

SPORT PARTICIPATION OF IMMIGRANTS: ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONGST KOREANS IN USA

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ABSTRACT

In spectating sports, many studies have observed the impact of ethnic identity. Regarding sport participation, however, questions still linger about its impact. Key to predicting the sport participation of an immigrant group are their ethnic identity and commitment to the sport organisation. The main purpose of this study was to see how the sport participation of immigrants is affected by ethnic identity and commitment to a sport organisation. Using self-administered questionnaires, the study surveyed a sample of 229 Korean immigrants in the greater Dallas area. The immigrants were conveniently recruited at soccer and softball tournaments hosted by ethnic sport organisations. The collected data were analysed by structural equation modelling. The results suggest that the organisational commitment of participants was affected by their event satisfaction and perceived benefits. As such, commitment affected their ethnic identity and influences their ethnic peers. The peer influences affected ethnic identity. Finally, ethnic identity had an impact on sport participation. This study suggests that an ethnic sport organisation should aim at providing a quality sport experience.

Key words: Ethnic identity; Organisational commitment; Ethnic sporting events; Sport participation; Immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

Today, Asian immigrants constitute 6% of the entire American population, a total of 18.2 million Asians (Pew Research Centre, 2012). The involvement in sport of immigrants is determined by their cultural traits and their interactions with such antecedents of sport participation such as motivations, attitudes or imposed restraints (Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004; Kang, 2011). Amongst these, researchers have been inclined to look at ethnic identity as they examine how sport-related behaviours of immigrants are determined by ethnicity-specific traits (Pons *et al.*, 2001; Bradley, 2006). It is striking that little information is available on how the sport participation of immigrants is affected by their ethnic identity in the context of recreational sports. Such a gap might be a result of the common premise that the behavioural outcomes of immigrants are a result of the cultural mobilisation of the group in a host society (Walter & Brown, 1991; Stodolska & Yi, 2003). That is, the ethnic identity of immigrants is viewed as a developing characteristic, as well as a pre-existing trait in them.

While this perspective provides a more comprehensive framework to understand the multi-dimensional characteristics of immigrants, identifying ethnic identity as a sole influence becomes a demanding task.

Another premise for explaining the shortage of this kind of research is based on the wide spectrum of concepts revolving around immigrants and ethnicity (Phinney *et al.*, 2001). When immigrants come to reside in a host society, they bring with them their traditional culture and lifestyles. The extent to which they develop their culture depends a good deal on the context they inhabit, as well as on the socio-economic circumstances of each individual (Nguyen *et al.*, 1999). Thus, some immigrants and groups are characterised to be homogeneous in terms of their ethnicity and culture, and others relatively heterogeneous. Given this, studying ethnic identity without considering the origin and cultural background of the immigrants may limit predicting their behaviours. This has resulted in the necessity of target-specific approaches when examining immigrants. To date, few studies have investigated the relationship of ethnic identity and sport participation.

An ethnic sport organisation refers to an umbrella organisation that provides ethnic sport teams or clubs with organised recreational sporting leagues and games across different sports. The members of a particular ethnic group manage such organisations and most participants of their events are members of the same ethnic group. The growing participation of immigrants in recreational sporting events hosted by ethnic sport organisations has raised an important question – what shapes the ethnic identity of immigrants in the context of sport participation?

A key to answering this question might lie in the level of commitment of immigrants to a sport organisation. Commitment refers to the voluntary willingness of a consumer to remain in a relationship and to make an effort toward maintaining it (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Dagger & O'Brien, 2010; Dagger *et al.*, 2011). According to the Social Identification Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people seek the social category with which they identify. Immigrants will therefore gravitate to an organisation run by immigrants of the same ethnic background and they are more likely to identify themselves with the ethnicity of such organisations. This tendency of the commitment of immigrants also plays a role in making them more socialised to the values and beliefs prevalent amongst their ethnic peers (Phinney, 1990; Phinney *et al.*, 2001). Through the dynamics of the commitment and these ethnicity-related consequences, the commitment of immigrants results in their behavioural outcome manifested in their participation in the sport programme of the organisation.

