

Customer service, traditional media, social media and customer patronage for the St. Louis Blues

Rachel Ford

## **ABSTRACT**

This research was performed pertaining to the Saint Louis Blues. The method used was a questionnaire given to participants at McKendree University and also at Monsanto. The author looked at the independent variables of social media, traditional media, and customer service in relation to the dependent variable of consumer attitude. Then, the author looked at attitude as an independent variable in relation to customer patronage as a dependent variable. All variables were reliable except customer patronage. Hypotheses included whether social media influenced consumers' attitudes (H1), traditional media influenced consumers' attitudes (H2), customer service influenced consumers' attitudes (H3), and consumer attitude influenced customer patronage (H4). H2 and H4 were supported through this study.

## **INTRODUCTION**

All professional sports teams have one common goal: to get as many consumers to purchase tickets and come to their games as often as possible. The professional sports teams would like those customers to repurchase tickets, purchase food and drinks, and purchase merchandise at the games all in the grand scheme of creating a profit while making their customers happy. Research has shown that consumers attend professional sports games for more than the result of the game; they go there for the experiences and memories (Miller and Johnson, 2008). Marketing staff of professional sports teams have to look at not only how they will get people coming to the games but also at their fierce competition. Miller and Johnson (2008) have concluded that natural attractions, amusement parks, racetracks, concerts, live performances, and cultural events are all competing for consumers' discretionary spending. Even other professional sports teams in the same vicinity can hinder consumer attendance and spending. Outcome of the game is also a factor when fans are determining whether they should purchase tickets. Coates and Humphreys (2012) performed research on expected outcome of games of a team in the National Hockey League, and how it affected attendance. Their results showed that when it is expected that a team will win, attendance will rise, and when it is expected that the team will lose or that it will be a close game, attendance will fall.

With many factors that can determine attendance at games, it is important for professional sports teams to focus on customer service as well as promotion through traditional media and through social media. These variables are important because they can be controlled by the marketing staff who work for those teams, while other variables that have been researched are dependent on consumer decisions.

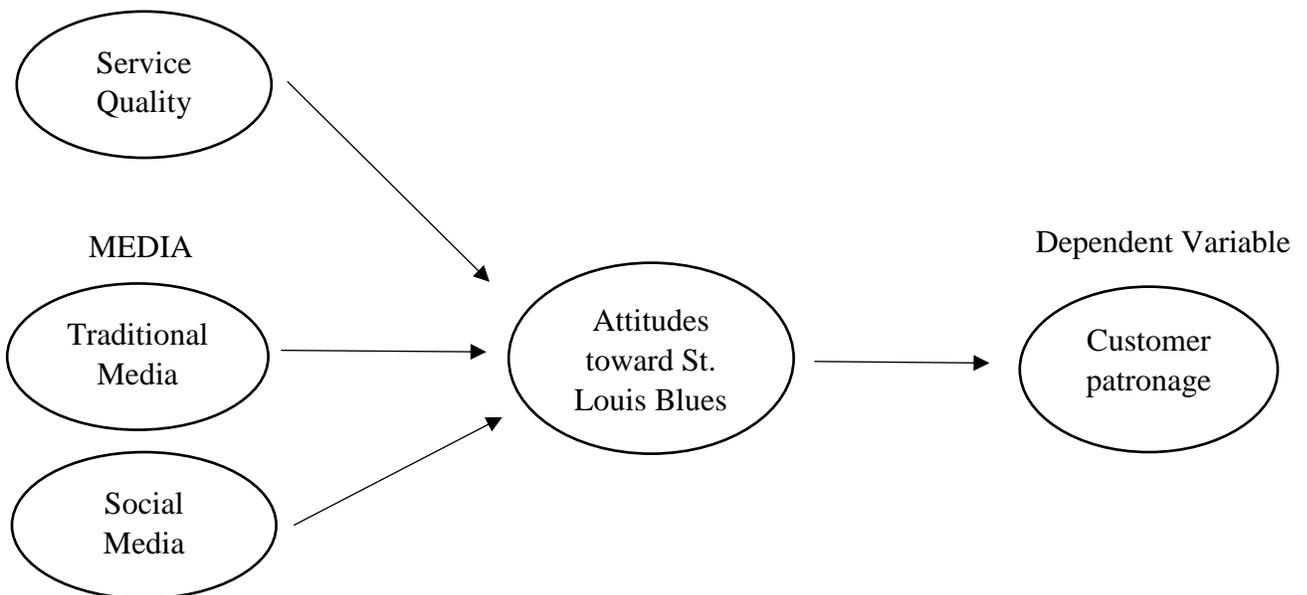
According to Aminiroshan, Sharifian, and Siyadat (2014), many consumers decide to purchase sport-based products based on promotions and advertisements. This makes it very important for companies in sport to focus on promotional activities, specifically through social media, and advertisements, mainly through traditional media channels, as well as customer service of staff. Media, both social and traditional, is crucial to emphasize when discussing promoting a product or service. Companies spend around \$130 billion on advertising by traditional media, such as television, print, radio, and outdoor, each year. They are now gradually changing to social media in order to be more interactive with consumers (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeftang, 2017). Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016) state, “recent business reports have suggested that total spending on social media advertising has increased worldwide (\$17.74 billion in 2014 vs. \$11.36 billion in 2013)” (p. 7). With so much money being focused on social media advertising, companies must ensure that they use it correctly and efficiently in order to deter any wasted funds. Batra and Keller (2016) have researched the importance of new media integrated marketing communications which includes social media as well as some traditional media activities such as television and traditional advertisements. They have found that the use of integrated marketing communications with new media can positively affect customer loyalty and customer trust in an organization. If used correctly, these factors can help the Saint Louis Blues create more interest in going to games, leading to more consumers spending their night, as well as their money, at Saint Louis Blues games.

