

How Sport Consumers Authenticate Teams: Global Perspectives

Don Lee, *University of Houston*
Inhae Park, *Honam University*
Leeseob Maeng, *Hanyang University*
Ho Yeol Yu, *University of Houston*
Myungwoo Lee, *University of Houston*

Wednesday, October 24, 2018
6:30-7:20 PM, Ford Field

50-minute poster presentation

Background

Existing literature emphasized brand ‘authenticity’ as a cognitive cue to product choices (Beverland, 2006; Gundlach & Neville, 2012). Brand authenticity studies in marketing claimed that brand authenticity is a multidimensional construct signifying genuineness and originality to be the two key elements. Because the meaning of (brand) authenticity is socially constructed (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) and often vary across contexts (Cohen, 1988), there is a need for research that is context specific (e.g., team brands in a sport context) as well as culture specific. Regardless of this growing research interest, this topic has not been substantiated in the sport industry (Lee, Giannoulakis, Pearson, Breslin, & Kim, 2017), especially at the cross-cultural level. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify multidimensional aspects that consist of sport fans' perceived team authenticity in an emerging market such as South Korea. We reference Lee et al.'s operationalized definition of team authenticity as a perceived evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a team (as a brand) by sport consumers.

Brief Review of Literature

There is no consensus on a single definition of brand authenticity because this concept is often perceived very differently by consumption fields (Bruner, 1994; Gundlach & Neville, 2012). A number of scholars have attempted to identify antecedents of brand authenticity in a variety of consumer contexts. Authenticity may be particularly applicable to the sport industry, as we take into consideration cultural aspects of contemporary sport. Beverland and Farrelly (2010) indicated that consumers recurrently seek characteristics (these are ‘associations’ in a sense) of brands or products that convey authenticity. By nature, consumers’ authentication is a means for determining what is genuine (or authentic) pertaining to a given product or consumption experience, which often is an end result of evaluation of brand associations. Eggers, O’Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster, and Guldenberg (2013) indicated that brand authenticity is an important determinant to brand trust. Because research on brand authenticity in the context of team sports is scarce at the cultural level, a compelling need was recognized for the measurement of contributing factors that determine the perceived team authenticity among active sport consumers in global markets. Given the importance placed on authenticity by researchers in other settings, conceptualizing and operationalizing the concept of sport team authenticity could provide valuable guidelines to sport team brands invested in maintaining or enhancing their perceived authenticity, especially at the cross-cultural level.

Subjects, Instruments, and Data Analyses

To identify descriptors pertaining to team authenticity, using open-ended questions, data were collected from 61 undergraduate students enrolled in sport and industry courses at a Tier I University in South Korea. Participants were asked to list things/aspects that determined participant’s perceived authenticity of their favorite professional sport teams. We primarily replicated Lee, et al.’s (2017) study in the overall methodology except English-Korean back to back translations. The majority of the subjects included 66% of male with mean age of 24.15. In this preliminary analysis, 266 descriptors were identified and we classified them into nine emerged themes. Based on a four-member expert panel’s (in the area of sociology, psychology, and sport/business administration) subjective judgment, content categories and respective items were refined, agreed upon, and finalized.

2018 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XVI)

Subsequently, the panel of experts constructed a survey questionnaire. Overall items had 67 factors representing each of the nine content categories. Items were randomly ordered to minimize respondents' errors. All questions were measured by a 7-point Likert-type scale. The instrument has been approved by the Institutional Review Board. Using Equation, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was ran to examine psychometric properties of the instruments. CFA results supported adequate reliability and validity of the scales in the current study. In this main analysis, 336 survey responses were collected from attendees at five professional sporting events in Korea (two basketball and three volleyball games). The following model fit criteria were applied: RMSEA < .08; CFI > .90; SRMR < .10; GFI > .90; and $\chi^2/df < 3.0$ (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2010).

Brief Overview of Key Findings

In the qualitative phase, approximately 90-95% of the themes corresponded among the researchers as follow: team culture and playing style (85 out of 266 or 40.0%), team management and operation (70 out of 266 or 26.3%), fan socialization and loyalty (46 out of 266 or 17.3%), corporate social responsibility (27 out of 266 or 10.1%), value (13 out of 266 or 4.9%), professionalism and ethics (12 out of 266 or 4.5%), branding and branding elements (7 out of 266 or 2.6%), and team legacy (6 out of 266 or 2.3%).

In the quantitative phase, the CFA initially assessed nine content categories. However, due to multicollinearity between two content areas, two content categories were combined into one based on a separate principle component analysis. The chi-square difference test between the two models were significant. We finally identified eight content categories that were interpretable. Fit indices for the final model ($\chi^2/df = 2.19$ =‘good’ fit; RMSEA = .06=‘good’ fit, CFI = .86=‘marginal’ fit, & SRMR = .058=‘good’ fit).

Brief Discussion

Positively perceived ‘authenticity’ of brands contributes to their commercial success (Beverland, 2005). Due to the lack of sport literature examining perceived ‘team’ authenticity, especially at the cross-cultural level, the need for the current study is justified that consumer perception on team authenticity often vary across contexts as well as cultures. To fill this research gap, the current study sought to empirically examine sport consumers’ perceived team authenticity within Asian market. Overall findings suggest various facets that sport consumers frequently consider when confirming a team’s distinguishable identity that reflect a unique sport and cultural values. From these results, we tentatively conclude that sport consumers often authenticate teams (as ‘brands’ in this context), and favorability and/or uniqueness of those team authenticity categories help create a team/brand trust, which often leads to subsequent consumptive behaviors (Eggers et al., 2013; Keller, 1993).

With respect to our findings, it was illustrated that what authenticates sports teams in Asian market consists of diverse consumer perspectives/values as comparable to the existing literature. The present study supports the existing literature noting that team authenticity is sport consumer perception that helps create favorable or strong brand associations (Aaker, 1996; Beverland, 2005; Keller, 1993). In sum, the current study provides an initial step towards identification of content categories for team authenticity based on international sport consumers’ perspectives. The worthiness of this type of research is supported by the highly competitive global sport business environment.