rituals

To the purpose of this research, rituals are regarded as the “symbolic form of communication repeated in a stereotypic fashion”. It can be either the most visible family celebrations and traditions as well as the less acknowledged patterned routines within a household (Bennett, Wolin, and McAvity 1988, p. 216; Rook, 1985). Ordinary rituals are important to consumer socialization, in general (John 1999). When reflecting about how they became a supporter, several informants remembered such rituals enacted by their parents or relatives, which they are also promoting with their children.

Rituals of association are one of the first ways parents employ to socialize their children into the club’s universe. Such rituals include the early conditioning of children to like everything that is red (therefore good) (Inter’s color), in opposition to what is blue, the color of the rival. It includes the systematic teaching of the club’s motives, colors, players, and songs, as immediate and readily observable perceptual features (John 1999) of relevant club elements. Ricardo, for instance, sings Inter chants on different occasions and used to sing club’s anthem as a bedtime song to his one-year-old daughter. In other cases, parents reported encouraging their children to cheer (or boo) when they happen to see the anything related to the team (or rival).

Local sports media has a prevalent role in representing and reproducing the club’s universe, often through the lenses of Inter versus Grêmio rivalry. In this context, *interacting with the media* becomes a daily ritual. When talking about their early club related memories, some of our informants fondly remembered when they used to see their fathers reading the papers and listening to the radio football news on daily situation, as going to school. These rituals were particularly important after great winnings/loses, which were taken as moments of rejoicing/agonies that extend the emotions generated by the matches’ results.

Generally mediated by the interaction with the media is the usual *joking and mocking* against rival supporters. This takes place in several social interactions within the realm of school, work colleagues, close friends, and the few opposite supporters from the extended family in such way that children grow up getting used to this type of brand related interaction (Fournier, 1998). For instance, it is usual for an older relative or friend to the parents to ask which team the child supports and joke (e.g. “you sufferer”, “I’m sorry”) or compliment (e.g. “how smart”, “look like a champion!”) depending on the answer. Parents ordinarily make jokes against the rival team in the presence their children, reinforcing their feelings for one club against the other.

Another set of rituals involves the often nostalgic *storytelling* about the glories, the dramas, the heroes, great victories and “battles” of the past. When reflecting about how they became Colorados, our informants make sense of how such stories used to impress them during childhood and pre-teen years. “It was my father who taught me to be Colorado, who taught me to go to Beira Rio [stadium], who always told me Inter’s stories, the amazing matches, the building of Beira Rio [with brick donations from supporters]” (Cluvio). The marketing departments of both clubs seem to understand the importance of such stories in order to keep alive the myth of the club. They seek to materialize it in the museums, books, DVDs of great accomplishments, posters, among others.

These four types of ordinary rituals mediate the creation of children’s passion for the club, building a sense of belonging to an imagined community of feeling, which becomes an actor in the network of family and club partisanship relations.

Extraordinary Rituals

Extraordinary rituals help to crystallize the associations built in ordinary rituals due to its special dimensions, detached from regular daily life. We identified three main extraordinary rituals that contribute to the evangelization of new supporters.

Going to the stadium is the most important of the rituals. All of our informants remember going to the stadium as among the most special parent/child experience they use to have. The atmosphere of the stadium, the crowd, the intense expression and sharing of collective emotions, and everything that involves the colorful, noisy, and carnivalesque spectacle (Bakhtin 1984) seems to intensify the ties with the club, as Cluvio exemplifies:

You don’t have much idea of the game. But, game after game you start to get the sense of what the game is, to learn the colors. I see it from Junior [younger brother]. From very young, he could not even talk, but he knew what Inter and Grêmio were. It is very much a family thing. Just like when my father used to take me, match day was ice-cream and unlimited soda day.

Matches are extraordinary experiences for children and get engraved in their memories for life. Those informants who now have children report to take them to the stadium after a meticulous process of game choice to increase the chances of a positive experience (especially related to winning). This way, parents evangelize children through experiencing stadium with a different and special corporeal state that prepare their sensibilities for the tensions of the game. The stadium can also be a place for eating goodies, where children are allowed to call names, and where they can spend quality time with their parents through the experiencing of strong positive and negative emotions. During both fieldworks, we could witness such rituals going on. It was common to see parents taking their children by hand, teaching the chants, swearing together to the referee, and encouraging the children to celebrate scorings, as the pinnacle of the game, in a very expressive and emotional manner.