The Saint Louis Blues are a professional hockey team located in Saint Louis, Missouri. They have been playing in the National Hockey League (NHL) since 1967. They have had two arenas, the first being the Saint Louis arena and the second being Scottrade Center, which is located in downtown Saint Louis where they currently play. The Saint Louis Blues have had

memorable moments in their past, such as the “Monday Night Miracle” and the Bridgestone Winter Classic, and huge, star players including Brett Hull and Vladimir Tarasenko that keep fans pouring in for games, despite not winning a Stanley Cup before (*Blues History*).

## MODEL

Independent Variables



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### MEDIA

#### *Traditional Media*

Traditional media is the first variable researched in this study. Companies spend millions of dollars to market through traditional media every year, making it a very important variable to research. James, Albrecht, Litchfield, and Weishaar (2013) researched effects of different marketing efforts, including traditional media, for a food safety campaign. The goal of this campaign was to make the general population more aware of the safe practices when dealing with leftovers: one should throw them away within four days. They used different methods

within the spectrum of traditional media including posters with pull-off sections, magnets, public service announcements (PSA) were broadcasted by radio stations and television stations, and a campaign mascot was created and visited different local grocery stores. In their study, James et al. (2013) found that traditional media was a useful way to get people aware of the message their campaign was trying to get across. People who were in the pilot test communities (communities that the researchers placed posters, ran television PSAs, ran radio PSAs, and set up a stand with the mascot of the campaign in grocery stores) were shown to be significantly more likely to be aware of the campaign than others. They were also more likely to participate in the campaign's practices (throwing away leftover food within four days). This study is significant because it shows that through the advertisements of traditional media, people became significantly more aware of the campaign. Also, they changed their behaviors because of the campaign's message through traditional media advertising.

Another study focusing on traditional media was performed by de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2017). They looked at the effects of traditional advertising, as well as other media marketing such as social media, on acquiring customers and brand image of a company. To research this, they collected data from a European telecom firm and Nielson, which is a data-collection firm in the United Kingdom. There was 119 weeks-worth of data collected on traditional media that included the company's spending on television, radio, print, and outdoor advertising. De Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2017) analyzed the data through a VAR model with exogenous variables. Their results showed that traditional media was the most effective way to build a brand image and acquire customers compared to firm to consumer impressions and consumer to consumer social messages. Traditional media was the main source of building a brand image, and firm to consumer impressions and consumer to consumer social messages

enhanced what messages the traditional media displayed. Many companies are choosing to spend less on traditional media and more on social media, hoping that consumer relations will get better through interaction between the company and the consumers; this study shows the importance of maintaining the expenditures of traditional media. It also shows that it is important to have both traditional media advertising and social media advertising because traditional media advertising creates the brand image and acquires customers, and social media advertising enhances the message and brand image that traditional media advertising puts forward. Companies should ensure that their social media messages agree with their traditional media identity to get the best results of revenue and customer acquisition.

