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A role of team and organizational identification in the success of cause-related sport marketing

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ABSTRACT

As sport marketers are increasingly engaging in cause-related sport marketing (CRSM) programs, there is a growing interest in understanding what CRSM characteristics and circumstances can lead to success. This study extends prior research by examining the direct and moderating impacts of team identification and cause organizational identification on consumer attitudes toward cause related sport marketing (CRSM) programs using intercollegiate sport contexts in the United States. A two groups (high vs. low-fit CRSM messages), between subject, and post-test only experiment ($N = 309$) denoted that respondents showed more positive attitudes toward high-fit CRSM messages and both team identification and cause organizational identification had different moderating effects of sport/cause fit on attitudes. Fit between a sport team and a cause had a greater impact on attitudes when consumer affinity toward the sport team was more positive. However, fit had little or no impact when consumer affinity toward the cause was positive, but it played a significant and positive role when consumers showed low affinity toward the cause.

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1. Introduction

The sports industry is considered an ideal field in which to deploy corporate social responsibility initiatives due to its many distinct features, including mass media distribution, youth appeal, and positive health impacts (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Many professional sports leagues, each franchise team, a host of individual athletes, and many mega sporting events are actively implementing socially responsible events, promotions, and sponsorship programs (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). For example, the National Basketball Association (NBA) named its social responsibility efforts the NBA Cares, and has employed such public campaigns as Read to Achieve, Nothing but Nets, and Basketball without Borders (NBA, 2009). By conducting these initiatives, the NBA aims to give back to the communities that support them and addresses important issues in the United States and around the world. Now social responsibility initiatives called corporate social responsibility (CSR) or community relations became pervasive and popular strategies of many sport organizations.

With increased interest in social responsibility initiatives in the sports industry, academic scholars have begun looking at this trend (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Extejt, 2004; Godfrey, 2009; Lachowetz & Irwin, 2002). Lachowetz and Gladden (2002) initially provided a framework for understanding the cause-related sport marketing (CRSM) phenomenon. Most importantly, they conceptualized the CRSM as any strategic marketing programs associated with social causes for mutual benefit between sports organizations or athletes, sponsoring corporations, and cause organizations using

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the sports events and programs. Following their definition, a wide range of social responsibility initiatives can be considered as CRSM programs.

Since Lachowetz and Gladden's (2002) work, approximately 10 peer-reviewed articles focused on CRSM have been published in the sport management area (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2006; Extejt, 2004; Lachowetz & Irwin, 2002; Roy & Graeff, 2003). These studies have examined attitudes toward cause-related sport marketing initiatives. For example, Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell, and Clark (2003) found that spectators are more likely to have a positive attitude toward cause-related sponsorship programs – for example FedEx, as a title sponsor of the St. Jude PGA Classic tour event, raised money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Roy and Graeff (2003) examined consumer attitudes toward cause-related marketing initiatives in professional sports. Their findings showed that consumers highly agreed with the idea that pro sports teams or athletes should support local charities or causes. In addition, Babiak and Wolfe (2006) explored socially responsible initiatives associated with Super Bowl XL in Detroit.

Despite the current development in this area, not much attention has been given to factors that may influence consumer responses to CRSM. Several important variables have shown to have an impact on consumer response constructs, such as attitudes or purchase intentions. For instance, congruence between a brand (or a sport organization) and a cause has received much attention from general business and marketing researchers studying the impact of cause-related marketing (CRM) programs on consumers (e.g., Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller, & Meza, 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). Consumer identification with a company/brand (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006) and a cause beneficiary (Cornwell & Coote, 2005) also were considered important factors affecting consumer responses to CRM campaigns.

The degree to which the aforementioned factors are also influential on consumers responding to CRSM initiatives in sport context has not been yet examined. In general, the majority of cause-related marketing in business and marketing literature confirmed that the higher fit between a brand and a cause generated more positive consumer attitudes toward CRM programs (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Nan & Heo, 2007; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). However, Lee and Ferreira (2011) showed that identification with a sport team can moderate the impact of fit on consumer choice of team licensed products.

Moreover, Barone, Norman, and Miyazaki (2007) indicated that the effects of company/cause fit are moderated by consumer affinity with the beneficiary. Therefore, it is definitely imperative to examine whether or not there are moderating variables between sport/cause fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM programs.

