

When Your Team Loses: Fan Attitude Toward Sponsor Advertisement

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50-minute poster presentation

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Introduction

In sport management literature, the concept of game outcome and team identification have long been assumed as the key component that shapes fans' overall impression of the consumption experience (Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Jang et al., 2017). Sport spectators influence individual happiness and health outcome either in a positive or negative way (Inoue et al., 2015). In a negative game condition, fans are likely to distance themselves from the team (Wann & Branscombe, 1990), and become more exasperated when the team lost against rivals (Talarico & Moore, 2012). When losing a game, the negative effect on fans' attitude is evident (Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Mardirgal & Chen, 2008); however, researchers need to investigate how to minimize the negative consequences. Studies examined the shift of fans' perception and behavior from sport team to team sponsor (e.g., Parker & Fink, 2010; Biscaia et al., 2013; Rifon et al., 2004). However, most research on this topic has examined the role of sponsors' exposure on sport fans' attitudinal/behavioral outcomes. There has been limited research that has been undertaken to understand how fans react to sponsors' advertisement associated with game outcome and level of team identification. Many mass communication studies have demonstrated the role of different brand communication strategies on a consumer response (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Ju et al., 2016). Thus, this study investigates how athlete-focused and product-focused advertisement differently perform on individuals' attitude toward sponsor advertisement when the team loses.

Theoretical Background and Research Hypotheses.

When encountering a negative game outcome, individual involves in a process referred to as Cutting off Reflected Failure (CORF) phenomenon (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). CORFing indicates individual tendency to increase the distance from unsuccessful others (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Due to this psychological process, a game outcome directly influences the level of self-esteem and tendency to express their loyalty (Jensen et al., 2016).

By examining the interaction between game outcome and team identification on fan's happiness, Jang et al. (2017) found out that highly identified group showed more variation in the levels of happiness than the other group following the game outcome. As such, fans' emotional responses and attitudes toward the team cannot be always favorable. Even though the sport fans mostly maintain the positive identity within the team they support (Chien et al., 2016), fans may distance themselves from the team or athlete when they perform poorly (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). Adopted from the coping strategy (Breakwell, 1986), highly identified fans may temporary CORF when the team loses due to their willingness to be unrelated although their team support may be resilient (Bizman & Yinon, 2002; Boen et al., 2002). Therefore, displaying them an athlete-focused advertisement following the game will produce individuals' lower levels of attitude toward the advertisement than showing them a product-focused advertisement. On the contrary, there will be no significant difference in terms of the two different advertisements for lowly identified fans because individuals have lower awareness about the game and the athlete compared to the other.

Thus,

H1: Fans with high team identification will report lower levels of attitudes toward sponsor advertisement when watching an athlete-focused advertisement than watching a product-focused advertisement.

H2: Fans with low team identification will report similar levels of attitudes toward sponsor advertisement regardless of advertisement type.

Method.

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The present study utilized a 2 (team identification: high vs. low) x 2 (advertisement type: athlete-focused vs. product-focused) between-subjects design. A total of 104 general sport spectators was recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The average age was 31 years old ($SD: 8.86$), and more than a half (52.9%, $N=55$) were male.

Respondents were divided into two team identification groups (high vs. low) based on their response. Then, the respondents were exposed to U.S. Women's National Soccer (USWNT) game that they lost against France. After watching the game, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two advertisement stimulus situations: (1) athlete-focused advertisement or (2) product-focused advertisement. In athlete-focused advertisement situation, USWNT players advertise the product, while the overall advertisement emphasizes the product features in the product-focused advertisement. Team identification was measured using four-items adapted from Wann and Branscombe (1993). The attitude toward advertisement was assessed with four-items (Holbrook & Batra, 1987).

The result from ANOVA indicated that there was a significant interaction effect between team identification and advertisement type on fans' attitude toward sponsor advertisement ($F(1, 102) = 9.57, p < .01$). Highly identified fans showed greater levels of advertisement attitude on product-focused advertisement compared to athlete-focused advertisement ($t=3.42, p < .001$). Meanwhile, lowly identified fans showed a similarity on both product-focused advertisement and athlete-focused advertisement ($t=1.47, p > .05$). Therefore, both hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported.

Result and Discussion.

Despite the importance of the game outcome, researchers have paid limited attention to the expedient advertising strategy depends on the result of the games. The result of this study supported the previous theoretical explanation on CORFing phenomenon (Bizman & Yinon, 2002; Boen et al., 2002). This study also extends aforementioned Jang et al.'s (2017) study on fan happiness by demonstrating that highly identified fans may have a less favorable attitude toward the athlete-focused advertisement than product-focused advertisement when the team loses. Therefore, it is necessary to televise rightful advertisements depend on fans' identification. For instance, both fans in an online community and social media webpage are likely to strengthen their level of team identification (Kim & Kim, 2017; Benigni et al., 2009). Thus, an athlete-focused advertisement may not perform efficiently to these specific groups. In this case, sport team and sponsor should broadcast the product-focused advertisement without inducing team-related image.

This study conducted a single experiment with two types of advertisement (athlete-focused vs. product-focused). For future research, researchers need to investigate further to ensure generalizability of the results by adding more types of stimuli incorporating different types of sponsor advertisement and positive game outcome condition. In addition, future research needs to conduct a longitudinal study on how fans CORFing changes.