One might wonder what forces and elements cause sport participants to commit to a sport organisation. Green and Chalip (1998) found that, in a sport context, the satisfaction of parents with youth programmes and the perceived benefits, affected their commitment to children's sport organisations. The commitment of immigrants to ethnic sport organisations tends to be determined by the quality of experience they have when participating in one of its events.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Sporting events hosted by ethnic sport organisations are an easy and salient entry by which immigrants begin playing sport and socialising with ethnic friends. The purpose of this study

was to test a model in which the commitment of immigrants to an ethnic sport organisation and their ethnic identity, affect sport participation. The study also investigated how the satisfaction of participants and their perceived benefits affect their commitment, while also observing how ethnic peers mediate the relationship between commitment and ethnic identity. By revealing what dynamics these factors go through for sport participation, the results could be implemented in such a way that would provide immigrants with a quality sport experience and create more opportunities to take part in sport activities. This need for deeper information becomes more obvious when one considers the extent to which a sport organisation can affect the quality of the sport experience of the participant.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Perceived benefits, satisfaction and commitment

When deciding to participate in sport, would-be participants consider the potential benefits. Green and Chalip (1998) revealed, for instance, that along with other antecedents, the commitment of parents to their children's sport organisation was affected by the benefits they perceived being bestowed on their children by their sport participation. For sporting events hosted by ethnic sport organisations, the participants are driven by social benefits (Artinger *et al.*, 2006), and by health benefits (Lee, 2005). Taken together, social and health benefits are what sport participants perceive as being the psychological benefits (Stodolska & Yi, 2003). Based on this, the *first hypothesis* of this study is that *the benefits of participating in sporting events as perceived by immigrants will have a positive effect on the degree to which they commit themselves to the organisation.*

The commitment of sport participants is substantially affected by satisfaction (Green & Chalip, 1997; 1998). For the sport participants, satisfaction with their commitment to a sport organisation is determined by a number of components associated with sport programmes, such as the facilities, equipment, programme administration and the coach. In addition, the level of satisfaction of participants is affected by how well an event is managed. For example: Does it start on time? Do the referees make good calls? Is the staff qualified and friendly? Taking this into account, the *second hypothesis* of this study is that *the satisfaction of immigrants with ethnic sporting events will have a positive effect on their commitment to the organisation.*

Commitment, ethnic peers and ethnic identity

According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), consumers' commitment produces a number of psychological characteristics. These include member cohesion, cooperation and identification. What characterises immigrants well is their ethnic identity. Ethnic identity refers to the degree to which one views oneself as a member of a particular ethnic group (Tsai *et al.*, 2002). Because of their immigrant status, it is natural to assume that their higher commitment is related to the greater identity they have with their own ethnic group (Phinney *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, this study posits the *third hypothesis* that *the commitment of immigrants to an ethnic sport organisation will have a positive effect on their ethnic identity.*

Commitment also allows organisation members to socialise (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Participants who are committed to ethnic sport organisations become socialised into sets of values and beliefs particular to the sport and ethnicity. In such processes, ethnic peers take on a crucial role. The importance of these ethnic peers becomes greater in a sport context in which the excitement of playing sports increases when one is taking part with others of the same ethnicity. Thus, the *fourth hypothesis* is that *the commitment of immigrants will have a positive effect on their ethnic peer influences*.

In forming an ethnicity-based network, the values and attitudes of significant others are easily transmitted. The specific identity an immigrant forms and the degree to which he or she develops that identity is substantially affected by such socialisation factors as ethnic friends (Peñaloza, 1994; Xu *et al.*, 2004). Knowing the effect of peer influences on ethnic identity would become relevant to the sport participation of immigrants because teammates are a major factor in determining the sport experience of the participant. Hence, this study puts forward the *fifth hypothesis* that *ethnic peer influences of immigrants will have a positive effect on the degree to which they identify themselves with an ethnic group*.

Ethnic identity and sport participation

In sport, the great impact of ethnic identity has been found at the level of spectating national competitions or that of cheering a sportsperson of a certain ethnicity or from a particular country (Cronin & Mayall, 1998; Pons *et al.*, 2001; Bradley, 2006). For example, Pons and colleagues (2001) suggested that Italian immigrants gravitated toward soccer, a sport they associated with their homeland, as an emblem of Italian identity, while their tendency to acculturate to a dominant society made no impact on their identification with soccer.

