International Sport Consumer Behaviors: The Case of the NBA in Brazil

Claudio Rocha, University of Sao Paulo

In a quest to explain sport spectator consumption behaviors, sport marketing scholars have proposed that different motives would drive the consumption of sport (Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001; Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996; Trail & James, 2001; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; Wann, 1995). Trail et al. (2003) proposed eight motives domestic consumers have to consume spectator sport: Vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, escape, knowledge about sport, physical skills, social interactions, and family. Literature has also reported some constraints of domestic sport consumption. Trail, Robinson, and Kim (2008) proposed and investigated some structural (such as concessions, restrooms, seating, and parking) and non-structural constraints (such as weather, social commitments, financial cost, and stadium location). Kim and Trail (2010) investigated internal (e.g., lack of success of the team) and external constraints (e.g., leisure alternatives) of sport consumption.

Beyond domestic consumers, in the era of globalization, sport managers are increasingly concerned about their overseas consumers. The international market is an option since the American sport market has started to give signs of saturation (Mahony & Howard, 2001). At first glance, domestic and international consumers could have similar motivators or constraints to consume sports. However, overseas, American sport is an international product. Therefore, consumer ethnocentrism is likely to play a very important role in consumption intentions. Shimp and Sharma (1987) defined consumer ethnocentrism as “the beliefs held by the consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products” (p. 280). For ethnocentric consumers, consuming imported products or services can be considered unpatriotic, as it can be harmful to their own country's economy. In this sense, to understand international sport consumers, patriotism is an important variable. Lee, Hong, and Lee (2003) defined patriotism as “the degree of love for and pride in one's nation” (p. 492).

Following this line of thought, the current research aimed to investigate the role of patriotism in the intention of consumption of NBA products by international consumers. To accomplish this aim, I tested two mediational models: A fully mediated and a partially mediated model. In both models, patriotism was the antecedent, identification with the NBA was the mediator, and purchase intention was the consequence. Yet, I tested a direct effects model (NBA identification and patriotism were supposed to directly affect purchase intentions, positively and negatively, respectively). Additionally, I tested a possible moderator effect of identification with “national” players in the relationship between patriotism and NBA identification. Identification with “national” players could mitigate or even reverse the negative relationship between patriotism and NBA identification. To measure patriotism, four items were drawn from Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) scale. To measure NBA identification, I used Trail et al.’s (2003) scale (three items). To measure NBA identification, I used Kim and Trail's (2010) scale (three items). Finally, four items were created to measure intentions of consumption of NBA products.

The proposed models were tested in a Brazilian sample. Brazil is one of the largest countries in the world and reports an annual GDP growth of 9% (one of the fastest growing economies of the world). Additionally, Brazilians love sports. Therefore, Brazil can become a very interesting market for the NBA and other American leagues very soon. A sample of 500 Brazilian undergraduate students was selected to respond the questionnaire. I received back 153 questionnaires back (30.6% response rate). The non-respondents asserted that they would not be able to answer the questions because they did not know anything about the NBA. This was quite surprising for at least three reasons. First, the major of those students is Physical Education and Sport. Second, NBA games are broadcasted weekly in Brazil, via ESPN cable TV channel. Third, there are currently four Brazilian players in the NBA. In the first question of the questionnaire, respondents pointed which of the Brazilian players they liked the most. Most of the respondents (31.6%) pointed Toronto Raptors’ Leandro Barbosa, then Cleveland Cavaliers’ Anderson Varejao (29.6%), Denver Nuggets’ Nene Hilario (25.7%), and San Antonio Spurs’ Thago Splitter (7.9%). Respondents were mainly males (66.4%) and were, in average, 26.3 (+11.78) years old. About half of the respondents (51.3%) reported to have access to ESPN via cable TV.

The measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis in MPlus 5.21. The measurement model fits the data quite well ($\chi^2/df = 1.57$; CFI = .967; TLI = .958; RMSEA [90%CI] = .061 [.038; .083]; SRMR = .057). Factor loadings ranged from .727 to .921 for patriotism, from .780 to .925 for national athlete identification, from .773 to .932 for NBA identification, and from .687 to .853 for purchase intentions of NBA products. The reliability coefficient was very good for all four scales: Patriotism (.903), athlete identification (.877), NBA identification (.891), and purchase intentions (.856). Average variance explained (AVE) values were all above .50, indicating that the subscales have good convergent validity (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998): Patriotism (.71), athlete identification (.70), NBA identification (.74), and purchase intentions (.59).
Both the fully mediated model ($\chi^2/df = 1.29$; CFI = .980; TLI = .974; RMSEA [90%CI] = .044 [.000; .069]; SRMR = .047) and the partially mediated model ($\chi^2/df = 1.29$; CFI = .981; TLI = .974; RMSEA [90%CI] = .044 [.000; .069]; SRMR = .048) presented very good and very similar fit measures. As the path coefficient from patriotism to purchase intentions in the partially mediated model was not significant ($\gamma = -.091; p = .237$), both models became equivalent to each other. Thus, the more parsimonious fully mediated model is preferable. The direct effects model also fits the data well ($\chi^2/df = 1.30$; CFI = .981; TLI = .974; RMSEA [90%CI] = .044 [.000; .069]; SRMR = .048).

I tested the moderation effect on the path from patriotism to NBA identification using the fully mediated model, which seems theoretically more plausible. Jöreskog’s (2000) latent score technique was used to test the interaction effect via structural equation modeling. Latent factor scores were computed for patriotism and national athletes’ identification. Then, an interaction variable was created multiplying those latent variable scores. Using MPlus 5.21, the moderated mediation model also fits the data quite well ($\chi^2/df = 1.81$; CFI = .985; TLI = .984; RMSEA = .073). The path coefficients from patriotism to NBA identification ($\gamma = -.013; p = .878$) and from national athlete identification and NBA identification ($\gamma = .045; p = .577$) were both non-significant. However, the path coefficient from the interaction term (patriotism x national athlete identification) to NBA identification was significant ($\gamma = .187; p = .014$). Thus, national athlete identification moderates (and reverses the sign of) the relationship between patriotism and NBA identification. The path coefficient from NBA identification and purchase intentions was large and significant ($\beta = .550; p < .001$).

The results confirmed the literature in the extent to which patriotism could prevent the identification with a foreign product, and consequently, its consumption. However, the identification with Brazilian players mitigated the negative effects of patriotism on NBA identification. The NBA should consider marketing the native players in their countries of origin in order to diminish possible ethnocentric tendencies related to its products.