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Cultural essence and sport consumption: marketing organizational charisma

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized elements of sport organizations' cultural essence (collectively posited as 'cultural charisma') on sport consumption. It is framed in the paradigm of organizational symbolism. Data for the study was obtained from a convenience sample of respondents ($N = 476$) who resided in a large metropolitan area on the west coast of the United States. The results (obtained via correlation and regression analyses) revealed that organizational cultural charisma was positively related to consumers' organizational associations and was a positive predictor of their sport consumption frequency. Additionally, cultural charisma may be considered a 'subordinate' capital (i.e., it was more salient to Individuals of Color and to the younger, less educated, and less affluent respondents), with one exception – it was more salient to males than to females. This investigation elucidated the role of culture in the branding of sport organizations and offered insight regarding marketing strategy in general and managing the process of marketing cultural essence in particular. In doing so, it illustrated how the ideological premise of organizational culture as a component of marketing theory can be translated into effective marketing practice.

Keywords: organizational culture, branding, marketing, sport consumption.

Introduction

Organizations may generally be more similar than dissimilar in nature; however, they may be differentiated in their symbolic appeal (Lannon, 1996). For instance, although the general nature of a sport organization's core product is sport competition, the organization's product aesthetics, consumers, and consumption ambience may represent a blending of functional and emblematic properties that makes the patronage of the organization symbolic and meaningful to its consumers. Branding is the strategic process of imbuing organizations with a distinctiveness that differentiates the organization and accentuates its symbolic appeal. However, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for organizations to differentiate their brands using the traditional attributes of price and quality (Alcaniz, Caceres & Perez, 2010). Thus, as Alcaniz et al. (2010) contend, organizations need attractive alternatives to give their brands symbolic value, to foster a strong and meaningful identity for their consumers, and thus, enhance their products' brand equity to consumers. Sport organizations are not exempt from the need to differentiating their brands' appeal; consequently, they are making concerted efforts to develop unique brand identities, and strengthen positive associations consumers have with their organizations (Hutchinson & Bennett, 2012).

Lannon (1996) offers the notion of 'charisma' in this regard. She professed, "charismatic" personalities are more compelling, generating extremes of loyalty in their followers" (p. 26). She thusly continued: "From a marketing standpoint, building equity is to

endow a brand with charisma" (p. 27). She defined 'charismatic' products as those that are anchored to a compelling emotion or related to a transcendent experience that is symbolic to consumers. El-Amir and Burt (2010) (in their citing of McCracken, 1993) insisted likewise and added, "...the value of a brand lies in its ability to convey a bundle of meanings rooted in the culture..." (p. 191). According to Holt (2004), "...most consumer brands need a cultural strategy as a part of their branding tool kits" (p. 5). This paper is based on the contentions of El-Amir and Burt and Holt, and focuses on sport organization's cultural essence as a branded element of their charisma.

1. Cultural codes, cultural congruence, and cultural pluralism

Organizations have cultures (Desphande & Webster, 1989). Organizational culture includes a broad array of ideological and material artifacts that characterize its total essence (such as defining characteristics of its consumers and other stakeholders, its brand markers such as names and logos, its product features, and other unique marketing attributes (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Every organizational action (be it seemingly isolated or in concert with other/larger behavioral patterns) is governed by a myriad of internal and external cultural influences (Kerby, 1975). Demarcating the multidimensional and dynamic elements of the construct of organizational culture is an arduous task. Nonetheless, Deal and Kennedy (1982) delineated five elements of corporate culture: (a) the organization's business environment; (b) the values or norms of behavior shared by members of the organization; (c) the individuals identified by the organization; (d) the rites and rituals employed by the organization to

reinforce the values or norms of behavior, and (e) communications, the management of the cultural network that sustains the organization's culture. Relatedly, in his discussion of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1984) depicted three dimensions or states of culture: (a) the embodied state, which recognizes the cultural skills, competence, etc. that can be learned or acquired; (b) the objectified state, which pertains to the cultural goods; and (c) the institutionalized state, which recognizes the organization's systematic embrace of culture.

