Does Manufacturer Matter? The Influence of a Manufacturer in University Licensed Apparel

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Session 2: Marketing Presentation (25-minute) Thursday, May 31, 2007 8:30 AM - 8:55 AM

Despite the increase in sales of sport team licensed merchandise, there is lack of research upon the effect of manufacturer of such licensed products. This study examined whether manufacturers’ brand influenced sport consumers’ attitude toward and purchase intention of licensed apparel.

The theoretical basis of this study is two-fold (i.e., information integration theory and classical conditioning). The major concept of information integration theory is that people receive, interpret, evaluate, and then integrate the incoming information with an existing belief or attitude. Two separate valuation functions (i.e., attitude toward manufacturer and attitude toward athletic team) are expected to be combined together through integration function and form a new attitude toward a co-branded product. Thus, sport consumers are expected to form a new attitude toward co-branded sport team licensed apparel based on their attitude toward a sport team and attitude toward the manufacturer. Thus, it was expected that when their attitude toward a sport team is set constant, their attitude toward co-branded licensed apparel should follow their attitude toward manufacturers.

Additional hypotheses were developed using classical conditioning framework. Classical conditioning is known as Pavlov’s classical experiment in which a metronome is paired with the presence of meal. Whenever a meal is served, the dog was exposed to the sound of metronome. If the pair is conditioned through quite a number of repetitions, the dog salivates to the sound of the metronome even without a presence of a meal. Researchers indicated that this kind of physiological responses could be developed in human being as well (Rescorla, 1988). Thus, it can be hypothesized that the individuals with strong attitude toward a sport team should show a stronger conditioning effect than the ones with moderate or weak attitude toward a sport team. Thus, it was expected that respondents with strong team identification should show a better attitude toward co-branded sport team licensed apparel no matter who manufactured it. This study also included purchase intention as another dependent measure to increase the validity of the results.

The data were collected from 299 students (men = 201; women = 98). The questionnaire included attitude toward a manufacturer, attitude toward school athletic teams, attitude toward co-branded licensed apparel, and purchase intention of co-branded licensed apparel. Among these, attitude toward manufacturer and attitude toward co-branded licensed apparel were measured respective to three different manufacturers’ brands (i.e., Nike, Starter, and Specs). Among the three brands, Specs is a generic brand developed by the researchers to represent the unknown brand. A MANOVA was performed to see if the attitude and purchase intention were statistically different across three different manufacturers and three different levels of team identification (i.e., High Medium and Low). The results of MANOVA indicated there were interactions between two independent variables of manufacturers and team identification. (Wilks’ Lambda = .88, F = 15.04, p < .001, partial eta square = .06) on two dependent variables of attitude toward co-branded licensed apparel and purchase intention. This result supported the hypotheses generated from classical conditioning. The main effects of multivariate test were also examined. The main effect of manufacturer was significant (Wilks’ Lambda = .54, F = 160.74, p < .05, partial eta square = .23), which supported the hypotheses generated from information integration theory.

Thus, it can be concluded that sport consumers’ attitude toward and purchase intention of licensed apparel is determined by their attitude toward a manufacturer and the attitude is modified by their team identification. The effect of manufacturer brand was decreased among the individuals with high team identification, which can be explained with classical conditioning. However, the effect was not as prominent for -Specs as Starter.

Although further investigation is necessary, the respondents might have failed to connect the two focal objects of a sport team and the name Specs. Michell, Kahn, and Knasko (1995) and Shimp (1991) suggested that to increase the conditioning effect, there needs to be perceived congruence between conditioned and unconditioned stimuli. The congruence is expected to increase the connection between the two focal objects and that should facilitate the conditioning effect. In the current study, the respondents did not seem to find any congruence between -Specs’ and their favorite sport team. Thus, when consumers are not aware of a manufacturer, the effect of classical conditioning is expected to be limited.