Hence, this study focuses on examining the effects of sport/cause fit on consumer attitude toward CRSM and purchase intention, as well as the role of consumer identification with a sports team and a cause organization in the effectiveness of CRSM. Since the former CRSM studies (e.g., Irwin et al., 2003; Roy & Graeff, 2003) only utilized professional sports contexts, this study uses intercollegiate athletic teams as a context (e.g., college football team implements CRSM programs/campaigns). Considering the fact that many college athletic departments suffer from financial pressure (Fulks, 2008), it would be meaningful to explore a new marketing strategy like CRSM.

Theoretically, this study contribute to the extant CRSM literature by empirically testing the direct impact of sport/cause fit and moderating effects of team and cause organizational identification on consumer attitudes toward CRSM. Pragmatically, the model can provide intercollegiate athletic departments wishing to engage in CRSM initiatives a better understanding of the factors that can influence the success of CRSM programs.

2. Theoretical model and hypotheses development

The impact of sport/cause fit and consumer identification with a sport team and a cause on consumer attitudes toward CRSM and purchase intention is shown in Fig. 1. The model proposes a direct impact of three independent variables on consumer attitudes toward CRSM, as well as the moderating role of team and cause organizational identification between sport/cause fit and consumer attitudes toward the CRSM program. Moreover, the model implies that positive consumer attitudes toward CRSM lead to increased purchase intention of cause-related products.

2.1. Sport/cause fit

Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) defined the fit between a brand and a cause in the CRM context as “the perceived link between a cause and the firm's product line, brand image, position, and/or target market” (p. 47). Congruence framework (Keller, 1993) provides a theoretical background to explain why the brand/cause fit may affect consumer responses toward CRM initiatives.

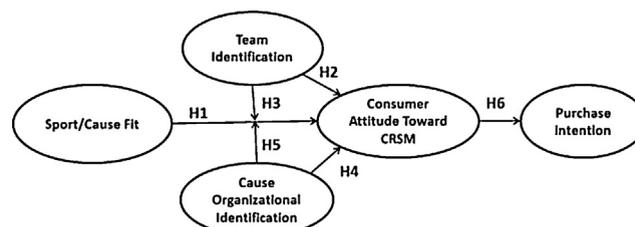


Fig. 1. Theoretical model and hypotheses.

Keller (1993) explained that existing brand associations in memory can influence the strength of a brand association. In other words, if given information is consistent with existing brand associations, it could be more easily learned and remembered. For example, partnership between sport organizations and youth-sport league might make more sense because both parties are considered “sport-related”. Thus, it is plausible to expect that high-fit between a brand and a cause will generate more positive consumer responses to a CRM campaign. The more consumers perceive the relationship between a brand and a cause (e.g., both have similar target markets) to be consistent, the more positive would be consumer response to CRM.

Many business researchers have investigated the impact of the brand/cause fit on consumer perception of CRM programs (Barone et al., 2007; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Bloom et al., 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 2005; Lafferty, 2007; Nan & Heo, 2007; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). Previous studies commonly indicated that a high-fit CRM partnership led to more positive consumer responses toward CRM programs. For example, Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) found that high-fit CRM initiatives (e.g., Home Depot supports programs for the Homeless) enhanced consumer attitudes toward CRM but low-fit initiatives (e.g., Home Depot supports programs against domestic violence) negatively impact consumer beliefs, attitudes, and purchase intentions. Pracejus and Olsen (2004) reported from their choice-based conjoint experiments that fit between a brand and a charity had a significant impact on consumer choice. Interestingly, they found that high-fit CRM initiatives generated 5–10 times more donation value than low-fit programs. Gupta and Pirsch (2006) also confirmed that company-cause fit improved consumer attitudes toward CRM initiatives and increased purchase intent.

Based on congruence framework and previous findings, it is reasonable to argue that people might respond more positively toward a high-fit association between a college football team and its related charity than toward a low-fit CRSM program. This assumption leads to the first hypothesis.

H1. Individuals will have more positive attitudes toward the CRSM when they perceive a program as high-fit between a sport and a cause rather than low-fit.

2.2. Social identity theory

Tajfel (1982) defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 31). In short, the social identity theory explains that people tend to place themselves and others into social categories, such as sports fans, political groups, or organizational members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Research on identification suggests that when people identify with particular social groups, they are more likely to have in-group favoritism and need for positive distinctiveness (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Applied to the organizational context, this would suggest that people become more sensitive to the success or failure of the organization with which they identify. In the cause-related sports marketing context, team identification and cause organizational identification are expected to have a significant impact on consumer responses toward CRSM initiatives. The following sections outline how team and cause organizational identification can play an important role in the relationship between a sport/cause fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM initiatives.

