Examining the Role of Team Identification to Predict Team Related Goal-Directed Behaviors

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Customer satisfaction is a key predictor to gauge sport organizations' success. Prior work in sport management has revealed a positive association between satisfaction and consumers' future intentions in the spectator sport contexts. However, two questions remain that require empirical investigation. First, what mechanism has the capacity to explain more variance in team-related goal-directed behaviors of sport consumers? Second, whether the link between satisfaction and team-related behavioral intentions varies based on an individual’s psychological connection to the team.

Satisfaction refers to an overall evaluation of encounters and experiences between organizations and consumers (Oliver, 1980). In sport, the construct has been conceptualized and operationalized as a significant predictor to elicit positive outcomes for sport organizations. Prior work indicates that satisfied sport consumers are likely to engage in future behaviors such as acquiring a membership, basking in reflected glory, and purchasing licensed merchandise (Lee & Trail, 2011). However, there is considerable variance unexplained in this research and requires further attention. Recent work on team identification provides a beneficial perspective to better understand the satisfaction-future intention relationship (Lock, Taylor, Funk, Darcy, 2012). Results of empirical research suggest that team identification is closely related to positive spectating experience and a reliable antecedent to elicit behavioral loyalty outcomes such as merchandise purchase intention and game repatronage (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003). However, a holistic approach is required to examine the role that team identification plays in the linkage between consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Lock et al (2012) integrated social identity theory and the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) (Funk & James, 2001; 2006) to explore the development of team identification. Results suggest the development of team identification is a mechanism that moves individuals from an extrinsically motivated state to an internalized driven connection with the team and this progression in team identification was influenced by direct team-based experience. Hence, the link between satisfaction, identification, and future intentions should vary within the PCM stage-based progression. Hence, the purpose of the current study is to provide empirical evidence to extend prior work on predictions of future intentions. Specifically, two hypotheses were derived as the following:

H1: An individual’s level of team identification mediates the relationship between satisfaction and the future behavioral intentions.

H2: The magnitude of such mediation will increase as individuals progressively develop a stronger connection to the team.

In order to address the two hypotheses, an online multivariate questionnaire was distributed to patrons of Gold Coast Suns club in the Australian Football League (AFL) (N=899). The AFL is the highest profile professional sport and dominates in spectator attendance. Through the process of launching the Gold Coast Suns, residents in the Gold Coast area are encouraged to support the club. Overall, demographical sketch included 77% Oceanic and 74% residents in the State of Queensland and Victoria. Majority of respondents were current club members (75%) but not season ticket holders of a professional sporting team (86%).

The independent variable satisfaction (SAT) represents an overall subjective evaluation of being a fan of the club (Oliver, 1980). Mediator variable Team ID (TID) evaluates the degree to which an individual affiliates with the club (Heere & James, 2007). Composite scores for SAT and TID were generated from multiple items measured on 7-point Likert scales adapted from previous research. Behavioral Intentions (BI) was created using four behavioral items related to future merchandise spending and game attendance to measure the dependent variable. Last, three
control variables related to a consumer’s previous behaviors (e.g., prior frequency of game attendance and usage of team merchandise) were added as covariates to account for potential confounding effects. Following the algorithmic procedure outlined in Kunkel, Funk & Hill (2013), respondents were segmented based on their involvement with the team to create a multigroup moderator (i.e., attraction, attachment, and allegiance). Construct factorial validity and reliability were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) and revealed a satisfactory measurement model before subsequent multigroup moderated mediation analysis was executed.

Mediation effects of TID were examined and confirmed that SAT is a significant predictor of BI, F (4,894) = 456.19, p<.01 and SAT is a significant predictor of TID, F (1, 897) = 217.09, p<.01. Finally, it was revealed that the effect of SAT on BI is partially mediated by TID, F (5,893) =406.78, p<.01; βSAT=1.72, p< .01, βTID=2.53, p< .01, Sobel z= 7.80, p<.01, and indicated a large effect size of mediation testing. A bootstrapping analysis revealed indirect effects which supported Hypothesis 1 that TID partially mediates the effects of SAT on BI. Overall, SAT, TID, combined with three Control Variables to explain 71% of the variance (R2=0.71) with a large effect size. A parametric approach to test the significance of path differences across the three PCM stages provided support for Hypothesis 2 and revealed both direct and indirect effects of individuals allocated to a higher stage were significantly larger than the effects of patrons segmented at a lower stage at p<.05. No conditional indirect effects of TID was found for subjects in the allegiance group due to a low computation of power. The magnitude of moderation effects was a medium-small effect size. Last, direct economic effects were assessed using log-linear least square regressions with breakdown of merchandise purchase intentions. Holding all other variables constant, on average, a marginal increase in the seven-point scale of TID and SAT would translate into an increase of 5% and 7% in buying team-related merchandise within next 12 months respectively.

In summary, the current research augments prior research by considering the role that team identification has for increasing the predicative validity of satisfaction on explaining goal-directed team related behavior among sport consumers. First, it provides empirical evidence to support how team identification partially mediates the relationship between satisfaction and future behavioral intentions. The large variance explained (R2=71%) combined with significant direct economic effects supports theorizing that team identification is a mechanism which has the capacity to promote success for sport organizations. Increasing team identification in conjunction with optimizing service delivery can translate positive game experiences into future consumption behaviors for spectators and consumers. Second, multigroup moderation analysis confirmed the benefits of the PCM as a theoretical framework to segment sport consumers based on their level of team involvement to better understand the role that managerial actions have for predicting goal directed behavior, which can contribute to future longitudinal investigation of the development of team identification.