An Interdisciplinary Conceptualization of Hierarchical Leisure Constraint Theory, Constraint Negotiation, and Endorsement

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Introduction

Since Hierarchical Leisure Constraint Theory (HLCT) was introduced into leisure literature by Crawford and Godbey (1987), it has typically been used to examine how motivated individuals negotiate constraints to participate in leisure activities (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Pritchard, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009; Son, Mowen, & Kerstetter, 2008). Hubbard and Mannell (2001) empirically tested four models of leisure constraint negotiation—the (1) independence model, (2) negotiation-buffer model, (3) constraint-effects-mitigation model, and (4) perceived-constraint-reduction model—finding strong support for the constraint-effects-mitigation model.

Noting the similar operationalization of motivation and involvement within leisure literature (Zaichkowsky, 1985), Lee and Scott (2009) implemented an adaptation of the constraint-effects-mitigation model to examine the relationship of celebrity fandom to leisure constraints, constraints negotiation, and frequency of participation in leisure activities related to the celebrity. In lieu of motivation, celebrity fandom was applied to the model; serving as an involvement type. Results obtained in testing the adapted model provided additional support for the interchangeability of the constructs (Lee & Scott, 2009).

While HLCT has been examined in leisure literature for more than two decades, scholars suggest that the testing of constraint research has been too narrowly focused on participation (Nadirova & Jackson, 2000), and that other forms of leisure behavior may be applicable (Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). Though not a behavior, purchase intention is a viable outcome for examination, as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) supports its use as an antecedent of leisure shopping (Bäckström, 2011), which involves purchasing products. Extending the rationale of Lee and Scott (2009) in substituting motivation for celebrity fandom, it is posited that athlete endorsement can serve as a source of involvement and motivation for an individual to purchase a product. “A general communications model that is proposed by Mowen, Brown, and Schulman (1979), integrating balance theory (Heider, 1958) and attribution theory (Kelley & Michela, 1980),” may apply in such circumstances, as consumers may be motivated to purchase an endorsed product, and later become fans of the athlete endorsing the product as a result of the pre-existing association (Mowen & Brown, 1981, p. 437). Subsequently, the purpose of this study was to propose a modified constraint-effects-mitigation model to apply HLCT and constraint negotiation to athlete endorsement effects as they pertain to endorsed product purchase intention.

The proposed model provides an impetus to consider the theoretical implications that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraint may have on the ability of athlete endorsement to affect consumer purchase intention. Practical implications related to application of the proposed model would involve the selection of athlete endorsers and constraint mitigation initiatives.

Review of Literature and Development of Propositions

Endorsement effects have been examined with a number of methodologies, typically finding positive effects related to firm value (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995), sales, (Elberse & Verleun, 2012), and purchase intention (Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Kahle & Homer, 1985). In summarizing findings, Elberse and Verleun (2012) conclude that “a firm’s decision to enlist an athlete endorser generally has a positive pay-off in brand-level sales—in an absolute sense and relative to the firm’s competitors—and increases the firm’s stock returns” (p. 163). Therefore, the following proposition is made regarding athlete endorsement and endorsed product purchase intention:

P1: Athlete endorsement for a product will positively influence consumer’s intention to purchase that product.
As the term “constraint” differs in definition by field and context, the proposed model adheres to those used within business management and literature. Considering such context, HLCT effectively serves as conceptualization of constraint in the proposed model (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). A major tenet of HLCT is that three constraint types—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural—exist in a hierarchical relationship (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991); from most proximal (intrapersonal) to most distal (structural). An individual must resolve intrapersonal constraints before facing structural constraints; addressing constraint types sequentially. Further, the power of each constraint type is proposed to be based its proximity to the individual (Crawford et al., 1991). Thus:

P2: Constraints will negatively influence consumers’ intentions to purchase the endorsed product.

Results from several early constraint studies found weak or no relationship between constraints and participation. In response to these findings—which, initially appear to contradict HLCT—Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993) present the negotiation proposition, introducing negotiation as a mediating variable between constraint and participation when motivation is present. The proposed mediation relationship of negotiation provides an explanation for why results from initial studies on HLCT appear contradictory. Based on proceeding studies using a constraint-effects-mitigation model (Son et al., 2008), the following propositions are made:

P3: Athlete endorsement of a product will positively influence consumer negotiation.

P4: Constraints for purchasing the athlete endorsed product will positively influence consumer negotiation.

P5: Consumer negotiation will positively influence consumers’ intention to purchase the product, serving as a mediator for athlete endorsement of a product.

Theoretically, examination of constraint negotiation within the context of athlete endorsement is expected to further explain the relationship of athlete endorsement to its known moderators. For instance, future studies on athlete endorsement effects could assess how gender (Grau, Roselli, & Taylor, 2007) and product involvement (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983) influence negotiation when constraints are present. Moreover, scholars may test if match-up hypothesis (Till & Busler, 2000) increases consumer ability to negotiate constraints when determining whether to purchase an endorsed product.

This study also has practical implications in that testing of the proposed model could assist sport marketers in selection of athlete endorsers for their products—indicating contingencies for a particular athlete’s effectiveness as an endorser of a particular product targeting a particular market. Through identification of constraint types that most impede consumers’ intention to purchase, sport marketers can proactively develop programs that would mitigate the presence of such constraints amongst their target market.