2.2.1. Team identification

Based on the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), team identification has received much attention from psychologists, sociologists, and sport management researchers. Previous findings indicated that team identification may engender affective responses (Wann & Schrader, 1997; Wann, Brewer, & Royalty, 1999; Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002), psychological responses (Wakefield & Wann, 2006; Wann & Polk, 2007; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000; Wann, 2006), and behavioral responses (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007; Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Wann, Hunter, Ryan, & Wright, 2001; Wann et al., 2002; Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003). For instance, Wann, Dolan, McGeorge, and Allison (1994) indicate that fans are more likely to show positive emotional reactions toward their favorite sport teams and the degree of affective responses is larger in fans highly identified with a team than in fans with lower team identification. In addition, Fisher and Wakefield (1998) found a significant relationship between team identification and merchandising product purchased. Kwon and Armstrong (2002) also showed that team identification was a key factor affecting impulse buying of team merchandise. Gwinner and Swanson (2003) proposed a theoretical model of fan identification, including antecedents of fan identification and sponsorship outcomes, and tested several hypotheses. Their results showed that fan identification had a significant impact on sponsor recognition, attitude toward sponsorship, sponsor patronage, and satisfaction with sponsors. Consequently, highly identified fans are more likely to recognize sponsoring brands, to have positive attitudes toward sponsorship, to show high purchase intention of sponsors’ products, and to be satisfied with sponsors.

This literature suggests that highly identified fans are more likely to have positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward the sponsoring brand or company (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003); thus, in the sports context, this would suggest that team identification is likely to have a direct impact on consumer attitudes toward a CRSM initiative. Furthermore, team identification may play a moderating role on the impact of sport/cause fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM. Lee and Ferreira (2011) demonstrated with their choice-based conjoint experiment that sport/cause fit did not make a difference in purchasing team-licensed products among students highly identified with sport teams because their motivation to buy a team-license product seemed already high regardless whether their purchase would benefit a cause. In contrast, sport/cause fit mattered more for students less identified with sport teams as they seemed to see a donation to a cause they support as an extra reason to buy a team-licensed product. In contrast, Bloom et al. (2006) found that fit between a

brand and a cause in cause-related sponsorship had different impacts on consumer brand preferences depending on type of affinity (social or commercial). For example, a low fit cause affiliated with social initiative (e.g., beer brand supporting a children's reading program) could lead to more positive consumer attentions than a high fit cause with commercial affinity (e.g., beer brand associated with a designated driver program). Bloom et al. (2006) concluded that the interaction effects between degree of fit and degree of affinity are uncertain. Therefore, we would hypothesize that team identification moderates the relationship between fit and consumer attitudes, but there is not enough evidence to set specific directions of the moderating impact (higher or lower). These findings and rationales prompt the following hypotheses regarding direct and moderating impacts of team identification on consumer attitudes toward CRSM.

H2. The higher the identification with a sport team, the more positive attitudes toward CRSM.

H3. Identification with a sport team will moderate the relationships between fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM. That is, the effect of fit on attitude in the highly identified group (with a sport team) will be different than that in the lowly identified group.

2.2.2. Cause organizational identification

The social identity theory also guides the argument that whether or not consumers are identified with cause issues or organizations could impact their attitudes toward CRSM initiatives. If an individual perceives a specific charity as "my" organization due to life experience or involvement, he or she would be more likely to have positive attitudes toward a CRSM program supporting "my" charity organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). By way of example, if a consumer suffers from cancer or had a family member undergoing cancer treatment, she or he might also identify more with cancer research foundations and support them. Cornwell and Coote (2005) examined the role of organizational identification in consumer responses toward corporate sponsorship of a cause. They found from the survey study that organizational identification with a non-profit organization (NPO) significantly improved purchase intent of the corporate sponsor's products. Gupta and Pirsch (2006) found that the company-cause fit effects on purchase intention of CRM products improved under conditions of customer-cause congruence. These findings support the argument that cause organizational identification may have a direct impact on consumer attitudes toward CRSM.

