The Measurement of Team Identification: What We Did Wrong and Are Still Trying to Fix

Bob Heere, University of South Carolina
Daniel Lock, Bournemouth University

Marketing - Fan ID (Other)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2017-168

Friday, June 2, 2017 1:00 PM
Room: Princeton

While team identification is one of the most used constructs in sport consumer behaviour research, our measurement of the construct has made limited progress since the contribution of the Sport Spectator Identity Scale (SSIS) and Team Identification Index (TII) (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Despite the obvious contributions of these instruments, they suffer from a lack of content validity due to the absence of a clear theoretical framework used to underpin each instrument, and a strong dependence on reliability measures as a sole indicator of construct validity. In addition, the SSIS and TII provide at best, a highly simplified picture of identification with sport teams, at worst, they might be tapping into something else entirely (e.g., role identification or psychological commitment). Recently, Trail and James (2016) have acknowledged that the TII more aptly measures role identity (i.e., identity theory); however, the original instrument was rationalized from a social identity theory perspective. Yet, despite this attempt to correct their previous mistakes, they fail to explain what role identity is, and how it differs from social identity theory. In fact, when, Trail, Lee and Anderson (2016) discussed the TII as measuring role identity rather than team identity, but they provided a very limited theoretical discussion for why this is the case.

More recently, sport-marketing scholars have contributed multi-dimensional team identification measures underpinned by social identity theory (Dimmock, Grove, & Ecklund, 2005; Heere, James, 2007). This line of research has progressed our understanding of the complexity of team identification; however, it has not replaced the more popular one-dimensional scales mainly due to the complexity and length of the measures. Many authors prefer to use the one-dimensional scales for pragmatic reasons, such as shorter survey length, and less complex data analysis methods. As a result, our understanding of team identification as a multi-dimensional instrument is still somewhat limited, and our understanding of role identification and how it impacts consumer behaviour is still in its infancy. A further complication associated with measuring team identification is the increasing theoretical and conceptual development that posits other forms of group and relational identity that influence consumer behaviour (Katz & Heere, 2013, 2015; Lock & Funk, 2016). Current approaches to measuring team identification do not provide tools that allow us to consider the complementary influence of team identification and, for example, interpersonal interactions with other consumers.

The theoretical framework for this presentation consists of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and identity theory (Stryker, 1980). The combination of these approaches provides a theoretical basis to 1) critically review previous measures of team identification (social identification), and 2) to contemplate potential methods and instruments to capture the influence of interpersonal interactions on consumer behaviour (role identity) in future research. In that sense, the work of Katz and Heere (2013, 2015), and of Lock and Funk (2016) might have been more informative for our understanding of role identity, than the recent work of Trail and James (2016) and Trail, Lee and Anderson (2016).

Therefore, the goal of this presentation is to review the original work on team identification, discuss it flaws, and explore the relevance of more rigorous theoretical approaches to measure both team identification (as a focal point for social identity) and fan identification (as a focal point for role identity). It will be argued that conceptually separating these two terms will be crucial in progressing research on sport consumer identity processes. The application of the arguments presented will provide a basis for the development of new measurement tools that capture a more realistic picture of the groups and roles with which a consumer identifies in relation to sport organisations.