

Causal Effect between Relationship Quality and Sport Consumption Behaviors

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Abstract

Relationship marketing is such an integral part of modern marketing including sport marketing. The importance of relationship quality in relationship marketing has been well documented; however, very little attention has been paid to the issues of relationship quality in sport consumer behavior contexts. Teams are striving to build a good relationship with their fans. The objective of this study is to provide a better understanding of the nature of the relationship between team and sport consumers, and the impact of the relationship on various sport consumption behaviors. Conceptual framework to investigate the research questions were developed based on the relationship quality literature. For this reasons Kim questionnaire (2008) was used in order to collect the data and analyzed by SPSS from 375 Students Comprehensive universities in the Esfahan city. Various statistical techniques such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), t test, Multiple Regression and Multiple Sample Structural Equation Modeling were employed for data analysis. A seven factor model including Trust, Commitment, Relationship Satisfaction, live, Intimacy, Reciprocity and Self-Connection was supported to best measure relationship quality between sport consumers and team or brand. In addition we empirically tested the link between RQ and four sport consumer behavioral intentions: word of mouth, attendance, media consumption, and licensed merchandise consumption. The results were shown the relationship quality significantly influenced sport consumption behaviors. This study extends sport management literature by applying relationship marketing theories to the sport consumer behavior realm. Researchers and sport industry practitioners should further examine the proposed relationship quality model in this study.

Key words: Relationship marketing, Relationship quality, Sport consumption behaviors

INTRODUCTION

Relationship marketing can be defined as “all marketing activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges”(Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Relationship marketing has attracted a considerable amount of attention among marketing practitioners (Kumar & Shah, 2009; Liu & Yang, 2009; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). The reason for the increased focus on relationship marketing is that researchers and sport marketers generally believe that relationship marketing efforts can enhance relationships with sport consumers. For example, a study of over 650

companies around the world reported that approximately 90% were involved in relationship marketing activities and the executives believed that building an authentic and relevant relationship with the customer was critical to the company’s long-term success (Peppers & Rogers Group, 2009). A relationship quality approach can offer a valuable framework for connecting relationship marketing to sport consumption behaviors of interest. Relationship quality can be defined as the “overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualized as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship”(Palmatier et al, 2006). the objectives of this study were to; (a) identify the key constructs to assess the quality of the relationship between sport consumers and the team/brand (b) identify expected behavioral outcomes of relationship quality and empirically examine the link between relationship quality and sport consumer behaviors, including attendance, sport media consumption and licensed merchandise product consumption. Relationship quality can be included a met construct composed of several distinct but related

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facets such as trust, commitment, identification, intimacy, reciprocity (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Fournier, 1998; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006), self connection and love which reflect overall assessment of strength and depth of relationships between organizations and consumers (Kim, 2008).

Trust can be defined as “one party’s belief that its needs will be fulfilled by actions undertaken by the other party” (Anderson & Weitz, 1989, p. 312). Filo et al (2008) found that an individual is attracted to a sport brand due to his or her satisfaction with the branding product, but loyalty to this brand will not develop until brand trust is created. Trust is an essential ingredient for all types of relational exchanges, including the one between a consumer and a firm (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Drawing on the above literature, Kim and Trail (in press) proposed that the concept of trust between sport consumers and a team is tenable, so trust is an essential component of sport consumer-team relationship quality. Trust is a significant predictor of various consumer behavior variables such as cooperation, dependence acquiescence, and purchasing (Bart, Shankar, Sultan, & Urban, 2005; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Hewett & Bearden, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Schlosser, White, & Lloyd, 2006).

The role of commitment in relationship marketing is considered as an important stage, “the most desirable one in the development of an ongoing relationship between a buyer and a seller” (Wetzels, Ruyter, & Birgelen, 1998). In the relationship marketing literature, commitment has been defined as an attachment-based attitudinal construct (Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004; Fullerton, 2003). In the spectator sport context, commitment can be defined as sport consumers’ enduring desire to continue a relationship with a particular sport organization (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2008; Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000). Commitment has long been emphasized as a key construct to explain the nature of the relationship between sport consumers and a team, and to play a substantial role in the sport consumption decision (Funk & James, 2001; Funk & Pritchard, 2006). Strong commitment results in improvement of sales, market share, and profits (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999; Palmatier et al., 2006).

