The Effect of Team Identification on Information Processing

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For sport professionals, there is increased emphasis on framing a singularly focused message to increase consumer engagement and attention to a website or brand (Doorn et al., 2010). Research indicates that media has a significant impact on what people think and learn, through its curation (Neuman, Guggenheim, Jang, & Bae, 2014). The most efficient path to influence consumers is through consistent exposure to information that reinforces prior beliefs (Lee & Park, 2007). From a cognitive learning perspective, increased attention to a message promotes elaboration and leads to positive learning outcomes of recall and comprehension. However, research has failed to investigate how sport consumers engage and learn from digital sport news.

What consumers learn from a message is largely based on cognitive processes and existing biases (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Prior research indicates two forms of information processing, attention and elaboration, are antecedents to learning. However, for message elaboration to take place, attention must first occur (Eveland, 2001). Additionally, Morris, Woo, and Singh (2005) found that emotional responses can also influence information processing. As a result, team identification (TID) will likely create a bias in the elaboration of information about a team and subsequent learning outcomes.

The effects of Team ID have been displayed in various capacities. Higher levels of TID produce intense emotional responses (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne, & Braddock, 2007; Sloan, 1989) and influence attending games, buying merchandise, and increased media use (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Additionally, research on information processing indicates that commitment level, a close proxy to TID, influences elaboration of sport news and increases recall of embedded facts (Funk & Pritchard, 2006). Hence, the current research examines whether TID creates a bias in information processing and learning outcomes recall and comprehension. It is hypothesized that the effect of attention on elaboration will be mediated by TID in a digital sport news context.

Method and Results

Participants (N=592) were recruited for a between-subjects, experimental design study. Participants were randomly shown an identical sport story about a team on either twitter or traditional website followed by measures assessing recall and comprehension of the story, attention, elaboration, and TID. A multiple mediation analysis was conducted in SPSS AMOS 26. The indirect effect of Attention -> Elaboration -> Recall and Comprehension was not significant ($\beta = .001$, LLCI = .009, ULCI = .029). However, there was a significant indirect effect with TID was included: Attention -> TID -> Elaboration -> Recall and Comprehension ($\beta = .018$, LLCI = .005, ULCI = .0324). No significant differences were found in recall and comprehension between the twitter and webpage conditions.

Discussion

This research theoretically contributes by showing how Team ID operates as an explicit bias for processing sport news. Specifically, Team ID helps explain the relationship between attention to a message and subsequent elaboration that occurs. While information processing is largely cognitive, the emotive effects of Team ID also contribute to what and how consumers learn. Managerially, understanding how a consumer’s explicit biases influence what is learned from a message can influence marketing campaigns.