Conceptualizing the Role of Self-Event Congruity in Consumers’ Event Consumption

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Marketing Abstract 2015-197
Saturday, June 6, 2015 8:00 AM  Poster (Ballroom B-C)

Given the high cost in such areas as broadcasting, athletic contracts, advertising, and venue and event operations, along with fierce market competitions in today’s sport marketing, how to effectively promoting consumer consumption of sport events (e.g., direct event attendance and indirect media usage) continuously is a major challenge for sport investors and managers. To a great extent, consumer purchase behavior is driven by the meaning of the consumption activity and the value provided from that meaning (Levy, 1959; Kwak & Kang, 2009). Therefore, the symbolic meaning of sporting event could be capitalized to promote the consumer consumption. According to the self-congruity theory, the higher congruity between consumer-self and a provided product/service, the greater behavioral intentions and actual behavior they may have. A few studies also have empirically supported the validity of this notion in sport marketing settings, such as studies related to leisure sport consumption (Kang, 2002), team-licensed merchandise consumption (Kwak & Kang, 2007), and sport sponsorship (Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). However, two crucial questions remain unanswered in the current literature. First, the congruity between consumers and events, an important form of self-congruity, has not been studied in terms of its impact on event consumption. Second, when examining the influence of self-congruity on consumer behavior, only a unidimensional model was used, which fails to provide specific, more detailed information on self-congruity that is often explained in at least two perspectives (i.e., actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop a conceptual framework to guide studies on the concept of self-event congruity and its impact on consumers’ direct and indirect event consumptions.

Based on the studies on self-concept (e.g., Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Rosenberg, 1979), the marketing phenomenon of self-congruity, indicating the match-up between an individuals' self-concept and characters of a given product or service, was proposed and has been tested in various marketing contexts (Sirgy & Su, 2000; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). Generally, self-congruity involves two components, including actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity. Actual self-congruity refers to the congruity between consumer actual self-image and the product image, which reflects the human need of self-consistency that is also called self-verification in some studies. Ideal self-congruity refers to congruity between consumer ideal self-image and the product image, which reflects the human need of self-enhancement that people have tendency to enhance themselves to a positive direction, such as aspired images or standards (Cohen, 1959, Coopersmith, 1979; Rogers & Dymond, 1954; Rosenberg, 1979). Extensive literature on self-congruity theory depicted a clear picture that self-congruity beliefs, both actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity, are aroused by a product’s clues that would positively influence consumer attitude, preference, and final behavioral (e.g., Sirgy, 1980, 1982; Heath, & Scott, 1998). Consistent with these findings in general business, a few scholars have conducted the self-congruity studies in sport marketing and came to the similar conclusions (e.g., Kang, 2002; Kwak & Kang, 2007; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). Therefore, the current study proposed that self-event congruity, as an important form of self-congruity, would positively impact consumers’ affective responses (e.g., perceived value), conative responses (e.g., intention of event consumption), and actual consumption behavior.

Perceived value not only refers to the tangible utilitarian value, but also includes the intangible and intrinsic value (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesto-Bonillo, 2006). It is a subjective and affective construct and would be influenced by both the physical attributes of a product/service and the individual mental factors, such as personality, personal liking, and needs. From perspective of equity theory, a consumer would evaluate the ratio of his/her perceived cost in consumption to the value provided form service/product (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). If the perceived value from service/product is comparably or over his/her perceived cost, the customer would have the high equitable feeling. This feeling will further exert the positive influence on enhancing consumer satisfaction and promoting consumer behavioral intentions (Alves, 2011; Lee & Overby, 2004; Wang, Lo, Chi, & Yang, 2004).
Additionally, although there are varying kinds of sport event consumption activities, several major forms have been identified and adopted widely, such as event attendance, licensed merchandise, media consumption, and word-of-mouth (e.g., Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, & Kaplanidou, 2011; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003; Zhang, Connaughton, & Vaughn, 2004). Based on the spending nature of these consumption activities, the current study divided the variables into two categories: direct event consumption (e.g., event attendance and licensed merchandise) and indirect event consumption (e.g., media consumption and word-of-mouth). Given the different cost levels of direct and indirect event consumptions, it is reasonable to refer that that the stimuli (e.g., self-event congruity) would influence these two sets of consumption to varying degrees.

In summary, through a comprehensive review of literature as the main method of inquiry, a theoretical framework was proposed, which includes the following components: (a) actual self-event congruity and ideal self-event congruity would respectively exert positive influence on the perceived value of event and also on the direct and indirect event consumption variables; (b) perceived value would positively influence the direct and indirect event consumption behaviors; and (c) perceived value also plays as a mediating role in the relationship between self-event congruity and event consumption behaviors.

The proposed conceptual framework has addressed the role of actual and ideal self-event congruity in fans’ event consumption and embraced perceived value as a major mediating variable. The development of this framework provides a theoretical foundation for further empirical studies. The current study enriches the self-congruity studies in sport settings and sheds a light on understanding sport fans behavior. The developed framework also provides insights for sport event managers to better comprehend fans behavior in event consumption and in turn launch effective and efficient marketing campaigns.