Understanding Sport Video Game Effectiveness From An Attitude Strength Perspective: A Case Of A Spectator Sport Team Brand

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Aim of research and background

Sport video games (SVG) modeling real life sports have been one of the most popular entertainment genres worldwide, turning the medium into a promising vehicle for sport marketers. Despite the growing popularity of SVG as a marketing tool, little empirical work has been sought to examine how game users' emotional and cognitive responses to sport team brands in SVG influence the strength of their brand attitudes and its relationship with subsequent consumption behaviors. Accordingly, this study tests whether sport video gaming fosters stronger attitudes toward sport team brands in SVG, which guide related brand choice behavior.

Given the development of new audio-visual technologies, Li, Daugherty, and Biocca (2001) suggest a need to include the new type of consumer experience (called a virtual experience) in a mediated environment to better understand consumer learning. Previous research has examined virtual experiences in SVG, focusing on evaluative attitudinal dimensions such as the overall evaluation (positive or negative) of corporate brands (e.g., Walsh, Kim, & Ross, 2008). However, conceptualizing attitude as an object-evaluation association, this line of research has generally failed to provide strong evidence that attitudes are good predictors of behavior. Consequently, researchers have approached the attitude-behavior relationship from a moderator variable perspective, focusing on non-evaluative attitudinal dimensions denoting attitude strength (Fabrigar, Macdonald, & Wegener, 2005). With the moderator approach, the research has shown evidence of higher attitude-behavior consistency with non-evaluative dimensions of attitude (attitude accessibility and attitude confidence).

Even though a large number of game users in the real world play the same game repeatedly until they master the game, the SVG research has failed to achieve a more realistic exposure environment within the confines of an experimental setting (Walsh, Kim, & Ross, 2008). Many studies have provided evidence that repetitive advertising has an effect on cognitive structure elements such as beliefs, attitude and behavioral intention (Campbell & Keller, 2003). These findings provide insight that SVG features which enable to repetitively interact with sport brands may affect attitude strength, which lead to behavior.

Methodology

For the purpose of this study, an experiment was designed to test the impact of repeated exposure to a sport video game (virtual sport experience), comparing to the impact of a real-life pre-recorded sport event (direct sport experience) on sport team brand attitude strength and choice behaviors. Using a convenience sampling technique, a total of 240 undergraduate students at a medium-size East Coast university in the United States was recruited. In the video game groups, participants were asked to play SVG in a single, 3 or 7 exposure condition with one of three sport video games (NBA, NFL, and FIFA) for virtual experience. For direct experience, participants watched a pre-recorded sporting event of a sport team for 30 minutes on a 40-inch TV. Following the subject's exposure to either a SVG or a televised sporting event, they completed a post-test questionnaire and then took a response time test in a personal laptop computer for a latency test. Last, participant's brand choice behavior was examined in a brand choice situation. All of the scales were adopted from previous research with some modifications (Kim & Ross, 2015). With previous brand attitudes as a covariate, ANCOVA was employed to test the mean differences of research variables among experiment groups.

Results, discussion, and implications

The results indicated that repeated exposure to SVG with a sport team brand influences sport team attitude and its strength, and subsequently behavior in a brand choice context. Regarding the effects of repetitive brand exposure on attitude strength, this study found that repeated exposure to a NBA team brand in SVG results in brand attitudes that are more accessible from memory, and held with more confidence than a single exposure to the brand, $F(3, 76) = 5.65$. $p < .001$ for brand accessibility; and $F(3, 76) = 4.52$, $p < .01$ for attitude confidence. Sport brand attitudes formed on virtual sport experience with repetition is as accessible and held with the same degree of confidence as those formed on direct experience. The results of Hierarchical multiple regression with an interaction term found the moderating effect of attitude accessibility and attitude confidence on the attitude-behavior consistency ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.54$, $p < .05$). These results are

similar to those in the other experimental groups with NFL or FIFA team brands. The findings of this study will be used in an effort to unravel the potential of sport video games as a marketing tool and enrich new media effectiveness literature with a theoretical framework in sport consumers' behavior.

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