To make the notion of 'organizational culture' manageable for this study, this investigation sought to examine individualistic and collectivist elements of culture discussed by Deal and Kennedy (1982) that corresponded to the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states of cultural capital noted by Bourdieu (1984). This study was framed and undergirded with the paradigm of organizational symbolism (Desphande & Webster, 1989; Smircich, 1983), and posited organizational culture as a 'metaphor' instead of a variable. It considered culture as not something an organization *has*, but something an organization *is* (Desphande & Webster). In so doing, it recognized expressive, ideational, and symbolic organizational attributes (Desphande & Webster, 1989). As such, this investigation was delimited to extrapolated elements of organizational culture that pertained to the: (a) embodied cultural essence, denoted by the cultural codes (i.e., ethics and values) of an organization, (b) objectified cultural essence, denoted by the cultural congruence with individuals identified with/by the organization; and (c) institutionalized cultural essence, denoted by the organization's implied or expressed embrace of cultural pluralism. Following is a discussion of these conceptualizations of culture as applied to sport organizations and the marketing of their respective teams/events.

2. Embodied organizational culture: cultural codes (ethics and values)

Cultural codes are an embodiment of organizational standards and refer to the ways and mores that govern organizational business practices and organizational treatment of employees and its community of customers (BusinessDictionary.com). Due to the accessibility of information on the Internet and via social media, sport consumers are inundated with artifacts alluding to a sport organization's cultural codes, which are represented by the underlying ethics and values of an organization. Such ethics and values of sport organizations are expressed and implied in a number of public ways such as the type of corporate partners they affiliate with, the nature of their investments,

their social engagement in their respective communities, the messages communicated in the norms of their marketing priorities and daily practices, etc.

Ethics and values are important considerations when deciding whether or not to patronize an organization's sport events. "Core values have emerged as fundamental characteristics that define the brand of an organization" (Hutchinson & Bennett, 2012, p. 435). Moreover, consumers are becoming increasingly demanding of companies to be ethically and socially responsive (Alcaniz et al., 2010). They want organizations to convey ethical codes, rules, and judgments and refrain from immoral practices. Pons, Laroche, Nyeck and Perreault (2001) noted that consumers are oriented toward sport events that fulfill their cultural needs and also respect their system of values. Paraschak (1997) also demonstrated that individuals would often modify their sport consumption to reflect their cultural values and traditions. Additionally, Green (2001) contend that sport offers and provides a highly visible, easily accessible, and particularly salient setting and platform for the expression of salient subcultural values and beliefs. Her research demonstrated that the subculture of sport events that results in the formation of salient and distinctive values, provided consumers with opportunities for symbolic consumption experiences. Thus, the ethics and values that characterize sport organizations become critical ingredients of their embodied cultural essence that adds symbolic value to the organization's brand, fostering a strong and meaningful identity for consumers in a manner that enhances consumers' associations with the organization and influences the frequency in which they patronize it.

3. Objectified organizational culture: cultural congruence (racioethnic representation)

Deal and Kennedy (1982) indicated that organizational cultures often transmit cultural meanings based on the manner in which they design, orchestrate and manage the representation of their stakeholders. According to Oyserman and Harrison (1998), "one's everyday choices and behaviors appear idiosyncratic... Yet research and theorizing in social and cultural psychology suggest that these choices may in fact be colored by social representations...and the sociocultural niches we occupy..." (p. 281). Social representations are therefore, objectified markers in popular culture that become "visual hooks" (Oyserman & Harrison, 1998, p. 284). Subsequently, an organization's stakeholders, as social representations of the organization, become visible and tangible objectified artifacts of the organization's cultural essence.

