Investigating Influence of Past Athletic Experience and Knowledge on Attitude, Credibility, Expertise & Trustworthiness, and Future Search Intention

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Sports fans today are exposed to their favorite pastimes through various media outlets such as newspapers, radio, magazines, the Internet, and television. Sports can be viewed at any time, from anywhere through new media such as the Internet (Boyle & Haynes, 2002). Traditional and new media industries are developing constantly, allowing events and advertisements to reach consumers easily and efficiently (Santomier, 2008). Thus, increase of interactivity between the new media and the users has enlarged the spending of media industries on the sport contexts (Boyle & Haynes, 2002).

Much learning takes place indirectly from models or observations (Bandura, 1986). Throughout their everyday lives, people learn different things directly and indirectly through “symbols” generated by the media (Bandura, 2001b). When the media is influencing the individuals’ attitude and perception, there may be potential mediators that can either influence the individuals or not influence the individuals. Some potential mediators include personal background, knowledge level, and personality. Previous studies have suggested that influence from the media to individuals will be filtered through social and psychological factors (Driedger, 2007; Rubin, 2002).

While there have been efforts to pinpoint the role of individual factors on media message interpretation, little is known if past athletic experience (PAE) and perceived football knowledge (PFK) also has an impact on interpretation of sport message. Athletic experience can lead the individuals to be able to self-regulate or reconceptualize their personality from different cognition of stimulus such as messages created from the culture and society (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Further, it is reasonable to assume that PFK affects football message interpretation as there is plenty of evidence that an individual’s knowledge influences his/her information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1982). Due to this reason, the effects from the sport media will not directly influence the individuals’ message processing or interpretation but may be mediated by different variations that the individuals formulated during their lives. It becomes important to examine how much of an influence mediators may have from the media toward an individual’s attitude, credibility, expertise and trustworthiness, and future search intention after exposure to a biased article.

Given the important role of individual factors in sport article interpretation, the purpose of the present study is to add to the body of literature in sport marketing and management by examining how an individuals’ PAE and PFK affect attitude toward the article, credibility, expertise and trustworthiness, and the future search intention toward the article after being exposed to the biased article. Media messages may influence the public but the level of impact will be different due to the different biases caused by prior knowledge and experience.

The current employed 2 (past athletic experience) X 2 (perceived football knowledge) quasi experimental design. Among other types of sport message, the current utilized a football article as football is most popular sporting event in the U.S. A online survey was conducted in order to measure subjects’ level of knowledge and football experience levels. Subjects, then, had read a biased article about the NFL, since it was expected that a biased article may product larger mean difference between groups. The fabricated article predicted that the Detroit Lions would have a great season even though they were 0-16 in 2008. The researchers hypothesized that subjects who had high levels of knowledge and experience would not be affected as much as the subjects who had low levels of knowledge and experience. After reading the article, researchers examined the level of credibility, expertise and trustworthiness, attitude, and future search intentions of the article.

The current study collected a sample (n=204) from undergraduate courses at a large Midwestern University. The sample consisted of 135 males and 69 females. Data analysis revealed that all the measured scales reached satisfactory reliability levels with Cronbach alpha level ranging from .77 (trustworthiness) to .95 (credibility). The
A study conducted Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) using SPSS 17.0 for the hypotheses testing. There were four significant main effects of PAE on credibility, (F(1, 202) = 4.992, p < .05), on attitude, (F(1,202) = 10.839, p < .05), on future search intention, (F(1,202) = 5.680, p < .05), and on expertise and trustworthiness (F(1,202) = 5.680, p < .05). These results indicate that the level of experience has a significant effect on the attitude, credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness, and the future search intention. However, the current study did not find a significant main effect of PFK on the dependent variables, while there was a significant interaction effects of PAE and PFK on attitude (F(1,202) = 4.821, p < .05). This study showed that experience played a much more prevalent role in the mediating process than that of knowledge.

This study will play a significant role in the industry of sport journalism. Because of the bias that can influence the readers of the newspaper, it will be important to hire experienced journalists to create unbiased articles. Consistent with this study, journalists should be knowledgeable and experienced when writing credible and trustworthy articles.