

Understanding Sport Volunteer Behavior in a Sporting Event: Impacts of Self-Congruity and Functional Congruity on Brand Attitude

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(including questions)**

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Volunteers are a crucial set of human resources for communities and organizations. Volunteers allow practitioners and administrators to develop and enhance both the “quantity and diversity of services without exhausting the agency’s budget” (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991, p. 270). In the sport industry, the need for volunteers and the important contribution they make to the successful management and operation of sport organizations and events has been extensively recognized (Giannoulakis, Wang, & Gray, 2008; Love, Hardin, Koo, & Morse, 2011). In recent years, sport volunteers have emerged as “a core component of sport service delivery” (Love et al., 2011, p.191). Sport volunteers are a crucial and indispensable set of human resources regardless of the level of sport (i.e., from youth to professional) or the size of events (i.e., from community to international) (Green & Chalip, 1998).

Given the importance of volunteers’ roles in sport events, practitioners and researchers have expressed interest in understanding aspects of sport volunteer behavior (Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007; MacLean & Hamm, 2007; Strigas & Jackson, 2003). Strigas and Jackson (2003) argued that understanding the factors that affect sport volunteer behavior is crucial to sport event administrators or organizers. In order to better understand sport volunteer behavior, Sirgy’s (1982, 1986) self-congruity theory can be useful. Image congruity is a crucial area in marketing studies because self-congruity and functional congruity show significant impacts on individuals’ psychological and behavioral aspects such as brand loyalty, brand preference, and brand attitude (He & Mukherjee, 2007; Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1991). Although the notion of image congruence has received extensive attention in marketing contexts (Sirgy, 1986), and the theory offers an intuitively valid explanation for individuals’ behavior, few studies have utilized self-congruity and functional congruity for understanding sport volunteer behavior (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the relationship between self-congruity, functional congruity, and brand (sporting event) attitude.

Self-congruity is defined as the degree of match/mismatch between self-concept (i.e., actual self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image, and ideal-social image) and brand image (Sirgy et al., 2005). Self-congruity has been proved to be an antecedent of consumer behavior (Sirgy et al., 1991). According to self-congruity theory, when sport volunteers identify that the sporting event which they provide volunteering services is congruent with their self-image, sport volunteers can represent their identity, and thus, favorable attitudes will be formed (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009; Sirgy et al., 1991). This leads to our first hypothesis; self-congruity has a positive influence on brand attitude.

Functional congruity is defined as the degree of matching between consumers’ perception toward brand’s functional attributes and consumer’s expectation of that attribute (Kang et al., 2012; Sirgy et al., 1991). Previous studies have identified different functional attributes depending on the target study areas (e.g., retail setting) (Kang et al., 2012). In volunteer research, Clary et al. (1998) identified values, understanding, social, career, protective, and enhancement as functions served by volunteering and developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). Previous research has found that functional congruity have a direct effect on consumer behavior (e.g., brand attitude, purchase intention, brand preference, and brand loyalty) (Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy et al., 1991; Sirgy et al., 2005). Moreover, self-congruity has a biasing effect on functional congruity (Sirgy & Su, 2000; Sirgy et al., 1991). Sirgy and Su (2000) indicated that consumers who experience high self-congruity are more likely to favorably process the functional attributes, and vice versa (Sirgy et al., 1991). That means sport volunteer who perceive a brand to match their actual, ideal, social, and/or ideal social self-image may form an initial favorable attitude toward the sporting event (Sirgy & Su, 2000). Based on the theoretical framework, two hypotheses are proposed as follows: (a) self-congruity has a positive influence on functional congruity (Hypothesis 2); and (b) functional congruity has a positive influence on brand attitude (Hypothesis 3).

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Using a convenience sampling method, data will be collected from volunteers at a sporting event in the U.S. In order to measure self-image congruity, respondents will be asked to rate the extent of agreement with the four self-image statements developed by Sirgy and Su (2000), which include (a) volunteering at the sporting event is consistent with how I see myself (actual self); (b) volunteering at the sporting event is consistent with how I would like to see myself (ideal self); (c) volunteering at the sporting event is consistent with how I believe others see me (social self); and (d) volunteering at the sporting event is consistent with how I would like others to see me (ideal social self). In regard to measure functional congruity, respondents will be asked to evaluate each of the six functional attributes in regards to their expectations before volunteering and experiences after their volunteer services. Brand attitude will be measured using 3 bipolar items, which include good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, and favorable-unfavorable with a 5-point Likert-type scale (Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002).

The study will employ the two-step approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, confirmatory factor analysis will be performed through AMOS 16.0 to examine reliability and validity of the scale items. Following Kline's (2005) recommendation, five fit indexes will be used to evaluate the model's fit: the model chi-square (χ^2/df), the Steiger-Lind root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990) with its 90% confidence interval, the Bentler comparative fit index (Bentler, 1990), non-normed fit index (Bentler, 1990) and the standardized root mean square residual. Second, structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be conducted to assure the validity of the hypotheses.

At the time of this presentation, the study will have been completed. Thus, the results will be discussed relative to the congruity theory and the extant literature. Practical implications derived from the results will be discussed. Limitations and suggestions for future research will also be provided.