Effects of Situational and Enduring Involvement on Team Identification

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Since intercollegiate athletics has become a powerful business and has significantly generated profits from a variety of sports fans, many scholars pay noteworthy attention to sports fans relationships with sport entities. In particular, team identification has been recognized as a level of psychological attachment toward a certain sport team (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Koo & Hardin, 2008). Fans who have strong identification with the team are likely to possess biased purchase behavior, frequent behavior for some duration, differentiation with respect to alternative brands, and psychological functions in evaluative processes (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Milne & McDonald, 1999; Sloan, 1996; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). However, there is a lack of research in scrutinizing factors significantly associated with the development of team identification in college sports.

In higher education, students are involved with a number of products related to intercollegiate athletics such as core products (e.g., team performance, team tradition, team success, players, and coaches), service quality (e.g., stadium and employees), social environment (e.g., community affiliations, fan association, and social media), belief, and domain involvement (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Gladden & Funk, 2002; Yoshida & James, 2010; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). The current study was intended to use the concept of situational and enduring product involvement as a theoretical framework to understand factors generating team identification. Involvement is the motivational level of a person when relating to a product and is articulated as the level of interest in that product (Mittal & Lee, 1989). Celsi and Olson (1988) purported that situational involvement is directed toward the use of a product in a specific situation, whereas enduring involvement is based on the relationship of the product to the person's centrally held values across all purchase options. Thus, in this study, a relatively short-term state of arousal related to team attributes was referred to as situational involvement (e.g., core products, service quality, and social environment) while enduring involvement was regarded as a student's centrally held values and interests in a particular sport category (e.g., belief and domain involvement). As both types of involvement reflect a student's feelings of self-relevancy toward the products, increased involvement could facilitate a greater amount of thoughts and emotions related to the team. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine whether a student's situational and enduring product involvement related to intercollegiate athletics has a significant impact on team identification.

For this study, undergraduate students enrolled in a major public university in the southeastern region of the United States participated and data was collected via an intercept survey method. The data collection resulted in a purposive sample of 242 undergraduate students. Since five products related to intercollegiate athletics can be meaningfully described by a higher-order structure, Rindskopf and Rose's (1988) model comparison between a first-order model consisting of five correlated factors (e.g., products) and a second-order model consisting of two superordinate factors (e.g., involvement) and five first-order factors was employed to examine the underlying structure of factors influencing team identification.

The results of the analyses indicated that the second-order correlated model $\chi^2 (1112) = 2133.100, p < .001$, RMSEA = .062, CFI = .909] fit the data better than the first-order model $\chi^2 (1116) = 2348.730, p < .001$, RMSEA = .068, CFI = .890]. The chi-square difference test also supported the second-order correlated model was the parsimonious model for the data when compared to the first-order model: $\Delta \chi^2(4) = 215.630, p < .001$. Findings revealed empirical evidence of the second-order structure of the five products discussed in this study. Therefore, the second-order model was used for further analysis while the results from the structure equation modeling
demonstrated that situational involvement \( (t = 5.766, p < .001) \) and enduring involvement \( (t = 3.378, p < .001) \) can enhance students’ team identification in higher education.

Because students are prospective season ticket holders and donors, it is important to identify potential aspects positively associated with the improvement of team identification. This research uncovered that a student’s identification with the team could be determined by a relatively short-term state of arousal related to team attributes as well as a deep-rooted sense of belief and domain involvement with the certain sport. Team identification has been known as one of the key strategies for any sport organizations to succeed in a competitive market environment, therefore, findings from this study suggest that sport marketers and college administrators should pay more attention to the following areas: (a) accessibility to core products (e.g., student interaction with players, coaches, and team), (b) development of community and fan activities (e.g., various community service opportunities), (c) improvement of peripheral services (e.g., environmental and functional services), (d) communication through social media outlets (e.g., closeness through social media), (e) education of sports (e.g., increase in knowledge and interest) and (f) enhancement of team tradition (e.g., maintenance of domain involvement) – in order to trigger and boost the extent to which students identify with the team. The current study could contribute to the literature by using the concepts of situational and enduring product involvement to identify factors affecting a student’s team identification in higher education.