Kim and Drolet (2009) postulated that in the individualistic cultural contexts, choice is regarded as a self-expression. Such choice and self-expression is applicable in sport because self-connections to sport teams parallel the identity consumers have with sport organizations (Kim & Trail, 2011). Moreover, as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) asserts, people will be motivated to attach themselves to those who are perceived to be similar. Social representation of race and ethnicity influences individuals' self-expressions, choices and behaviors (Oyserman & Harrison, 1998). Such social representation is relevant to sport organizations. The patronage of sport activities and events is often linked to racial/ethnic variables (Pons et al., 2001) making the racial-ethnic self concept operative whereby consumers feel that racially/ethnically similar athletes and other organizational stakeholders represent them – making them feel part of the organization and the community which the organization represents (Bilyeu & Wann, 2002; Nadeau et al., 2011). As such, the racial/ethnic profile of sport organizations may serve as positive dispositions to consume the organization's products and services (Sapolsky, 1980; Schurr, Wittig, Rubble, & Ellen, 1988). Additionally, Nadeau et al. revealed that racial-ethnic congruence between a sport organization and its respective market of consumers lead to increased revenue, particularly in the sport of professional baseball.

The preference for racial-ethnic representation in sports is rooted in the social psychological concept of symbolic self-completion (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982), self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982), self-consistency (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987), and others that are fundamentally premised on consumers' desire for a cognitive balance or racio-ethnic homeostasis between their self-perceptions and the products they are consuming. Therefore, it is likely to infer that racio-ethnic congruence between consumers and a sport organization's stakeholders of athletes and spectators may endow the organization with an objectified cultural essence that adds symbolic value to the organization's brand, fostering a strong and meaningful identity for consumers in a manner that enhances their associations with the organization and influences the frequency in which they patronize it.

4. Institutionalized organizational culture: cultural pluralism

Cultural pluralism is a concept that refers to the celebration of ethnic differences (Morrison, Plaut & Ybarra, 2010; Pons et al., 2001; Takaki, 1993) and it assumes that within one organization many different cultures can coexist and adopt norms and values

from each other (Toarniczky & Primecz, 2006). Morrison et al. (2010) noted that organizations are increasing their overall embrace of multiculturalism. Two ways in which institutionalized cultural pluralism may be manifested in a sport organizational context are in: (a) the cultural diversity within the organization; and (b) the organization's expressed or implied embrace of multiculturalism. Cultural diversity and multiculturalism (terms often used interchangeably) are critical components of an organization's cultural essence that convey cultural variation and moral philosophy (Toarniczky & Primecz, 2006).

Desensi (1994) issued a challenge to sport scholars to increase their understanding of the permeations and effects of cultural pluralism on sport. She sought to "...not only raise or reaffirm a social consciousness within us regarding multiculturalism, but serve as a jumping-off point for debate, further questioning, and, most importantly, social action within the management of sport" (p. 68). Armstrong (2008) proclaimed that multiculturalism is redefining American sport, and her findings "...demonstrated the need for multicultural sensitivity at the micro and macro levels regarding the ... branding and positioning of sport events to a culturally diverse consumer base" (p. 229). Sport organizations that reflect a culturally plural 'flavor' may be endowed with an institutionalized cultural essence that adds symbolic value to the organization's brand, fostering a strong and meaningful identity for consumers in a manner that enhances its association with the organization and influences the frequency in which they patronize it.

5. 'Subordinate' capital

Bourdieu (1984) claimed that cultural tastes (be they embodied, objectified, or institutionalized) are correlated with economic status and social space location and thus, more salient to subordinate groups. Bourdieu asserted that culture serves a more 'functional' role for members of the *subordinate* group than it does for members of the *dominant* group such that it leads them to select consumption opportunities that afford them social empowerment (Fiske, 1992). Viewing Bourdieu's primary focus on economics and social class as a weakness of his model, Fiske (1992) has broadened the concept and added that fandom is generally "associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people ... disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class, and race" (p. 30). Thus, Fiske added gender, race, and age to the axes of discrimination that influence cultural tastes and subsequently, the culture of consumption. Therefore, based on the contention concerning cultural essence and its relationship to and functions

for members of a subordinate, the salience of cultural charisma may differ based on consumers' age (Fiske, 1992; White & Wilson, 1991), income (Thrane, 2001; White & Wilson, 1991), education (Mehus, 2005), and gender (Fiske, 1992). There is a dearth of research on race and cultural capital (Fiske, 1992); however, differences are expected based on the different racio-social locations consumers occupy (Armstrong, 2008).

