Exploring Moderators of the Relationship between Team Identification of Korean Immigrants and Their Adaptation Patterns

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As the sport industry in the U.S. has realized the importance of the Asian-American sport consumer, professional sport teams developed various promotions toward the Asian-American sport consumers, such as national basketball association (NBA), major league baseball (MLB), and major league soccer (MLS) (Clarke & Mannion, 2006). These increasing marketing efforts to Asian-Americans are evidences that professional sports leagues recognize Asian-American sport consumers as a niche market in their business. As a result of professional sport leagues’ efforts to attract Asian-Americans, they were able to achieve a noticeable revenue increase from Asian-American sport consumers and Asian company sponsors and sport consumers in Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan (Kim & Jeon, 2008). Even though marketing efforts for Asian-Americans market has been increased, there is relatively little theoretical explanation of why the Asian-American sport consumer attends sporting events in the U.S. and why Asian professional athletes are attractive to them except for a few studies (Claussen, Ko & Rinehart, 2008; Kim, DeSensi, & Koo, 2009; Kim, DeSensi, & Dzikkus, 2010; Strodolska & Alexandris, 2004).

The purpose of this sequential mixed methods study from a sociological perspective was twofold: (a) to understand how Korean immigrants develop team identification with the Atlanta Braves and MLB teams with Korean players and (b) to explore the moderators on the proposed relationship. A two-phase explanatory design was employed. In the first phase, quantitative data for acculturation level (adaptation patterns), sport involvement, MLB involvement, team identification with the Atlanta Braves, socioeconomic status, and the length of stay of recent Korean immigrants in the Atlanta area were collected to statistically test the relationships between these variables. The second phase (qualitative study) was conducted to explain the statistical results of the first phase of the study and to explore the moderators on the relationship.

Four hundred six Korean immigrants in the Atlanta area participated in the survey, and 391 obtained data were valid for the measurement model and structural model test after deleting survey with missing information. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 67 years ($M = 41.96$, $SD = 6.63$), with a majority indicating male (52.9%) and married marital status (76.7%). The average length of stay of the participants in the U.S. was 14.43 years ($SD = 9.05$ years), and 9.05 years ($SD = 6.90$ years) in Atlanta. Adaptation patterns of Korean immigrants were categorized based on mean scores for acculturation levels toward Korean and American sport consumers in Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan (Kim & Jeon, 2008). Approximately 96% of the participants showed integration (34.0%) or segregation adaptation pattern (61.9%). Each latent construct included in the current study was measured by using multi-item scales, except demographic information, and all items, except socio-demographic information, were measured by 7-point Likert type scales anchored by strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7) or not at all (1) and extremely well (7).

The snowball sampling method was implemented to recruit the research participants, and 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted for the follow-up qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews are known as a useful way to understand relationships between variables or specific topics (Sampson, 1972). Even though all major open-ended questions related to the conceptual framework were presented to every participant, depending on the interviewees’ experiences and adaptation patterns, interview questions were tailored in order to explore the specific experience of each participant.

The software AMOS 18 and SPSS 18 were utilized to test the measurement model, reliability and validity of the scales and examine the hypotheses which address the relationships between variables in the conceptual framework. The quantitative data analysis consisted of two steps including analysis of the measurement model and of the structural model.

The measurement model was evaluated in the second order measurement model and the analysis of the measurement model showed an acceptable fit to be utilized for the structural model test after modifying the initial measurement model (CMIN/DF = 1.835; RMSEA = .046; CFI = .960). Analysis of the structural model also showed an adequate model fit resulting in a good overall fit: (a) integration adaptation group: CMIN/DF = 2.396; RMSEA = .060; CFI = .982 and (b) segregation adaptation group: CMIN/DF = 2.499; RMSEA = .062; CFI = .980. Even though the structure models showed acceptable fits, adaptation patterns of Korean immigrants were not always significant predictors of their team identification with the Atlanta Braves and MLB teams with Korean players. In addition, there were not significant correlations between adaptation patterns of Korean immigrants and their involvement levels in sports.

After the interviews were completed, the process of data analysis was initiated. Since the primary purpose of the follow-up qualitative research was to elaborate on the statistical results of the proposed research hypotheses, the conceptual framework
was a guideline to indentify the interview data. In addition, interview data that are not directly related to the research hypotheses were analyzed in an inductive process of analysis. The patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data rather than from being imposed on the data prior to data collection and analysis (Patton, 1990).

The findings of the follow-up qualitative study consist of four themes elaborating and explaining the results of hypotheses testing and the potential moderators of the relationships. The following three aspects were considered the significant moderators of the relationships: (a) attitude toward new culture, (b) satisfaction with immigrant life in Atlanta, and (c) previous residence before Atlanta. In addition, the qualitative data provided an opportunity to reconsider what the introduced adaptation patterns mean.

Both the results of the quantitative and qualitative research presented that the adaptation patterns of Korean immigrants with involvement in sports and MLB games were significant predictors in explaining team identification of Korean immigrants with the Atlanta Braves and MLB teams with Korean players. At the same time, however, the results of the quantitative and qualitative research showed a considerable limitation in predicting Korean immigrants’ team identification based on simply their adaptation patterns when considering the long immigration history of Korean to the United States and the fast growing population of Korean immigrants in Atlanta. Therefore, the holistic understanding of Korean immigrants’ lives in Atlanta should be required for a better comprehension of their team identification with the Atlanta Braves and MLB teams with Korean players and the moderators of the relationship.

The understanding of Korean immigrant MLB consumers based on the findings of this study suggests the following practical applications: (a) short-term strategy and (b) long-term strategy toward Korean immigrant MLB consumers.