

## Product meanings as drivers of sport consumer behavior: evidence from the Greek sport industry

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### Aim of research

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the factor structure of the 'Meanings of Sport Licensed Products' (MSLP) scale (Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2015) using a sample of Greek sport consumers. The secondary purpose was to examine relationships between the MSLP scale and behaviors related to sport licensed products, specifically product satisfaction, consumers' willingness to pay a price premium, the likelihood they would recommend those products to others (WOM), and future buying intentions.

### Theoretical background

Sport licensed products like jerseys, hats and a myriad of other items can be found at sporting events around the world serving as expressions of fan support and symbols of affiliation with one's favorite team or player (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007). Earlier studies provided support for the significance of identification in the consumption of sport licensed items (Kwon & Armstrong, 2006; Kwon, Trail, & Anderson, 2006). More recently, the discussion has shifted to the meanings and value that these items hold for their owners (Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou, Synowka, & Clark, 2012; Papadimitriou & Apostolopoulou, 2015). The present study builds on this line of research by examining a market where availability and consumption of sport licensed products are not as widespread.

### Methodology

Using a convenience sampling approach, N=246 fans of major professional football (soccer) and basketball teams in Greece were solicited for participation in the study. All participants had recently bought a sport licensed item of their favorite team. Data collection took place outside of the sport venues and prior to games during the 2014-2015 season. A three-part questionnaire was used to collect data that included: 1) the 20-item MSLP scale; 2) measures of the four dependent variables, namely product satisfaction, willingness to pay a price premium, word-of-mouth intentions, and intention to buy sport licensed products in the future, and 3) respondents' demographic and sport profile. The analysis included descriptive statistics, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling.

### Results

In terms of the first research goal, data analysis uncovered a four-factor (i.e., experience, socialization, aesthetics and locality) 14-item structure of the MSLP scale with respect to the sport licensed items purchased by Greek sport consumers that explained 72.6% of variance of the product meanings construct. The particular structure was also confirmed with CFA and the

model fit the data well ( $\chi^2=165.6$ ,  $df=67$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $Cmin/df=2.47$ ;  $GFI=.91$ ;  $CFI=.94$ ;  $RMSEA=.07$ ), producing factor loadings greater than .40 and satisfactory evidence of convergent and discriminant validity and reliability. The two highest rated sources of meaning of sport licensed products for those Greek fans were their aesthetic appeal ( $M=5.32$ ) and consumers' enjoyment and overall experience ( $M=4.54$ ).

For the second research goal, structural equation modeling was performed to analyze the conceptual model that included the four-factor MSLP scale as the independent variable and the four dependent variables. The model displayed satisfactory fit to the data ( $\chi^2=403.39$ ,  $df=206$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $Cmin/df=1.95$ ;  $IFI=.95$ ;  $CFI=.95$ ;  $SRMR=.06$ ;  $RMSEA=.06$ ). The results showed that meanings related to experience had a significant impact on consumers' WOM ( $\beta=.34$ ;  $p<.001$ ), intention to buy ( $\beta=.29$ ;  $p<.01$ ), and product satisfaction ( $\beta=.20$ ;  $p<.05$ ), but not on willingness to pay more for these licensed products. Meanings reflecting socialization had a significant impact on consumers' WOM ( $\beta=.26$ ;  $p<.01$ ), but not on any of the other three dependent variables. Aesthetics had a significant impact on product satisfaction ( $\beta=.63$ ;  $p<.001$ ), followed by buying intentions ( $\beta=.39$ ;  $p<.001$ ), willingness to pay more ( $\beta=.35$ ;  $p<.001$ ), and WOM ( $\beta=.27$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Finally, locality was found to have a significant impact on consumers' willingness to pay more ( $\beta=.23$ ;  $p<.01$ ), but not on the remaining dependent variables. The model explained a significant portion of variance of product satisfaction ( $R^2=.57$ ), WOM ( $R^2=.48$ ), purchase intentions ( $R^2=.35$ ), and willingness to pay a price premium ( $R^2=.27$ ).

### Discussion and implications

The present study explores sport licensing from a non-American market perspective and extends existing knowledge in regards to symbolic consumption by incorporating insights from the Greek sport market. The findings suggest that Greek sport consumers find value in the sport licensed items they possess that relates mainly to those items' features and attractiveness and the enjoyment they derive from their consumption. Moreover, the meanings embedded in licensed products positively impact consumer satisfaction and a number of desirable behaviors. Sport marketers involved in licensing should work to understand why sport consumers buy these products and what these products mean to them, and use that knowledge to grow their sales and business.

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