The Segmenting Fans Based on where they Sit: The Moderating Impact of Seat Location on the Relationship among Team Identification, Corporate Identification and Purchase Intention

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Marketing
Friday, May 30, 2014
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
(Conference Center A

Abstract 2014-106 9:45 AM

Corporate sponsorship of sports is a steadily growing market estimated to be worth approximately $33 billion worldwide (IEG, 2012). The increasing popularity of Korean baseball following their national team’s successes at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and in the 2009 World Baseball Classic has captured the attention of corporations that are keen to market their products to sports consumers. In line with these strategic investments, Korean professional baseball teams are owned and operated by corporate entities that also act as a named sponsor (e.g. the Samsung Lions based in Daegu are owned by electronics giant, Samsung). One of the main objectives of these corporate sport sponsorships is to increase consumers’ intentions to purchase a product or service (Pope & Voges, 2000), and in this regard, attendees of sporting fixtures represent a lucrative market.

Identification, a psychological relationship or emotional affection, and the level of that identification are critical variables in understanding sport consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2001). Specifically, Team Identification is closely related to sports fandom and spectator behavior (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002). Prior research has shown that fans will engage in a process of ‘reciprocation’, whereby the financial support offered by sponsors to the team is indirectly repaid through increased willingness to purchase goods produced by that company (Pracejus, 1998). Investigating this further, Madrigal (2000) has demonstrated that higher levels of Team Identification among attendees at a sporting event are positively related to intention to purchase sponsors’ products. Kim (2004) suggests that more identified fans will also exhibit higher corporate identification, the extent to which individuals identify with a corporate sponsor, while Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995) indicate that higher corporate identification leads to heightened intention to purchase sponsors’ products. This study will extend the knowledge in this area by investigating the relationship between team identification, corporate identification and purchase intention.

Also of interest to marketers is how to reach the most fertile consumers. Spectator sports attract a range of consumers with different demographic and socioeconomic profiles (Greenwall, Fink, & Pastore, 2002), and identifying profitable consumer segments is vital for effective marketing to sports consumers (Park, 2005). It is important that practical ways to do so are sought. However, to our knowledge, there is currently no research that examines psychological variables such as team identification, corporate identification or purchase intention according to seating section. This study is important because, despite the importance of consumer segmentation, the majority of studies have treated sport spectators as one group (e.g. Wann et al., 1994), which does not account for the range of attitudes and preferences that exist. To this end, the present study proposed that different consumer segments might be identifiable by disaggregating the physical facility (i.e. the sports stadium) into seating sections.

Studies regarding sport stadia have focused primarily on the site as a service environment (e.g., Yoshida & James, 2011), while the only studies to examine discrete seating sections within stadia are related to dynamic pricing and the secondary ticket market (e.g., Salaga & Winfree, 2013; Shapiro & Drayer, 2013; Sweeting, 2012). Through such segmentation, sport organizations could communicate more effectively with their fans using targeted marketing strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate moderating effecting of seating section on the relationship between team identification, corporate identification and purchase intention (i.e. different seating sections within a sporting venue) at a professional baseball venue.

To investigate differences between spectators seated in different sections, attendees of a professional baseball game at a stadium in Incheon, Korea (n = 423) completed a paper questionnaire. The stadium was divided into three distinct seating sections: ‘reserved seating’ (located behind the field of play; n = 132), ‘infield seating’ (along each side of the field; n = 151), and ‘outfield’ seating (located behind the outfield; n = 140). A quota sampling method was used in order to populate each group. The sample consisted of 55.3% men and 44.7% women with a mode age range
Team identification was measured using the scale developed by Robinson & Trail (2005), corporate identification using that of Kim (2008), and purchase intention by the scale developed by Kim, Trail, & Ko (2011). Data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA and regression.

The results indicated a strong positive correlation (r = .71, p < .01) between corporate identification and purchase intention in line with the previous finding of Bhattacharya (1995); however team identification and corporate identification displayed only a medium positive correlation (r = .31, p < .01). Additionally, team identification was significantly correlated (r = .31, p < .01) with purchase intention. This demonstrates that, while some fans may be highly identified with both the team and its sponsors, that team identification alone does not necessarily provide the best indication of intention to purchase sponsors' goods or services.

In terms of seating sections, corporate identification and purchase intention were found to be significantly higher (p < .01) among spectators in the 'reserved seating' (CID = 3.07, PI = 3.33) section than in the 'outfield' (CID = 2.76, PI = 2.87) sections, and significantly higher than the 'infield' section on purchase intention (CID = 3.04), but not on corporate identification (PI = 2.88). Furthermore, corporate identification was shown to explain more of the variance in purchase intention than did team identification across all seating sections. Corporate identification explained the most variance among the 'outfield' group, $R^2 = .59$, $F(1, 421) = 98.13$, $p < .001$, followed by the 'infield' section $R^2 = .45$, $F(1, 421) = 119.00$, $p < .001$, and the 'reserved seating' $R^2 = .43$, $F(1, 421) = 191.89$, $p < .001$. These results suggest that, while differences do exist between the different seating sections, a more sophisticated method for disaggregating sports stadiums may yield more psychographically distinct consumer segments. All results across all variables will be discussed at presentation.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of Sport Management by demonstrating that disaggregating physical facility can be an effective way of identifying discrete consumer segments. These segments differ on key psychological variables (i.e. Team Identification and Corporate Identification) that impact purchase intentions; however other methods for segmentation (e.g. seating tiers within sections; ticket price bands, etc.) might likely produce stronger rationale for targeted marketing strategies.

This also has implications for marketing managers who wish to create such strategies. Additionally, the findings provide an indication of how these strategies can aim to maximize the effectiveness of corporate sponsorships. The study also provides a rationale for further investigation within a North American context, examination of different levels of sponsorship (e.g. title sponsor, game sponsor, etc.).