Moreover, cause organizational identification could moderate the impact of sport/cause fit on consumer attitudes toward CRSM. Barone et al. (2007) showed that consumer affinity for the cause moderated the impact of retailer-cause fit on consumer evaluations of CRM programs. In other words, retailer-cause fit had little or no impact on evaluations when consumer affinity toward the cause was positive, but fit played a significant and positive role when consumers showed low affinity toward the cause. From this finding, it is plausible to assume that consumers will be more likely to have a positive attitude toward CRSM partnerships regardless of the level of retailer-cause fit if they identify more with the cause. For example, if an individual identifies with Breast Cancer Awareness (BCA), he or she would be more supportive of CRSM programs associated with BCA regardless of the level of sport/cause fit, whereas if an individual does not identify with BCA, then fit should matter more to their attitudes toward CRSM partnerships. As such, the following hypotheses, regarding moderating as well as direct impact of cause organizational identification, are proposed.

H4. The higher the identification with a cause organization, the more positive attitudes toward CRSM.

H5. Identification with a cause will moderate the relationships between fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM. That is, the effect of fit on attitude in the lowly identified group (with a cause) will be higher than that in the highly identified group.

2.3. Consumer attitude toward CRSM and purchase intention

The majority of the cause-related marketing research constructed consumer attitudes (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Irwin et al., 2003; Nan & Heo, 2007; Pirsch, Gupta, & Grau, 2007; Roy & Graeff, 2003) and purchase intention (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Cornwell & Coote, 2005; Pirsch et al., 2007; Roy & Graeff, 2003) as dependent variables. Generally, positive consumer attitudes toward the product may lead to increased purchase intention based on the cognitive psychology framework (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Fishbein, 1978). Specifically, CRSM practitioners might want to know whether or not cause-related marketing campaigns increase actual sales revenue. Therefore, it would be meaningful to look at the eventual impact of CRSM initiatives on consumer purchase intention to the CRSM product. In this study, it seems appropriate to expect that positive attitudes toward CRSM initiatives result in increased purchase intention of the cause-related product.

H6. A positive attitude toward the CRSM will lead to increased purchase intention of the cause-related product.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and design

To test the hypotheses, a two-group (high-fit vs. low-fit CRSM), between-subject, and post-test only experimental design was employed. Participants were asked to read the hypothetical CRSM messages manipulated by the level of fit (high vs.



Fig. 2. Hypothetical CRSM message example (high-fit condition).

low), and to answer the items about their attitudes toward the CRSM message, identification with the sport team and related cause, and purchase intention of the product in the message. The sample was composed of undergraduate students enrolled in several physical activity classes at a large southwestern university in the United States. Since physical activity classes are mandatory for all undergraduate students at this university, collecting the data from selected physical activity provide a wide coverage of the population. A total of 325 students responded to the experiment. After removing respondents with missing answers, 309 samples were usable for data analysis. Participants randomly received one of the two different survey instruments (high-fit vs. low-fit CRSM messages).

3.2. Manipulation of fit

In order to create two different hypothetical CRSM messages, which only varied in the level of fit between a sport and a cause, a pre-test was conducted with 69 undergraduate students enrolled in sport management classes at a large southwestern university. The pre-test subjects were not included in the main experiment. The pre-test survey consisted of open-ended questions about the most and least appropriate cause issues or organizations that the college football team of the respondents' school should support. Participants were asked to list the name of cause organizations or issues that they considered more or less appropriate for a college football team. As a result of the pre-test, education (e.g., Boys and Girls Club), health issues (e.g., American Cancer Society), and sport-related organizations (e.g., football little league) were identified as high-fit causes with the football team, whereas controversial issues (e.g., gay/lesbian rights or abortion), religion (e.g., Salvation Army) and animal issues (e.g., People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals [PETA]) were identified as low-fit causes. In order to validate the manipulation, two specific organizations were selected for each high-fit and low-fit condition. Boys and Girls Club (BGC) and Pop Warner Football League (PW) were chosen as the high-fit cause organizations with the college football team, whereas Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Planned Parenthood (PP) were selected as the low-fit cause organizations.¹

Hypothetical CRSM messages were created as t-shirt advertisements. All students were given the same advertisement except the related social cause. Fig. 2 shows one example of hypothetical CRSM messages. The advertisement featured a picture of the product, and the text described the CRSM by stating that \$1 out of \$15 will be donated to a social cause for each unit sold. The fictitious CRSM messages followed Varadarajan and Menon's (1988) concepts of CRM.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. Attitudes toward CRSM message

One of the dependent variables was consumer attitude toward the CRSM programs. The attitude items were based on Burton and Lichtenstein (1988) and Lichtenstein and Bearden (1989) research. The attitude scale consisted of six semantic differential items measured on a 7-point scale: favorability (1 = unfavorable, 7 = favorable), goodness (1 = bad, 7 = good), benefit (1 = harmful, 7 = beneficial), attractiveness (1 = unattractive, 7 = attractive), excellence (1 = poor, 7 = excellent), and preference (1 = I do not like this program; 7 = I like this program). Participants were asked to rate their attitude after reading a CRSM message. Cronbach's α reliability of the attitude scale was 0.96.