6. Sport events: conduits of organizational cultural charisma

Sport is cultural: it is culturally produced and culturally consumed, and comprised of a bundle of cultural meanings (Pons et al., 2001). Consequently, sport is a conduit for conveying and consuming organizational culture. Thomas and Dyall (1999) affirmed as much in their discussion of the unique and distinct capacity of sport to symbolize national, cultural, subcultural, and ethnic identities. Moragas (1992) similarly commented that "sport events are fundamentally cultural performances and, as such, they are an extension of the values, meanings and identities of the social actors involved" (cited in Garcia, 2001, p. 194). According to Garcia (2001): "Increasingly, sport events are acknowledged as moments of symbolic significance...grounded in the high level of social interaction they provide, intensely personal identification they generate in their audiences, and the subjective valuations to which they are consequently submitted" (pp. 193-194).

Armstrong (2008) corroborated the notion of a sport event's 'cultural essence' in her remarks that when sport events are imbued with artifacts and expressions that have sociocultural salience, they may provide consumers with a sense of cultural congruity and a cultural balance that allows them to have a rewarding sport consumption experience. She also affirmed Holt's (2004) position on the need for cultural strategy as a part of sport 'branding tool kits' and informed that sport marketers be mindful of the 'cultured personality' of sport events. Her research revealed that, although the functional product features (quality of teams and athletes competing) were the most predictive of sport attendance, the effect of sport event culture as a predictor of sport attendance was also noteworthy. Pons et al. (2001) also indirectly supported the notion of cultural essence in sport. They affirmed the social role sport events play in today's multicultural society, suggested that sport events were capable of carrying cultural meanings, and demonstrated how 'ethnocultural emblems' of sport events impact consumption. According to Green (2001), a sport event's culture/subculture offers a symbolic utility for consumers such that it may be a lever for marketing the event. In Chalip's (2006)

recount of the salience of certain sport events, he stated, "The sporting outcomes may matter to some, but there is a sense that something more important – something that transcends the sport is going on" (p. 110). Although previous research has not used the term 'cultural charisma' as the moniker to describe the 'something more' or the branded appeal of sport organizations, it is a befitting descriptor of the symbolic cultural essence that fosters the compelling emotional and transcendent experience (Chalip, 2006; Lannon, 1996) repeatedly displayed by the extremes of loyalty among sport consumers.

Green (2001) indicated that the culture of sport may be accessed and transmitted through both direct and indirect sport consumption. She insisted that individuals may chose to participate in sport organizations' product or event cultures/subcultures in a variety of ways: viewing sports live or on television, reading about sports, discussing sports, and purchasing sport products. Additionally, according to Green, each interaction and engagement with a sport organization's product or event culture/subculture provides a slightly different venue for the expression and transmission of cultural values and beliefs. Wann, Melnick, Russel and Pease (2001) offered similar categorizations of direct sport consumption (live attendance) and indirect sport consumption (consumption via mass media). Therefore, it is important to distinguish the likely influence of an organization's cultural charisma on direct and indirect sport consumer behavior.

7. Purpose of study

"Despite this centrality of organizational culture to marketing management issues, there has been relative little scholarly study of its impact in a marketing context" (Depshpande & Webster, 1989, p. 3). Additionally, while there is a growing recognition of the salience of culture in marketing social products and services (of which sport is), elucidations of the impact of sport organizational cultures on sport consumption and strategic marketing warrant further attention. Notwithstanding the ideological importance of the cultural branding of sport organizations, questions remain concerning how this can be accomplished practically, and to what extent such practice would impact marketing success (i.e., enhancing consumers' associations and predicting consumers' behaviors). Herein lies the impetus for this investigation.

