

Effects of Team Identification on Word-of-Mouth Effectiveness in Different Fan Bases: A Mediation Effect of Prototypicality

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25-minute oral presentation

(including questions)

Introduction

When people initiate their socialization process to become fans of sport teams, they tend to be influenced by other consumers (Casper & Menefee, 2010). In particular, people who have high team identification (team ID) tend to recommend others to watch games of their favorite teams (i.e., word-of-mouth; Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003). However, little is known whether people process others' recommendations differently depending on a recommender's team ID and unique characteristics of the fan base (i.e., relative size and homogeneity). Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of a recommender's team ID on the recipient's intention to attend a recommended game in different fan bases.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Social categorization theory postulates that people psychologically classify others and themselves into certain social categories to understand social environments around them (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Specifically, when people select a category for social categorization, they focus on the most distinctive feature that is not shared by many people in a given situation (Nelson & Miller, 1995). If only a small group of people support a sport team, fans would be perceived as unique individuals rather than typical community residents. Thus, when nonfans communicate with existing fans, they perceive a clear distinction with existing fans. In contrast, if most people in a community support a sport team, being a fan of the team would be a common characteristic shared among community residents. Consequently, nonfans would not perceive a clear distinction with existing fans if they are both community residents. In persuasion research, scholars have shown that people tend to be persuaded by in-group members more than out-group members (Loken, 2006). Thus, nonfans would be more willing to accept a recommendation from existing fans. Accordingly, we developed the following hypotheses.

H1-a: When a small group of people support a sport team, a recommender's team ID has a negative effect on the recipient's intention to watch a recommended game.

H1-b: When most people support a sport team, a recommender's team ID has a positive effect on the recipient's intention to watch a recommended game.

In addition, to examine whether social categorization actually occurs during the persuasion process, we incorporated the concept of prototypicality, which refers to the extent to which a group member is perceived to represent essential characteristics of the group (Turner et al., 1987). If existing fans are perceived as typical residents, their recommendations would be more influential to nonfans' decision-making compared to when existing fans are perceived as atypical residents. Accordingly, we developed the following hypothesis.

H2: A recommender's prototypicality as a resident mediates the effects of the recommender's team ID on the recipient's intention to attend a recommended game.

Methodology

We employed a 2 (relative size: small vs. large) by 2 (homogeneity: low vs. high) by 2 (recommender's team ID: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design. A total of 210 participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical

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Turk. In the experiment, participants were asked to imagine that they live in a factious city, Wrester. They also learned that there is a professional soccer team, Wrester FC. In the small fan base condition, participants were told that only a small group of people support the Wrester FC whereas participants in the large fan base condition learned that most people support the team. In the low-homogeneity condition, participants were told that the existing fans show very different behaviors from each other whereas participants in the high-homogeneity condition learned that the fans show many similar behaviors. Then, participants were exposed to another stimulus about word-of-mouth recommendation. In the low-team ID condition, a recommender says that he is not a big fan of Wrester FC whereas the recommender says that he is a big fan of Wrester FC in the high-team ID condition. After reading all stimuli, participants indicated their intention to attend a recommended game (Ajzen, 1991) and their perceived prototypicality of the recommender as a Wrester resident (Ward, Bitner, & Barnes, 1992). They also indicated their involvement with watching soccer (Zaichkowsky, 1985) and need for uniqueness (Lynn & Harris, 1997). These two variables were included as covariates in data analysis.

Results

Multivariate analysis of covariate was performed to test the interaction effects between three independent variables on intention to attend a recommended game. We found a significant three-way interactions ($F = 6.81, p = .01$). Specifically, the results showed that (1) a recommender with low team ID caused a greater effect on intention to attend the game ($M = 5.44$) than a recommender with high team ID ($M = 4.24$) in the small, highly homogeneous fan base, (2) a recommender with high team ID caused a greater effect on intention to attend the game ($M = 5.81$) than a recommender with low team ID ($M = 5.19$) in the large, highly homogeneous fan base, and (3) such group differences were not found in the low-homogeneity conditions. In addition, the results of structural equation modeling implied that there was a significant indirect effect of team ID through a recommender's prototypicality on intention to attend the game ($p = .03$), while there was no significant direct effect of team ID on intention to attend the game ($p = .27$). Therefore, we concluded that the recommender's prototypicality as a resident played a full mediation role. Based on these results, we will discuss theoretical and practical implications at the conference.

Reference

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