

THE INTERNATIONAL FAN-CONSUMER'S COGNITIVE PROCESS: SOUTH KOREAN FOOTBALL FANS' MOTIVATION AND LOYALTY TO SUPPORT EUROPEAN FOOTBALL TEAMS

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INTRODUCTION

International football fans follow the exploits of their favourite team, club or league operating from cities in other parts of the world, especially those featuring local athletes playing abroad. This global popularity has led to generate substantial income of football clubs, mainly in the form of revenue from match-day broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals and merchandising. Up to date, sport fans have been treated as sport spectators or sport consumers who used to be the major revenues source of sport organisations. Most studies related to sport fans focused on transactional processes, such as identifying and assessing local fan's motivation to attend matches or emotional attachment factors toward sport teams (Wann and Brandscombe, 1993; Funk, 2001; Trail and James, 2001; Mahony, et al., 2000; Madrigal, 2003). However, fans are involved with and committed to multiple facets of sport teams, and continue to patronage within a long term time frame of consumption. Therefore, sport fans are viewed as emotionally affiliated consumers who present pro-relationship behaviours.

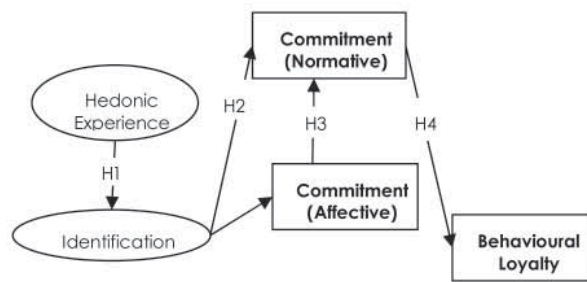
In previous researches, sport fans' motives and attachments were examined with socio-demographically homogeneous sample population; local spectators, college students, and white-Caucasian in the US (Wann et al., 1999; Mahony, et al., 2000; Backman and Crompton, 1991). To identify international sport fans' motives and loyalty, different and distinctive social/cultural circumstances must be scrutinised in the cognitive processes.

This research aims to conceptualise and empirically examines why international fans are engaging the relationship with and enhancing the degree of emotional affiliation with the team. The research is designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are psychological consumption motives of international sport fans to enter into the relationship with the European football team?
2. What are elements of fans' attachment which represents fan consumer's ultimate loyalty?
3. What is the mechanism to enhance the fan's emotional / affective affiliation with the team in the cognitive process?

METHODS

To provide rigorous answers for the research questions, three research stages have been executed. In preliminary research stage, variables of motivation, commitment and loyalty were identified based on the literature review and 16 in-depth interviews. The relationship among these three factors was explored through a preliminary survey (n=304) in the summer of 2006 to develop the hypothetical model. In the primary research stage, the proposed model with five hypotheses will be tested to assess two psychological motives and two commitment elements of fan-consumers in South Korea. Empirical data will be collected through on-line survey with 1000 sample population who describes him/herself as a fan of the European football team. Figure 1 presents the theoretical relationship and research hypotheses in the motivation – loyalty cognitive process. Explanatory and confirmatory factor analyses will be used to analyse the collected data using SPSS 12 and AMOS 6.



- H1: There is positive relationship between hedonic experience needs and Identification needs.
- H2: Identification with the team is positively related to the both components of commitment: Affective commitment and normative commitment.
- H3: There is positive relationship between affective commitment and normative commitment.
- H4: There are positive relationships between normative commitments, and behaviour loyalty intention.
- H5: Identification is the mediator between two psychological motives and two components of commitment.

RESULTS Expected results from the primary survey in 2007

The core of the hypothetical model summarises the relation among motivation, commitment and loyalty. Two psychological motives are identified based on the contemporary symbolic consumption of Levy (1969), consumption metaphors of Holt (1995) and fan motivation theories of Sloan (1989). One is identified as the hedonic experiential motive based on the playful consumption which complements with traditional information process perspective (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). The other is the identification motive which stems from the social identification needs and communal needs. Individuals want to create their self-concept through image congruity with positive symbolic object (Tajfel, 1982), and to share emotion within the voluntarily gathered community (Cova, 1997). Hedonic experience motive is converged into identification motive concerning fan-consumers related behaviours which lead to a commitment as an attitudinal loyalty.

The commitment is determined as the attachment of fan-consumers from the interactional relationship perspectives (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Mayer and Allen's three commitment components; affective, normative, and continuance, are applied to clarify different behavioural consequences and impacts on the fan's loyalty. Affective and normative commitments simultaneously determine fan-consumer's loyalty related intention and behaviour. The importance of social and cultural norms in the collectivism culture results that sport fans are less influenced by emotion while normative commitment directly effects on consumption behaviour including loyalty (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Lastly, the hypothesised relationship suggests that the identification motive directly impacts on the fan's commitment to the sport organisation. The commitment enhances fans' unique loyal behaviour that benefits to European football teams and leads to greater level of productivity and profitability.

DISCUSSION

This empirical research will be conducted from June to July 2007. The result is expected to present the international sport fan's loyalty development process between psychological motives and commitments. In the proposed cognitive process, identification takes the role of a mediator enhancing affective affiliation with the team as a consumption motives and a precursor of commitment. The fan-consumer's cognitive process demonstrates why he or she gets involved to the team and how augments his or her loyalty. Understanding international sport fans as emotionally devoted consumers provides useful insight for marketers to build and maintain the strong relationship with their customers.

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