The conceptualization of organizational culture in this study was informed primarily by the theoretical premises of organizational symbolism but also by those of cultural psychology, social psychology, branding, and self-congruity. The purpose of this

investigation was to: (a) situate micro/individualistic and macro/collectivistic elements of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural essence at the meso-level context of sport organizations, and (b) explore the impact of sport organizational culture on consumers' associations and consumption behaviors, noting the marketing implications. Based on existing literature and previous research related to this topic, three hypotheses were formulated and tested in this investigation:

Hypothesis 1: Sport organization cultural charisma is a 'subordinate' capital and thus, will differ based on consumers' race, gender, age, income, and education.

Hypothesis 2: Sport organization cultural charisma will be significantly and positively related to the consumers' associations with sport organizations.

Hypothesis 3: Sport organization cultural charisma will be a significant and positive predictor of consumers' direct and indirect sport consumption.

8. Research methods

8.1. Sample participants. The data for this investigation were based on responses of a sample of 476 individuals, of which the majority (59%) were males, 70% were aged 18-34, and 41% were 4-year college graduates. The majority (51%) of the sample were Caucasians. Due to the unequal sub-population sizes for the other racial groupings consisting of individuals of African, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Island, Native, and mixed-race descent, they (49%) were collapsed into the collective category of 'Individuals of Color' for comparison.

8.2. Materials and procedures. The data were captured in items contained in a self-report questionnaire. The self-report questionnaires were pretested prior to distribution and were disseminated throughout a large culturally diverse and geographically dispersed metropolitan area on the west coast of the United States. The questionnaires were distributed by a team of researchers via non-probability convenience sampling procedures.

8.3. Cultural charisma. Based on the premises of previous research, a five-item exploratory measure of cultural charisma was formulated that represented embodied, objectified, and institutional cultural essence of sport organizations. The cultural charisma construct included: (a) a single item regarding the embodied cultural codes (e.g., the ethics and values of the organization/team), (b) two items pertaining to objectified cultural congruency with organizational stakeholders (e.g. the presence of one's racial/ethnic group members as spectators, and the presence of athletes competing from one's racial/ethnic group); (c) two items denoting institutionalized cultural pluralism (e.g. cultural diversity among the organization's/team's consumers and the organization's/team's embrace of multiculturalism). These items were posited to summarily endow sport organizations (and their respective teams, events, and products) with what was characterized accordingly as a 'cultural charisma.' The respondents rated the salience of these elements to their sport consumption decisions using an interval scale ranging from 1 = *Not influential* to 5 = *Very influential*. See Table 1 for the factor matrix of this construct (as yielded by the principal axis factoring); internal consistency is .87.

Table 1. Principal factor analysis of organizational cultural charisma

| Organizational culture | Variables | Factor 1 |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Embodied culture | Ethics and values | .624 |
| Objectified culture | Spectator racial representation | .825 |
| | Athlete racial representation | .755 |
| Institutional culture | Organizational multiculturalism | .848 |
| | Organizational cultural diversity | .769 |

8.4. Organizational associations. Three items were included in the self-report questionnaire that pertained to the salience of various consumer associations in influencing sport consumption: (a) the image of sport organization/team; (b) the feeling of connectedness to the organization/team; and (c) pride in supporting sport organization/team. These items were measured on an interval scale ranging from 1 = *Not influential* to 5 = *Very influential*.

8.5. Sport consumption. Two dimensions of sport consumption were examined: (a) direct sport

consumption activity of live sport attendance; and (b) a composite measure of indirect sport consumption including which included the behaviors of mediated sport consumption (via Internet, television, and radio) and behaviors of wearing sport merchandise and talking about sports to others. The internal consistency of the indirect sport consumption variable was .89. The frequency in which the respondents engaged in these consumption behaviors was measured on an interval scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very frequently*.