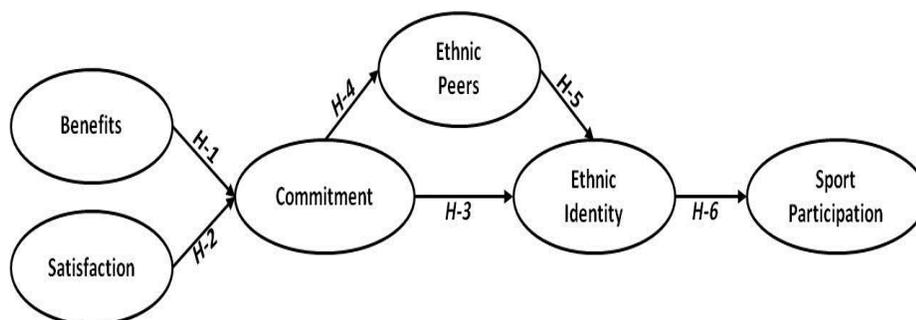


Figure 1. PROPOSED MODEL

The role of ethnic identity in sport participation as opposed to sport spectating is, in contrast, still in question. A number of studies have suggested a conflicting relationship between whether ethnic identity is a psychological characteristic derived from sport participation and whether it causes immigrants to participate in sport (Stodolska & Yi, 2003; Harrolle & Trail, 2007; Vermeulen & Verweel, 2009). Despite these results, the participation of immigrants in an event hosted by ethnic sport organisations can be considered as an ethnicity-related behavioural outcome. Thus, the *sixth hypothesis* of this study is that *the ethnic identity of*

immigrants will have a positive effect on the degree to which they participate in the events of ethnic sport organisation. All the proposed hypotheses are represented in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

Research context

Korean immigrants in the United States (US) are widely known for their ethnic lifestyles and strong attachment to their ethnicity. They are found to be homogeneous in terms of Korean ethnicity (Kim & Wolpin, 2008). In 2014, the largest Korean immigrant community, totalling about 86 000, resided in greater Dallas, Texas (Fleck, 2014). Two strong Korean neighbourhoods provide a wide range of ethnic businesses from grocery markets to medical and legal services. In addition, six Korean ethnic schools facilitate children's education and many Korean churches serve the Korean immigrant communities.

A number of Korean sport organisations have hosted sporting events in which Korean immigrants living in Dallas utilise their ethnic networks to assemble and register teams for the games. Existing Korean sport clubs and teams also participate, resulting in a number of Korean teams taking part in the tournaments or seasonal leagues. These sporting events are developed, marketed and maintained by such ethnic sport organisations as the Dallas Korean Softball Association and the Korean Soccer Association of Dallas. Considering these contextual factors, sampling Korean immigrants in the Dallas area would support the purpose of this study.

Survey procedures

The first survey (n=73) was conducted during a regional-level softball tournament and a week later a second survey (n=156) was performed during a regional-level soccer tournament. When a team finished its game, the investigators distributed self-administrative questionnaires and remained available until all members of each team completed the questionnaire. Based on the determinants of the generations of the immigrants (US Census Bureau, 2010), the study recruited only first-generation immigrants (born in Korea and immigrated to the US as adults), and first-half generation (born in Korea and immigrated to the US as children or adolescents). It was quite reasonable to set such criteria when considering that these groups appear to be more likely to associate themselves with Korea and its ethnicity than do the second and following generations. The average age of the final sample was 32 years and most of them were males (98.7%). About 39% of them had a bachelor's degree and 31% held master's and doctorate degrees. They had been living in the US for approximately 10 years.

Measurement

The items of perceived benefits, satisfaction and organisational commitment of the participants were adopted from Green and Chalip (1998). Ethnic peer influences and ethnic identity were employed from a study by Xu *et al.* (2004). Sport participation was examined through their behavioural patterns of participating in ethnic sporting events. Every item of each construct was assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7

(*very much*). A translation/back-translation was employed to maintain linguistic equivalence between Korean and English (Su & Parham, 2002). Slight word changes were made to fit into the context of a recreational sporting event. All the item-to-total correlations of the measures ranged from 0.55 to 0.85, and the average of inter-item correlations ranged from 0.56 to 0.75. The Cronbach's α ranged from 0.79 to 0.90. The details of the measures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. DESCRIPTION OF ITEMS

