Effects of Team Identification on College Adjustment: A Cross-National Study between American and Korean students

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Marketing Abstract 2016-106  Friday, June 3, 2016  Poster
8:50 AM  (Legacy North)

Many social scientists support the notion that the most common issues influencing college dropouts are a lack of social relationships with friends and difficult academic settings (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). A variety of social activities such as intercollegiate athletics can yield opportunities for students to not only integrate themselves into social groups but also to enrich their college lives by tying their values to a sport team (Koo, Sung & Martinez, in press). Thus, the degree of attachment toward intercollegiate athletics may influence a student’s social integration and academic adjustment in college life. This study has been utilized team identification as a predictor of social and academic adjustment. Although a number of studies in the field of sport management have examined the effects of team identification on consumer behaviors such as purchasing intentions, game attendance, media consumption, and spectator motives (e.g., Hardin, Koo, Ruhiely, Dittmore, & McGreevey, 2012; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Madrigal, 1995; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000), little research has been carried out into its impact on comprehensive college adjustments (Koo, et al., in press).

Moreover, very few studies have examined cross-national differences in team identification in the context of intercollegiate athletics since the differences in the popularity and infrastructure of college sports between the United States and Korea are apparent. It is necessary to better understand how different cultures influence team identification, social adjustment, and academic adjustment considering cross-cultural equivalence. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the differences in team identification and college adjustment between American and Korean college students. The emphasis was placed on discovering the differences in the effects of team identification on college adjustments from cross-national perspective. The following research hypotheses were examined:

H1: There are differences in team identification and college adjustment (e.g., social adjustment and academic adjustment) depending on student’s countries.

H2: The magnitude of the relationship between team identification and college adjustment (e.g., social adjustment and academic adjustment) differ according to the student’s countries.

For this study, two sets of data were collected: (1) a purposive sample of 320 American students at a major public university in the southeastern part of the United States; (2) a purposive sample of 301 South Korean students at a major private university in the western part of Korea, using an intercept survey method. Unlike the United States, since most universities in Korea do not have noticeable intercollegiate athletic programs, the researchers selected a private university that had an eminent intercollegiate athletics program. Thus, collecting data at this school was judged to be equivalent to Division I institutions in the US, while team identification and college adjustments were evaluated using Spectator Sport Identification Scale (SSIS: Wann & Branscombe, 1993) and Student Adaption to College Questionnaire (SACQ: Backer & Siryk, 1989), respectively.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine differences in team identification and college adjustments between two countries (e.g., RH1). Findings revealed that college adjustments were significantly different over the two countries: Hoteling $T^2 = .369, F (3, 626) = 76.92, p < .001$. The univariate F-tests provide additional support for the difference in team identification: $F (1, 628) = 49.91, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$, and academic adjustment: $F (1, 628) = 198.35, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$, while social adjustment was not significantly different between Korea and the USA: $F (1, 628) = .12, p = .73$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. 
Prior to examining the decomposition of structure effects (e.g., RH2), two measurement models were first evaluated. Findings indicated that both measurement models were fitted to the data: Korea, $\chi^2 (214) = 721.481, p < .001$, CFI = .906, SRMR = .129, RMSEA = .086; United States, $\chi^2 (214) = 423.056, p < .001$, CFI = .946, SRMR = .063, RMSEA = .056. Decomposition of the significant direct and indirect relationships among the latent constructs (e.g., team identification, social adjustment, and academic adjustment) was scrutinized by assessing the structural equation model (SEM). The parameter estimates for Korean students and American students indicated that team identification was a stronger predictor of academic adjustment for American students ($\beta = .313, p < .001$) than Korea students ($\beta = .251, p < .001$). On the other hand, findings revealed that team identification was a stronger predictor of social adjustment for Korean students ($\beta = .359, p < .001$) than for American students ($\beta = .213, p < .001$) while the effect of social adjustment derived from team identification on academic adjustment was also stronger for Korean students ($\beta = .526, p < .001$) than for American students ($\beta = .242, p < .001$).

The current study found that American students had significantly higher team identification and were academically better adjusted than Korean students. These phenomena were quite obvious due to the prevalence and involvement of intercollegiate athletics in the United States and the academic pressure and competitiveness caused by the Korean education system. It is also interesting to note that social adjustment for students in Korea, which was more significantly influenced by team identification than in the United States, plays the most important role in enhancing academic adjustment. This reveals that intercollegiate athletics in Korea has great potential to help students build social relationships with other students, which in turn could directly influence their academic adjustment. In line with these findings, we suggest college administrators in both countries should consider intercollegiate athletics as an effective communication tool to improve the complex nature of college life. Intercollegiate athletics could be a common ground in which students could develop relationships, share thoughts, and collectively practice affiliation (Correll & Park, 2005). Therefore, an expansion of this common ground via using various social media platforms would allow universities to develop the most fitting surroundings for students to maximize their adjustment to college life.