9. Data analysis and results

9.1. Organizational cultural charisma: a subordinate capital? A 2 x 2 ANOVA to determine whether cultural charisma was a subordinate culture and thus, to establish whether the salience of cultural charisma should be nuanced based on the participants' race and/or gender revealed no race x gender interactions. However, it did reveal: (a) a main effect for race $F(1, 465) = 34.58, p < .001$, *Partial Eta Squared* = .07, such that cultural charisma was more salient to Individuals of Color ($M = 2.62, SD = 1.09$) than it was to Caucasians ($M = 2.08, SD = .964$); and (b) a main effect for gender, $F(1, 465) = 10.69, p = .001$, *Partial Eta Squared* = .02, such that cultural charisma was more salient to males ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.09$) than it was to females ($M = 2.17, SD = .998$). Based on the main effect for race, an additional ANOVA was performed to determine if there were differences between the subgroups of Individuals of Color, i.e., Blacks/African Americans ($n = 46$), Hispanics ($n = 99$), and Asians and Pacific Islanders ($n = 56$) (note: this subgroup analysis excluded the 1 Native American respondent and 28 mixed-raced respondents). The results revealed no significant difference between the sub-groups

of Individuals of Color on the salience of cultural charisma to their sport consumption, $F(2, 198) = 2.20, p = .11$.

To further explore the 'subordinate' nature of the salience of cultural charisma, bivariate correlations between cultural charisma and participants' age, income, and education revealed that the salience of cultural charisma was lowly, yet significantly and inversely correlated with each of these demographics. It was more important to the younger ($r = -.091, p = .05$), less educated ($r = -.20, p < .001$), and less financially affluent ($r = -.30, p < .001$) respondents.

9.2. Organizational cultural charisma and consumer associations. Due to the main effects for race and gender previously revealed, separate bivariate correlations were performed based on the respondents' race and gender to examine their associations with organizations. The results revealed a strong and positive correlation between cultural charisma and image of sport organizations/teams for both racial and gender groupings; however, there were some differences in the magnitude of the relationships between cultural charisma and connectedness to sport organizations/teams and pride in supporting sport organizations/teams (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations for cultural charisma and organizational associations by race and gender

| | Indv. of Color | Caucasians | Males | Females |
|----------------------------------|----------------|------------|----------|----------|
| | Charisma | Charisma | Charisma | Charisma |
| Image of organization | .61* | .55* | .55* | .61* |
| Connectedness to organization | .45* | .33* | .31* | .38* |
| Pride in supporting organization | .41* | .36* | .36* | .32* |

Note: * Denotes correlations significance at the .01 level.

9.3. Organizational cultural charisma and sport consumption. The respondents' direct attendance frequency ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.21$) and their indirect sport consumption frequency ($M = 3.22, SD = 1.02$) were deemed 'moderate.' To examine: (a) whether cultural charisma was a significant predictor of direct and indirect sport consumption; and (b) whether such predictability varied by respondents' race and gender (based on previous main effects for race and gender), two separate regression analyses were performed for

race gender. To prevent Type II error the Bonferroni Alpha adjustment was employed and the alpha level of significance for the regression analyses was set to .025. The results revealed that the most amount of variance (16%) was explained for Individuals of Color and the least amount explained was for males (8%). Additionally, while the amounts of variance explained for direct and indirect consumption were similar for Individuals of Color and females, such similarity was not revealed for Caucasians and males (see Table 3).

Table 3. Amount of variance explained in sport consumption by race and gender

| Amount of variance explained | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | Indv. of Color | Caucasians | Males | Females |
| Sport consumption | | | | |
| Direct consumption | 16% ($B = .397$)* | 12% ($B = .350$)* | 14% ($B = .367$)* | 9% ($B = .292$)* |
| Indirect consumption | 14% ($B = .378$)* | 7% ($B = .263$)* | 8% ($B = .275$)* | 9% ($B = .298$)* |

Note: Predictor variable: Organizational cultural charisma. * Denotes significant at the $p < .001$ level.