Construct (Mean \pm SD)	Items <i>To what degree...</i>
Perceived benefits 5.51 \pm 1.93	do you perceive health benefits of participating in this event? do you perceive social benefits of participating in this event? do you perceive psychological benefits of participating in this event?
Event satisfaction 5.13 \pm 1.93	are you satisfied with this event's facility? are you satisfied with this event's operation? are you satisfied with the overall attendance?
Organisation commitment 4.94 \pm 2.09	do you intend to pay continuous attention to their business? do you intend to offer word-of-mouth referrals? are you pleased about participating in their event?
Peer influences 5.63 \pm 2.05	are your Korean friends on a team? do you share things with your Korean friends playing on a team? do you tend to hang out with Korean friends who are on a team?
Ethnic identity 6.00 \pm 1.55	are you proud of being a Korean? do you feel you belong to a Korean group? are you proud of Koreans' achievement?
Sport participation 5.52 \pm 2.93	do you play the sport in ethnic sporting event (ESE)? do you choose playing the sport for your recreation in ESE? do you choose ESE to play the sport?

Data analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed first to check if all the variables were loaded on the desired factors, as well as to see if the factors were correlated with one another. The study then conducted structural equation modelling to find the overall fit of the hypothesised model, as well as the magnitude and significance of each causal path amongst latent variables.

RESULTS

Measurement model

As per absolute fit of the model, the results of the χ^2 test were found to be significant ($\chi^2=298.88$, $df=120$, $p<0.001$). The selected absolute fit indices suggested an acceptable fit of

the model for the population (Normed $\chi^2=2.49$, RMSEA=0.08). The model's incremental fit was also achieved by the selected fit indices (CFI=0.93, IFI=0.93, TLI=0.91). The convergent validity of the model showed acceptable levels with the average variance extracted (AVE), ranging from 0.62 to 0.76 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, composite reliability ranged from 0.66 to 0.82 (Nunnally, 1978). Regarding discriminant validity, the largest squared correlation was 0.51 between perceived benefits and organisational commitment, lower than the smallest AVE of 0.61 on satisfaction (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural equation modelling (SEM)

First, the results of the χ^2 test were found to be significant ($\chi^2=348.79$, $df=129$, $p<0.001$). However, the selected fit indices suggested an overall fit of the comprehensive model to the data (CFI=0.92, IFI=0.92, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.09). As per the hypotheses on the effects of perceived benefits and event satisfaction on organisational commitment (H₁ and H₂), perceived benefits and satisfaction were significantly related to organisational commitment ($\gamma_1=0.45$, $p<0.001$; $\gamma_2=0.44$, $p<0.001$, respectively). Regarding the hypothesis on the effects of commitment on ethnic identity (H₃) and peer influences (H₄), commitment significantly affected ethnic identity and peer influences ($\beta_3=0.34$, $p<0.001$; $\beta_4=0.19$, $p<0.01$, respectively). Peer influences were found to have a significant impact on ethnic identity (H₅: $\beta_5=0.39$, $p<0.001$). Finally, ethnic identity significantly affected sport participation (H₆: $\beta_6=0.24$, $p<0.001$). All the hypotheses were thus supported. Table 2 describes the results of the structural equation modelling.

Table 2. RESULTS OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING (SEM)

Paths	Loadings	Significance
H1 : Benefits → Commitment	0.45	$p<0.001$
H2 : Satisfaction → Commitment	0.44	$p<0.001$
H3 : Commitment → Ethnic Identity	0.34	$p<0.001$
H4 : Commitment → Peer Influences	0.19	$p<0.010$
H5 : Peer Influences → Ethnic Identity	0.39	$p<0.001$
H6 : Ethnic Identity → Sport Participation	0.24	$p<0.001$

DISCUSSION

What really boosts the participation of immigrant groups in recreational sporting events? The major predictors to explain their participation were found to be their commitment to an ethnic sport organisation and ethnic identity. Questions remain regarding how ethnic sport organisations can spark a commitment in participants and, once that happens, how to kindle it into a steady flame. In taking part in the programmes of sport organisations on a continuous basis, the participants tended to develop their commitment to the organisation according to the quality of the sport experience and choosing the programme based on the reputation of the organisation. Nonetheless, researchers paid substantial attention to developing commitment of the participants to the sport, not to the sport organisation (Kwon & Trail, 2003; Casper *et*

al., 2007). By highlighting the importance of sport experiences of participants, this study has revealed what causes Korean immigrants to commit to sport organisations in the context of the recreation of immigrants (Green & Chalip, 1998).