Relationship satisfaction can be defined as customers’ affective or emotional state toward the relationship with a brand or firm based on the overall evaluation of the relationship (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003; Palmatier et al., 2006; Roberts et al., 2003). Crosby et al. (1990) suggested that relationship satisfaction resulted in high sales effectiveness and more future interaction. In addition, relationship satisfaction

has been found to positively influence sales, market share, and profit (Palmatier et al., 2006). There is also evidence to suggest that it is the satisfaction of the customer that ultimately determines their future intentions and behavior towards the service (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Bloemer, 1997; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Taylor & Baker, 1994). McDougall and Levesque (2000) proposed a causal path, with perceptions of service quality influencing feelings of satisfaction, which in turn influenced future purchase behavior of customers. Satisfaction has been identified as a reliable predictor of repurchase intentions (Cho et al., 2004; Cronin et al., 2000; Tian-Cole et al., 2002; Yoo, Cho, & Chon, 2003).

Fournier (1998) stated that self-connection is a relationship quality facet [that] reflects the degree to which the brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes, thereby expressing a significant aspect of self”. A strong self-connection discourages customers from defecting from relationships when facing difficult times (Lydon & Zanna, 1990). Self-connection to a brand or firm corresponds to the identification with a team. Team identification has been found to influence expectancies for event experience and outcome (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003), intention to attend games (Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003), and actual attendance (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). Identification does not significantly influence Attendance Intention (Kim et al., 2011). Fournier suggested that love is an emotional feeling that embraces warmth, affection, passion, infatuation, and obsession. Whang et al. (2004) report empirical verification on brand love as an essential factor in enhancing brand loyalty; three

dimensions of such love are proposed: passion, possessiveness and altruism (Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), Albert et al. (2008), Fedorikhin et al. (2008), Park et al. (2009) and Carlson et al. (2009) report findings that prove passionate love for the brand originates from brand attachment and predicts brand loyalty; the passionate love that the consumer feels for the brand is found metaphorically analogous to the romantic love existing in interpersonal relationships. Such analogy points to the possibility of transforming a brand relationship into a romantic relationship in which the consumer becomes so strongly attached to the brand that he or she is durably loyal to it. Intimacy can be defined as the degree of familiarity, closeness, and openness to relationship partners (Fournier, 1998). Fournier emphasized that successful brand relationship was built on the higher level of intimacy between relationship partners. In addition, intimacy has been considered to foster continuity of relationship by influencing perceptions of relationship partners (Murray et al., 1996), improving the effect of persuasive

communication efforts, and facilitating conflict resolution (Stern, 1997).

The principle of reciprocity states that when one benefits from another, the recipient should return the favor in proportion to what the other has done for him or her. Until the recipient reciprocates the benefit received from the donor, he or she is obliged or indebted to the giver (Gouldner, 1960). Miller and Kean (1997) found that in a rural community, reciprocity was the strongest motivator for maintaining a relationship with local retailers. In a leisure context, Morais et al. (2004) reported that tourists' perceived reciprocity in tourist-provider relationships encouraged the tourist to resist changing providers when they faced counter persuasion. Furthermore, Howard and Crompton (2004) noted that sport consumers are more likely to defect from a relationship with a team if they perceived the reciprocity in the relationship to be imbalanced.

Derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), behavioral intentions are viewed as antecedents to actual behavior, in that behavior is preceded by the intention to engage in that behavior. Behavioral intentions as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of (a) Attendance Intentions, (b) Word of Mouth, (c) Merchandise Consumption Intentions, and (d) Media Consumption Intentions.