Traditional media can be generated and paid for by the company in channels it controls, which is owned media, it can be owned and created by another company or person unrelated to the company it is about, called earned media, and it can be paid for by the company in channels it does not control, called paid media (Stephen and Galak, 2012). Previously researched by Stephen and Galak (2012), traditional earned media can include word of mouth between consumers, consumers showing other consumers a product, and professional media outlets, such as newspapers or televised news broadcasts. Examples of traditional owned media are press releases provided by the company, brochures and hand-outs, and in-store displays. Traditional paid media includes television, print, outdoor, and radio advertising. In their study, Stephen and Galak (2012) researched Kiva, which is a company that facilitates microlending, between January 1, 2007 and March 2, 2008. They found that traditional earned media's per-event effect on sales was the highest of the variables they studied, most likely because traditional media outlets have a high reach. These findings are significant because they show the importance of

traditional earned media, meaning companies should focus on things like word of mouth and televised news broadcasts as well as their internal advertising and marketing efforts.

### *Social Media*

The next independent variable researched is social media. Social media is a relatively new medium of advertisement and marketing that can lead to extensive consumer awareness, high consumer and company interaction, and eventually revenue for a company. Bilos and Galic (2016) performed a study in a university in Croatia. One of the authors' main research questions pertained to the effects of digital marketing relating to the university sports. They used a questionnaire to find out what were the students' main forms of coming across information about university sports, and they surveyed ten percent of the student population. Results of Bilos and Galic's (2016) research include that around 94% of the students use the internet many times a day, the most popular social media site to find information about university sports used by respondents was Facebook, and it was very rare that participants found out about university sports through television, radio, or any other traditional media. This study is important because companies must ensure they use the correct medium to contact their target markets, and it shows that if a company, especially a sport organization, wants to target a student-aged segment they should use an internet medium such as social media, particularly Facebook.

The study performed by Stephen and Galak (2012) previously mentioned in the traditional media section also applies to social media, considering they studied both variables in relation to sales. Like traditional media, social media can be considered any of the following categories: paid media, which is media that the company creates, owned media, which is also media that the company creates but is only released in channels that the company itself controls, and earned media, which is media that is related to the company but is not generated by the

company itself (Stephen and Galak, 2012). The authors studied a microlending company for a little over a year. Because microlending is a nonprofit organization, they considered the loans as sales and the number of loans made on the website each day as daily sales volume. Specifically, they focused on earned media, with social earned media being blog and online community posts, and its effect on sales. After analyzing the data, Stephen and Galak's (2016) results showed that social media had the most long-term sales elasticity and the highest long-term return when focused on average daily activity. Because of this, the authors concluded that social media is more effective in creating extra sales than traditional media. Companies should focus on social media when they think they have saturated the current marketing medium they are pursuing.

Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, and Kannan (2016) reiterate the importance that companies should place on social media. Their study focuses on a retailer that specializes in wine and spirits that operates in the northeastern United States. This retailer had been active on social media for around two years before the research was conducted, and they used the popular social media site to interact with consumers by posting promotional and nonpromotional messages. Kumar et al. (2016) concentrated on how the firm-generated content posted by the retailer on the popular social media platform affected consumer spending, cross-buying, and profitability. They collected data through the social media platform (how interactive customers were with the company), in-store transaction data (what consumers purchased and how much they spent), and a survey conducted by the researchers (how much participants used social media, how active they were on social media, and the distance between the retailer and the participant). After statistical analysis of the data, Kumar et al. (2016) found that there was a significant, positive relationship between firm-generated content on social media and consumer behavior such as overall customer spending and cross-spending behavior. This research is

important because it provides evidence that, by encouraging customers to follow their social media sites and actively creating posts (whether promotional or nonpromotional), companies can generate customer awareness that leads to customer spending.

## SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is growing in importance and is becoming a huge reason why consumers choose to purchase from certain companies rather than others in the service industry. Service quality can be defined as, “the ability to meet or exceed the expectations of the customer and it is the quality perceived by the customer” (Atsan, 2017, p. 1245). Service quality encompasses reliability, empathy, and responsiveness (Atsan, 2017). Atsan performed a study on perceived service quality compared to corporate image and the effects on customer satisfaction on the banking industry, which is a major member of the service industry just like sporting events. The author argued that service quality that encompasses a consumer’s wants, needs, and expectations of a company, particularly with the employees he or she encounters, leads to customer satisfaction which can then lead to customer patronage. The method used by Atsan (2017) was a questionnaire provided to 250 customers of retail banking in a private section in Antalya, Turkey. The questionnaire measured service quality as well as customer satisfaction. After analysis, Atsan (2017) concluded that service quality positively affects corporate image, as well as service quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. These results show the importance of service quality to consumers. This study can be used by many companies in the service industry that are struggling to acquire and retain customers; by focusing on service quality of employees who encounter customers daily, they can acquire and retain more customers.

Service quality is a very important variable to research when dealing with customer patronage, especially when dealing with sporting events. Miller and Johnson (2008) have noted that the overall experience of customers when attending sporting events relates to whether they were greeted with a polite and warm welcome, whether the staff displayed friendliness and professionalism, and whether they were easily able to obtain services including parking, seating, and food, drink, and souvenir purchases. The authors knew that the product itself was not the outcome of the game, due to its uncertainty, but rather the experience had by the consumers. In Miller and Johnson's (2008) research, they focused on the relationship between customer orientation and high performance human resource management. High-performance human resource management is an assortment of employee recruitment and selection procedures, incentive compensation through high performance, and highly emphasizing employee training, all to ensure employees are well-equipped with the knowledge, ability, and motivation to provide customers with excellent service quality. The authors chose to work with five Major League Baseball (MLB) organizations when executing their study. At each organization, the authors surveyed various employees who held various positions that required high customer interaction, such as ticket salesmen, ticket collectors, suite attendants, fan services, and guest relations. Results of their study included that high-performance human resource management was positively related to customer orientation. This is important because it shows the positive relationship between emphasis on training employees and customer orientation of those employees. Companies should emphasize a customer oriented brand image when training employees to ensure customers are happy with their experiences at their sporting events.

In a study performed by Shepherd (1999), the relationship between service quality and personal selling was shown. The author found service quality of utmost importance to businesses

looking for a profit because it entices new customers to try their company through word of mouth, it retains customers by keeping them satisfied, and encourages existing customers to increase their spending. Also, Shepherd (1999) states that companies that excel at customer service are able to charge a higher rate for their products and have a higher market share. He tested these statements found while performing background research with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to 256 churches across the United States that have produced a pictorial directory around the time the study was conducted, and it focused on service quality of the company that the church bought its pictorial directory from. Results showed that there was a significant relationship between service quality and the sales force (Shepherd, 1999). This study reiterates the importance of creating and maintaining high customer service quality for companies, with the main implication being profitability.

## ATTITUDE

Attitude towards a brand is an extremely important variable to measure for companies. Attitude has two ranges of valence that consumers can fall in, which includes a range from strong-positive to weak-positive and another range from strong-negative to weak-negative (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). If consumers fall into the positive range of valence, they are inclined to purchase from a brand. Likewise, if consumers fall into the negative range of valence, they will have purchase avoidance pertaining to the brand. Obviously, it is imperative that companies ensure that consumers fall into the positive range of valence. Park et al. (2010) performed multiple studies measuring brand attachment and brand attitudes. Their methodology included gathering participants' opinions on brand attitudes and brand attachment toward the Apple iPod. They partnered with a university that gave one hundred and eight marketing students a booklet to fill out to measure their brand attitudes and brand attachment.

Their findings supported their hypotheses, meaning brand attitude does lead to the action of purchase as well as the relation between brand attitude and brand attachment. These results are important because brand attachment is stronger than brand attitudes, with brand attachment requiring a long-term relationship between a consumer and a brand and brand attitudes requiring a short time for customers to create their attitudes about a brand (Park et al., 2010). If consumers can have a positive brand attitude toward a brand, this can eventually lead into brand attachment, defined as a strong bond that leads to repurchase intention and brand loyalty, which is what companies are searching for.