Many sport organisations have already implemented ethnic bonding to market their programmes. This strategy has proven fairly successful. In spite of this, neither scholars nor practitioners have made ethnic identity the main question to be solved. It is of course to be expected that there is little information on the role of ethnic identity in the sport participation of immigrants. Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that the behavioural outcomes of organisational commitment could be mediated by the psychological status of members. In the current study, ethnic identity achieved a successful transition that made immigrants participate in sport activities based on their commitment to ethnic sport organisations.

A number of studies regarding the sport participation of an ethnic group indicated that traditional cultures are the main barrier to explaining the low degree of sport participation (McGuire & Collins, 1998; Hyun, 2001; Lee, 2005; Kay, 2006). Traditionally, Asian groups show little appreciation for the positive values of sport participation (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010). Farver *et al.* (1995) found a tendency of Korean American parents to regard their children's play activities as mere amusement although understanding the educational value of sport activities increased as they acculturated. In spite of this, the positive association of ethnic identity and sport participation is compatible with the findings of previous studies (Walter & Brown, 1991; Xu *et al.*, 2004). For example, Xu *et al.* (2004) reported a positive effect of ethnic identity on culture-specific consumption of daily necessities such as ethnic food, media or apparel among Asian college students.

Immigrants, regardless of their attitude to their mother culture, consume these ethnicity-oriented products daily. In this consumption, their ethnic identity controls the degree of consumption. However, sport participation may follow a different process, something quite different from consuming daily necessities. Immigrants who may be considering sport participation have to take into account a range of constraints and available resources – following specific and context-oriented protocols – before making a decision (Tsai & Coleman, 1999; Kang, 2011). Unlike the unconditional consumption of ethnic daily necessities, culture-specific characteristics affect whether or not immigrants actually participate in a sport programme. While the current study found the effect of the ethnic identity of Korean immigrants on softball and soccer participation in ethnic sporting events, such culture-specified behaviours might become more distinct for the participants of a Korean traditional sport, such as Tae-Kwon-Do that requires its participants to learn Korean manners and etiquette (Huh & Reid, 2000).

As further studies try to reflect the different features of ethnic sport programmes and ethnic daily necessities, they should develop a sport context-applicable theory to grasp the effect of ethnic identity on sport participation (Walter & Brown, 1991; Phinney, 1992; Cronin & Mayall, 1998; Vermeulen & Verweel, 2009). Identifying this could reveal how the cultural values and beliefs of an ethnic group facilitate (or prevent) their involvement in sport activities (McGuire & Collins, 1998; Lee, 2005; Kay, 2006).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Most ethnic sporting organisations have designed events in which ethnic members can socialise with other ethnic peers. Given the results of the powerful role of organisational commitment to ethnic identity, sport organisations should strive harder to create a quality sport experience for participants. In addition, it is suggested that ethnic sporting events be held in the form of cultural festivals, by augmenting cultural events with sporting competitions, through which immigrant communities maintain their ethnic heritage and promote their culture (Ziakas & Costa, 2011). This is possible by creating diverse strategic partnerships with not just mainstream constituents, but with varied ones in ethnic communities as well (Van Acker *et al.*, 2011). It would seem sensible, then, to manage the activities of sporting events in such a way that develops these factors. After all, immigrants seek out ethnic organisations to nourish a sense of belonging in their immigrant life, making such a strategy appear to be well targeted for an immigrant (Farrer, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The salient factors that appear to determine participation by immigrants in recreational sporting events are their commitment to an ethnic sport organisation and their ethnic identity. Nonetheless, no systemic approaches have yet been made to know the dynamics of these factors in predicting the sport participation of immigrants. To fill such a gap, the current study has examined Korean immigrants in the US, regarding the antecedents and consequences of organisational commitment and ethnic identity.

Powerful factors that helped shape the commitment of the participants to ethnic sport organisations were perceived benefits of participating in sport and the satisfaction with the sport event. The commitment had an impact on ethnic identity and the influences of ethnic peers on the immigrants. Ethnic peers substantially affected their ethnic identity and then the identity in turn affected sport participation. The focus of event management should be on providing participants with a quality experience and on creating ethnic festivals beyond mere sporting competitions. Further study should examine the role of the organisational commitment and ethnic identity in sport participation of immigrants across more diverse contexts and ethnic groups.

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