METHODOLOGY

The target population for the study was individuals who were affiliated with a comprehensive university of Esfahan. All students of comprehensive university represented the statistical population in the current study. It is not feasible to survey all of them so 375 students were selected using the judgmental sampling method according to Morgan table and then subjects completed the questionnaires. The present study is a structural equation interaction models research and with regard to the theoretical and scientific fundamentals of the research is an applied research. The Kim(2008) standard questionnaire has been used to evaluate. Research tool for this study consists of four parts: 1) relationship quality 2) Relationship quality outcome variables 3) Personality traits 4) Demographic Characteristics and comprise of 52 items. Participant responses were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and reliability coefficient values ranged from .7 to .95. Data analysis was performed using various statistical techniques such as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Structural Regression, Multiple Sample Structural Equation Modeling.

RESULTS

The results in Table 1 indicate that majority of the participants were men (74.9%). The average age of the participants was 21-25 years old (50.4%).

Descriptive statistics for relationship quality variables are presented in Table 2. The means of the relationship quality items for the UF Football team ranged from 3.17 to 3.73. Standard deviations ranged from 0.45 to 0.81. The item for love factor had the highest mean on the 7-point Likert type scale. The items for Reciprocity had the lowest mean.

The data in Table 3 indicates that the relationship quality with beta coefficient of 0.984 has a direct impact on sports consumption behavior and this effect is significant. So the relationship quality explained 0/82 of the variance in sport consumption behavior.

As shown in Table 4 is observed to correlation coefficient between trust and word of mouth, $r = 0/457$, trust and Media Consumption $r = 0/418$, trust and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/431$, trust and Attendance $r = 0/374$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant. So trust has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior.

Correlation coefficient between Commitment and word of mouth, $r = 0/551$, Commitment and Media Consumption $r = 0/264$, Commitment and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/433$, Commitment and Attendance $r = 0/388$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant. So Commitment has a

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

| Variable | Group | N |
|----------|--------|-----|
| Gender | Male | 281 |
| | Female | 94 |
| Age | -20 | 129 |
| | 21-25 | 189 |
| | +26 | 57 |

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for relationship quality

| Factors and items | M | SD |
|---------------------------|------|------|
| Trust | 3.62 | 0.63 |
| Commitment | 3.48 | 0.56 |
| Relationship satisfaction | 3.38 | 0.69 |
| Love | 3.73 | 0.68 |
| Intimacy | 3.30 | 0.45 |
| Self-connection | 3.37 | 0.81 |
| Reciprocity | 3.17 | 0.77 |
| Relationship quality | 0.47 | 3.43 |

Table 3: Structural model of the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables

| Effects | | B | Beta | T | R ² | F | P |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|------|----------------|-----|-------|
| Predictor variables | Criterion variables | | | | | | |
| Model | | | | | 0/82 | 8/4 | 0/001 |
| relationship quality | Sport consumption behaviors | 0/954 | 0/91 | 3/72 | | | 0/001 |

Table 4: Structural relationships between predictor variables and the criterion

| Relationship quality | Attendance | Merchandise consumption | Media consumption | Word of mouth |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Trust | r=0/374 R ² =0/139 p=0/000 | r=0/431 R ² =0/185 p=0/000 | r=0/418 R ² =0/174 p=0/000 | r=0/457 R ² =0/208 p=0/000 |
| Commitment | r=0/388 R ² =0/15 p=0/000 | r=0/433 R ² =0/187 p=0/000 | r=0/264 R ² =0/07 p=0/000 | r=0/551 R ² =0/303 p=0/000 |
| Relationship satisfaction | r=0/108 R ² =0/01 p=0/000 | r=0/726 R ² =0/527 p=0/000 | r=0/583 R ² =0/34 p=0/000 | r=0/395 R ² =0/156 p=0/000 |
| Love | r=0/327 R ² =0/107 p=0/000 | r=0/593 R ² =0/351 p=0/000 | r=0/377 R ² =0/142 p=0/000 | r=0/397 R ² =0/157 p=0/000 |
| Intimacy | r=0/401 R ² =0/16 p=0/000 | r=0/189 R ² =0/04 p=0/000 | r=0/356 R ² =0/127 p=0/000 | r=0/221 R ² =0/05 p=0/000 |
| Self-Connection | r=0/152 R ² =0/023 p=0/000 | r=0/698 R ² =0/487 p=0/000 | r=0/558 R ² =0/311 p=0/000 | r=0/355 R ² =0/126 p=0/000 |
| Reciprocity | r=0/269 R ² =0/072 p=0/000 | r=0/745 R ² =0/555 p=0/000 | r=0/432 R ² =0/186 p=0/000 | r=0/315 R ² =0/1 p=0/000 |

significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior. Correlation coefficient between Relationship Satisfaction and word of mouth, $r = 0/395$, Relationship Satisfaction and Media Consumption $r = 0/583$, Relationship Satisfaction and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/726$, Relationship Satisfaction and Attendance $r = 0/108$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant. So Relationship Satisfaction has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior. Correlation coefficient between Love and word of mouth, $r = 0/397$, Love and Media Consumption $r = 0/377$, Love and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/593$, Love and Attendance $r = 0/327$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant and Love has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior.

Correlation coefficient between Intimacy and word of mouth, $r = 0/221$, Intimacy and Media Consumption $r = 0/356$, Intimacy and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/189$, Intimacy and Attendance $r = 0/401$ so all of

them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant and Intimacy has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior.

Correlation coefficient between Self-Connection and word of mouth, $r = 0/355$, Self-Connection and Media Consumption $r = 0/558$, Self-Connection and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/698$, Self-Connection and Attendance $r = 0/152$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant and Self-Connection has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior.

Correlation coefficient between Reciprocity and word of mouth, $r = 0/315$, Reciprocity and Media Consumption $r = 0/432$, Reciprocity and Merchandise Consumption $r = 0/745$, Reciprocity and Attendance $r = 0/269$ so all of them ($\alpha=0/01$) are significant and Reciprocity has a significant relationship with all the sports consumption behavior.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The literature on relationship quality suggested that there are seven relationship quality dimensions: Trust, Commitment, Reciprocity, Self-Connection, Relationship Satisfaction, Love and Intimacy. Our results also are consistent with previous research (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Iacobucci, 2001; Fomier, 1998; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006).

Results from the simultaneous equations model indicate that General Relationship Quality significantly influenced all three sport consumption behavioral intentions. First Trust significantly affects Sport Media Consumption and Team Licensed Merchandise Consumption and attendance. This finding is in line with the previous research in various areas suggesting that trust is an essential relationship quality construct and it is a significant predictor of various consumer behavior (Kim and Trail (in press), Bart, Shankar, Sultan, & Urban, 2005; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Hewett & Bearden, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Schlosser, White, & Lloyd, 2006; Magnusen, 2013; Zhang & Won, 2009). Second Our results show that domain specific Commitment significantly influences all three sport consumption behavioral intentions. This finding confirms the previous research findings (Sutton, 2011; Park, 2012; Kim, 2008; Kim & Jin-Soo, 2013). Our results demonstrate that Relationship Satisfaction influences various consumption behaviors as a component of overall relationship quality. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that intimacy is closely related to various consumer behavior variables (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Cho et al, 2004; Brady et al, 2006; Carlson & O’Cass, 2010). Our results demonstrate that when psychological familiarity, closeness, and openness

between sport consumers and the team exist, sport consumers are more likely to attend games, follow team related information through media, and purchase team licensed merchandise. This is consistent with previous research (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Ramani & Kumar, 2008; Kim et al, 2011). Our results indicate that self-connection is significantly linked to sport Consumption Intention. This finding is in line with the previous research (Kim et al, 2011; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Fink et al, 2009). Finally, Our results show that reciprocity and love have substantial impact on all three sport consumption intentions. Due to the significant difference between the effects of relationship quality on sports consumption behavior can be inferred that managers in dealing with consumers should have long-term relationships, trust and confidence, commitment, satisfy expectations, establish love and intimacy, so they can earn loyalty and profitability.

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