10. General discussion

The results revealed that the respondents were moderately active sport consumers, making them an appropriate sample for this exploration and a viable target for sport marketing (notably for strategy of market penetration – where the aim is to increase the rate of consumption of existing consumers from moderate to high). Concerning the testing of the hypotheses, cultural charisma was more salient to Individuals of Color than it was to Caucasians (a finding that affirmed those of Armstrong, 2008); it was also more salient to the younger, less educated, and less affluent respondents. These findings generally supported the notion of cultural charisma being a ‘subordinate’ capital as Fiske (1992) suggested; however, with one exception – it was more salient to males (the dominant sport consumer group) than to females (the subordinate sport consumption group). Fiske’s claim was that cultural capital would serve as a buffer for discrimination for the ‘subordinate’ female group because of their disempowered social position. To the contrary, the finding in the present study regarding the salience of culture to males (a generally empowered group) countered Fiske’s proposition, providing mixed support for Hypothesis 1. It is unclear why or how sport organization cultural charisma functioned in a manner that made it more salient to males than females – whose sport consumption is generally influenced by ancillary sociocultural attributes. This finding questions the relegation of cultural buffering solely as ‘subordinate’ capital and gestures to further exploration of the functional role cultural charisma plays for males’ sport consumption.

Notwithstanding some differences in the magnitude of effects based on the participants’ race and gender, organizational cultural charisma was positively and significantly related to the respondents’ associations. It had a notable relationship with the image the respondents had of sport organizations/teams and to lesser and varied extents, their feelings of connectedness to sport organizations/teams and the amount of pride they had in supporting sport organizations/teams (supporting Hypothesis 2).

The organizational cultural charisma variable received low to moderate ratings of importance (based on the low mean scores). Nonetheless, notwithstanding some differences in the magnitude of effects based on the participants’ race and gender, the nature of the results revealed that organizational cultural charisma was a positive and significant predictor of sport consumption. Even though cultural charisma explained more of the variance in sport consumption for Individuals of Color than it did for Caucasian consumers (in fact, it was twice as

much regarding Consumers of Color’s indirect sport consumption), and more of the composite variance in the sport consumption of males than females (notably in their sport attendance frequency), the range of the amounts of variance explained (7%-16%) were minimum-modest. Nevertheless, the amounts were statistically significant and thus, this variable was deemed to be a noteworthy positive predictor of direct sport attendance and indirect sport consumption behaviors of mediated sports, wearing sport merchandise, and talking about sports (supporting Hypothesis 3). Interestingly, while the amount of variance explained by cultural charisma for direct sport consumption and indirect sport consumption for Consumers of Color (16% and 14%, respectively) and for females (9% and 9%, respectively) were similar, there was more discretion in the amount of variance explained for the direct and indirect sport consumption of Caucasians (12% and 7%, respectively) and males (14% and 8% respectively). Greene (2001) forewarned of the possibility of such difference. She noted that each interaction and engagement with a sport organization’s culture/subculture (via the different opportunities for direct and indirect sport consumption) could provide a slightly different venue/platform for the expression and transmission of culture. As such, additional explorations are warranted to explain the reason for the discretionary effects of cultural charisma on the direct and indirect sport consumption of Caucasian and male respondents.

11. Managerial marketing implications

The majority of scholarly marketing attention has historically been directed to consumer issues rather than organizational issues; however, the importance of organizational culture to effective marketing has increased (Desphande & Webster, 1989). This study contributed three unique findings that advanced our knowledge in this latter regard. First, the results offered some insight relative to taste preferences for the cultural essence of sport organizations. As mentioned at the outset, while the ideological premise of organizational culture as a component of marketing theory is noteworthy, the challenge lies in translating this theoretical premise into marketing practice. This investigation revealed that elements of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized culture may be codified and thus, infused into marketing strategy. More specifically, based on the findings of this study sport organizations engage in marketing practices that: (a) boast of their cultural codes, as expressed by their ethics and values; (b) accentuate culturally congruent organizational references for their consumers (i.e., racio-ethnic inclusiveness/representation among its employees, athletes, and spectators); and (c) convey

their embrace of the essence of cultural pluralism (via cultural diversity and multiculturalism throughout its organization) may brand their sport organizations with a cultural charisma that positively influences consumers associations with the organization and their patronage of it. Additionally, it must be noted that these elements of culture are not restricted to sport but may be viable brand markers and thus, relevant marketing strategies for non-sport organizations as well.