The second set of extraordinary rituals involve the different forms that parents *materialize the club* to their children. This comprehends taking them to club experiences, such as trainings, meetings with players, guided visits to the stadiums and museums, as well as buying all kinds of club paraphernalia, from t-shirts to pacifiers. Our informants who are parents deliberately buy many kinds of products to their children in order to “surround them with red”. Among these, one particular possession is designed to almost seal the children’s fate as a supporter: the club membership. Some of our informants got the membership from their parents when they were very young –which help them claim that they were “born Colorados”– while others enrolled their newborns in the first months of their lives.

The last of the rituals involve the celebration of victories. From the honking at the stadium exit after winning a game, to the celebration of important championships, such moments get registered as very special ones in young supporters’ memories, who feel rewarded. Indeed, that is one of the earliest childhood memories of Cluvio, who remembers “when we won the Brazilian [Championship] in 1979 my father made a huge red and white kite to celebrate it.” To all of them, the winning of Copa Libertadores (the equivalent to the European Champions League) and the FIFA Club World Cup in 2006 was considered a redemption for all “dry” times, which was celebrated as something that compensated “all the suffering of the 80’s” (Barbara).

Taken together, ordinary and extraordinary rituals co-constitute a network that create and reinforce a sense of (family and club) com-

munity among evangelized supporters. As their lives are mediated by the deliberate efforts –enacted as gifts that transmit meanings (McCracken 1986)– of association and conditioning to preference formation, children get more and more involved, effectively embodying club passion. As these rituals are enacted by their most important references (parents) and associated with the circulation of strong and incarnated emotions relevant to their identity, children develop emotional bonds that mediate their family relations. As the time passes, the relationship between family as a whole and in different familial dyads is reproduced and reinforced through club partisanship, such as: when a son starts to take part in dinner table soccer conversations; when the whole family attends a game or gather around the couch to watch it at home; when, at the stadium, older and younger brother hug each other after every scoring; when a 36-year-old daughter gets a surprise birthday party from the entire family with Inter's motives; and when a wife announces her pregnancy to her husband with Inter's baby t-shirt saying: "now you will have someone to put this t-shirt". It also manifests in our (researchers) own experience, when after many years, the evangelized son starts to take his father to the games, reversing roles, as in the case of the first author. Or when, as in the case of the second author, during the streets' celebration of the most important championship in the history of the club, his younger brother in tears hugs him and says: "Thank you, brother".

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We analyzed the process of socialization of new supporters in the context two rival Brazilian clubs. Football club fans are conceived as imagined communities of feeling (Anderson 2008; Damo 2005). As such, they carry strong identity value (Holt 2002; Holt 2004). To pass the club's mythology along, our informants engage in ordinary and extraordinary rituals, which can be both intentional and non-intentional. We now discuss the threefold nature of our contribution.

Epp and Price (2008) advocate that "we might better understand intergenerational influence processes by examining how particular brands are embedded in family and relational identity enactments" (p. 55). Our study provides an extreme context to understand intergenerational influences on brand relationships embedded in larger system of social relations (Fournier 1999). Here, parents work to evangelize children, reducing potential threats that supporting the rival team might bring to the social order within the household. This helps to provide alternative explanations for intergenerational influences on consumers' preference formation beyond dominant cognitive models (Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002; Cotte and Wood 2004; Gil, Andrés, and Salinas 2007). We show that in some cases, preference development is not only an outcome of observation, imitation, or direct learning. It is also carefully constructed by parents through an emotionally charged process. By uncovering the sociocultural mediators that make evangelizing "a must do" for engaged supporters, we answer Fournier's (1998) call to understand the specific processes through which strong and long lasting brand loyalties are constructed.

The cognitive approaches to consumer socialization tend to treat it as a natural and unintended process that parents do when performing their socially ascribed roles. Our study highlights a context where parents are fully active in the process also because of the mediation of forces circulating from different sociocultural spaces. With this, we show that the actors constituting brand and brand loyalty go far away in time and space from "simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer" (Fournier 1998, p.344).

Our analysis might also shed light on consumer socialization controversies in the contexts of brands, product categories, and life-

styles with strong identity value for consumers and high competition among opposing parties. Similar processes could be found in cases such as Apple x PC (Muñiz and Schau 2005), American x Japanese automobiles (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and anti-consumption x consumerism (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010). We propose the potential existence of an agonistic dimension of brand loyalty development in addition to Fournier's (1998) elements, as brands may become totemic enactments of socially relevant differences, as in the case of Grêmio x Inter rivalry.

Finally, our analysis deepens the understanding of the ways in which family identity is mediated by consumption practices (Epp and Price 2008). The process of evangelization is made through rituals that systematically produce associations between the individual, the club, and the family. These rituals produce emotional bonds that accumulate in family memory and are made persistent through the materiality of club elements. As the time passes and socialized consumers are fully invested in the passion, club partisanship becomes an important mediator that reproduces families' subjective sense of collectivity and continuity over time.

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