## CUSTOMER PATRONAGE

Customer patronage is commonly known as the consumer's intention to purchase from a company (Parsa, Gregory, Self, & Dutta, 2012). This variable is influenced by many factors including quality, service, ambiance, attitude, and price. Ultimately, it is what all businesses are looking for. Parsa et al. (2012) performed research on what attributes were most important in determining customer patronage in the restaurant industry, which is similar to the sporting event industry because it relies heavily on service, prices, and overall quality. They used a scenario-based questionnaire that included different restaurant scenarios, such as cleanliness and business, and were researching the main factors of quality, service, and ambiance. Participants were then asked to give their willingness to pay (with a dollar amount) and their intention to patronize (from a range of one to seven). The questionnaires were given to 95 college students. The authors found that the importance of the attribute (quality, service, and ambiance) relating to customer patronage varied depending on the consumer's perception of the restaurant, with quality ultimately being the most important (Parsa et al., 2012). This is important for all companies to understand because it shows the importance of quality, particularly service quality

of staff that directly encounters customers. If companies prioritize quality, and ensure customers perceive their quality to be high, they are more likely to receive the customers' patronage.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **SAMPLE DATA AND COLLECTION**

Data were collected through a questionnaire with Likert-type surveys. Questionnaires were distributed by hand throughout the student body of McKendree University located in Lebanon, Illinois and a small portion of the faculty of Monsanto located in St. Louis, Missouri. Collecting data was done by hand to encourage a full response rate as well as ensure the participants had full clarity when responding to the questionnaire. In total, there were 58 respondents with four incomplete questionnaires. People from the St. Louis area were targeted in hopes they were familiar with the St. Louis Blues.

The descriptive analysis of the questionnaire included an average age of participants as 28 years old. Also, 56.9% of respondents were male, leading 43.1% of respondents to be female. The majority of the participants' annual household income fell into the category of \$100,001 or higher with 44.8%. The second largest group in regards to annual household income was the range of \$80,001 to \$100,000 with 17.2%. Next, participants fell into the category of \$60,001 to \$80,000 with a percentage of 12.1%. The ranges of \$40,001 to \$60,000, \$20,001 to \$40,000, \$20,000 to \$10,001, and \$10,000 or less have the percentages of 10.3%, 5.2%, 3.4%, and 3.4%, respectively. Regarding ethnicity, 87.9% of participants were Caucasian, 3.4% were African-American, 3.4% were Hispanic-American, and 5.2% identified as "Other," which would include any ethnicity except Caucasian, African-American, Asian American, and Hispanic-American.

## MEASURES

The questionnaire was adopted from various previous studies. The social media portion of the survey was adopted from Song and Zinkham's 2008 study researching consumer-perceived website inactivity. This was chosen because social media is closely related to web sites. Also, the activity of the social media account is important to analyze because it can impact consumers' opinions and decisions. The portion of the survey pertaining to customer service was adopted from Alalwan, Dwivedi, Williams' (2016) research on consumers' intentions and adoption of a service-oriented product. Finally, the customer patronage portion of the questionnaire was adopted from Abass and Oyetayo's (2016) study of service quality measurement and demand.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Data was entered and analyzed through IBM SPSS Statistics. Reliability was focused on to ensure that the variable being measured was appropriately used to measure what was intended. Reliability for a variable is determined upon whether the variable is greater than .7. Social media had a reliability of .816, mass media had a reliability of .820, customer service had a reliability of .814, consumer attitude had a reliability of .980, and customer patronage had a reliability of .300. Social media, mass media, customer service, and consumer attitude were all reliable portions of the questionnaire, while customer patronage was not reliable.

Determining whether social media affected consumer attitude (H1), mass media affected consumer attitude (H2), customer service affected consumer attitude (H3), and consumer attitude affected customer patronage (H4) were all measured through multiple regression. Multiple regression measures whether an independent variable affects a dependent variable and can be

determined on whether the probability is smaller than .05. H1 (social media affecting consumer attitude) and H3 (customer service affecting consumer attitude) were not supported with multiple regression probabilities of .053 and .799 respectively. H2 (mass media affecting consumer attitude) and H4 (consumer attitude affecting customer patronage) were both supported by having multiple regression probabilities of .008.