The second unique contribution of this research concerns its rebut of the typical narratives surrounding the impact of accentuating or branding organizations with marketing attributes denoting their cultural essence. A widespread belief is that the implementation of ideologies of racio-ethnic representation, cultural inclusivity, and the like may create a backlash among non-minorities (Morrison et al., 2010). Thus, a viable challenge for marketers is finding a balance where an emphasis on cultural pluralism will not alienate or disenfranchise their primary target markets of males and Caucasians – i.e., those who comprise the cultural majority or financial mainstay of their consumers. Based on the findings of this study, such a backlash was not evident. The notion of cultural charisma was more important to the Individuals of Color (both at the collective level as Individuals of Color and at the individual level of their racial-ethnic subgroup membership) as posited; however, it was actually more salient to males than females, and did not alienate the Caucasian respondents and was salient enough to them to positively influence their associations sport consumption behaviors as well.

Another concern among marketers is whether or not a concept like ‘cultural charisma’ is financially prudent and will have any ‘real’ effect on generating marketing related revenue. According to Chalip (2006), sport event organizers tend to focus more on their events’ economic impact than their events’ social value. However, Throsby (2003) suggested that economic impact and social value are not necessarily diametrically opposed. He opined that cultural worth may include emanating values (often embedded in aesthetics, spiritual meanings, social functions, symbolic significance, historical importance, uniqueness, etc.) that also have economic value/sustenance. This study allayed the economic concern and supported the premise espoused by Throsby. The positive correlations found between organizational culture and consumer associations with sport organizations, and the positive predictive power of cultural charisma in increasing direct sport attendance and other indirect or secondary forms of sport consumption illustrated the financial implications of marketing cultural charisma.

Conclusion

“The importance of understanding organizational culture issues in a marketing management context is undeniable” (Desphance & Webster, 1989, p. 13). Sport organizations provide a unique platform for examining this proposition. As mentioned previously, sport is a conduit for the conveyance and consumption of culture. “Sports and sporting events in particular are recognized as being major components of the values and the culture of many countries, and they carry a strong meaning for individuals” (Pons et al., 2001, p. 232). Nevertheless, despite: (a) the assertions and growing acknowledgement of the need to explicate the impact of culture on the branding of organizations, (b) the need to include culture in branding ‘toolkits’ (Holt, 2004), and (c) the increasing complexity of responding to and facilitating relationships with a ‘cultural mosaic’ (Armstrong, 2011) of consumers, there is still a dearth of research on the impact of organizations’ cultural essence/charisma on marketing effectiveness. This research sought to fill part of this void in the domain of sport. However, in doing so, it offered noteworthy insights regarding the need for marketers (be they in sport or other industries) to: (a) identify and manage the cultural components of their organizations’ cultural symbolism (i.e., symbolic aspects of culture transmitted to the consumer pre-during- and post-consumption), and (b) as Desphande and Webster suggested, “develop theoretical structures that relate carefully defined cultural variables to the market phenomenon they are trying to understand” (p. 13).

Notwithstanding the contributions previously mentioned, there were some limitations that must be noted. Due to unequal sub-sample sizes based on the race of the respondents, the data were collapsed into the two sub-groups of Caucasians and Individuals of Color (following the procedures of Armstrong, 2008). While this collapsing was necessary for statistical purposes, future research should seek larger and equal representation of participants from different racial/ethnic groups of Individuals of Color for more concise racio-ethnic comparisons. Future research should also include a comparative component with global consumers. Additionally, the amounts of variance in sport consumption explained by the cultural charisma variable were relatively small. Therefore, future research should include a broader index of organizational culture items in regression models or perhaps in structural equation modeling techniques to increase the explanatory possibilities of how varied elements of culture may imbue an organization with an essence or charisma that influences consumption.

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