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.619 <sup>a</sup>	.383	.346	1.04457

a. Predictors: (Constant), CS, MM, SM

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33.926	3	11.309	10.364	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	54.556	50	1.091		
	Total	88.482	53			

a. Dependent Variable: A

b. Predictors: (Constant), CS, MM, SM

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3.448	.705		4.887	.000		
	SM	.363	.183	.327	1.978	.053	.452	2.212
	MM	.287	.103	.405	2.782	.008	.581	1.720
	CS	-.052	.201	-.044	-.256	.799	.421	2.377

a. Dependent Variable: A

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.360 <sup>a</sup>	.130	.113	1.21700

a. Predictors: (Constant), CP

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.466	1	11.466	7.741	.008 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	77.016	52	1.481		
	Total	88.482	53			

a. Dependent Variable: A

b. Predictors: (Constant), CP

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5.436	.284		19.161	.000		
	CP	.136	.049	.360	2.782	.008	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: A

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

According to the results, social media was not a significant factor in determining consumers' attitudes. This differs from past research stating that it clearly was a factor when considering consumers' attitudes. Ardiansyah (2013) studied social media in social marketing and found that the attitude of a social marketing program has a positive effect on consumer behavior intention. Online buzz, defined as "user-generated reviews, recommendations, and blog signals on social media sites" (p. 213) is recognized to consumer attitude with advocacy, enhancing the value of a company (Luo and Zhang, 2013). Also, Stephen and Galak (2012) studied the effects of social media on sales and found that social media marketing positively

affected attitude which then positively affected sales. Because the results of this study and past studies differ, the Saint Louis Blues should consider spending time and money to research social media affecting consumer attitude because social media is such a huge expense to companies and should be properly compensated for.

Traditional media affecting consumer attitudes was supported through this study. This notion agrees with past research such as Batra and Keller's (2016). They reported that traditional media such as television, radio, and print campaigns positively affect consumer attitudes in their study. Stephen and Galak (2012) found that traditional media was the most effective when referring to customer patronage as well as consumer attitudes. This is important to the Saint Louis Blues because it shows them what marketing efforts work the best and have the biggest reach. The Saint Louis Blues should focus on traditional media more by investing in more commercials, print campaigns, and radio commercials.

Customer service affecting consumer attitudes was not supported through this research. Past research had mixed reviews on the relationship between service quality and consumer attitudes. Atsan (2017) studied the banking sector and found that there was a positive correlation between Purnamadita and Tauriana (2012) performed a similar study concerning whether service quality affected consumer attitude for a theme park, which is related to sporting events. Their results agreed with this study's in saying that there was no relationship between customer service and consumer attitude. Although results differ, the Saint Louis Blues should continue to focus on high customer service as it is an important factor for many people.

Consumer attitude affecting customer patronage was supported through this study. Park et al. (2010) performed a study of consumer attitude toward the Apple iPod. Their results showed that consumer attitude positively affects purchase intention, which is essentially what customer

patronage is, agreeing with the results of this study. Korgaonkar, Lund, and Price (1985) also performed a study that showed a positive relationship between consumer attitude and customer patronage in retail stores. This shows the importance of consumer attitudes on customer patronage, meaning that the Saint Louis Blues should focus on leading customers to have strong, positive attitudes about their brand. They could do this by focusing on marketing through traditional media, which has been proven to improve consumer attitudes.

From this research project, I have learned that it is very important for companies to research the mediums in which they perform their marketing. They should focus on what medium provides them with the most profit, promotes positive consumer attitudes, promotes consumer-company interactions, and what keeps customers repurchasing. While the Saint Louis Blues are successful and profitable, they have room to grow, especially with their social media marketing and their customer service. They are successful in their use of traditional media marketing, and their customers have positive attitudes about their brand which leads to customer patronage. It was surprising that social media and customer service were not supported through my research, considering past literature has shown that both are influential in marketing.

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