¹ HRC is selected as a low-fit cause since it is one of the most well-known organization supporting gay/lesbian rights. PP is also chosen as a low fit cause since it is related to support abortion rights. The pre-test identified causes stimulating controversial issues as low-fit, so HRC and PP are selected as low fit causes in the experiment.

Table 1
Measures and items.

Measures	Sources
<p><i>Team identification</i>^a</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To me, it is important that [the football team] wins. 2. I see myself as a fan of [the football team]. 3. My friends see me as a fan of [the football team]. 4. During the season, I follow [the football team] via ANY of the following: in person or on television, on the radio, or televised news or a newspaper. 5. Being a fan of [the football team] is important to me. 6. I dislike the greatest rivals of [the football team]. 7. I display [the football team]' name or insignia at my place of work, where I live, or on my clothing. 	Wann and Branscomb (1993)
<p><i>Cause organizational identification</i>^a</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When someone criticizes [the cause organization], it feels like a personal insult. 2. I am very interested in what others think about [the cause organization]. 3. When I talk about [the cause organization], I usually say “we” rather than “they”. 4. The successes of [the cause organization] are my successes. 5. If a story in the media criticized [the cause organization], I would feel embarrassed/angered. 6. When someone praises [the cause organization], it feels like a personal compliment. 	Bhattacharya et al. (1995) and Mael and Ashforth (1992)
<p><i>Purchase intention</i>^a</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I would purchase this [football team] t-shirt. 2. I would consider buying at this price. 3. The possibility that I would consider buying is high. 	Grewal et al. (1998) and Kwon et al. (2007)

^a Respondents are asked to rate their agreement (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) on each item.

3.3.2. Perceived fit

For the manipulation check, participants were asked to rate three items to indicate the degree of fit between the intercollegiate football team and related beneficiary after reading the CRSM message (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Participants were asked to estimate their position and circle the appropriate number on the scale (e.g., 1 = *bad fit*, 7 = *good fit*; 1 = *not at all logical*, 7 = *very logical*; 1 = *not at all appropriate*, 7 = *very appropriate*). Cronbach's α reliability of the perceived fit scale was 0.94.

3.3.3. Team identification

This study used the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) developed by Wann and Branscomb (1993) to measure team identification with the college football team. The SSIS has been successfully used in numerous studies across several countries (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), and consists of the seven items shown in Table 1. The degree of identification with a football team can be calculated by simply averaging all values within the scale. Cronbach's α reliability of the team identification scale was 0.90.

3.3.4. Cause organizational identification

Cause organizational identification was measured by six Likert-scale items, based on Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn (1995) and Mael and Ashforth (1992). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) on the six items shown in Table 1. The reliability of the cause organizational identification scale was 0.92.

3.3.5. Purchase intention

To determine purchase intention of the product mentioned in the hypothetical CRSM message, three items were used to measure purchase intention, adopted from Grewal, Krishnan, Baker, and Robin (1998) and Kwon et al. (2007). Table 1 included three items using a seven-point Likert scale: 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach's α reliability of the purchase intention scale was 0.91.

3.4. Data analysis

A number of statistical analyses were conducted in this study. First, manipulation of CRSM messages was checked by comparing means of the perceived fit variables. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations were then computed for all variables (fit, attitude toward CRSM message, purchase intentions, fan identification, and cause organizational identification) in the model. To test the hypothesized relationships, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed, using AMOS 18.0. In the model, following Marsh, Wen, and Hau (2004) recommendations, interaction effects were examined to test Hypothesis 3 and 5. Fit was treated as an observed variable, coded as 1 = *high fit* and 0 = *low fit*. Team identification and cause organizational identification were calculated as indices by first averaging the items that formed each construct and then standardizing the means (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Two interaction terms were created by multiplying the observed variable fit and each identification index variable. To construct latent variables, three items were used as indicator variables for attitudes and purchase intention variables. For the attitudes variable, three parcels out of the six items were created

based on Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman (2002) recommendation. Six items were randomly assigned to each of the three parcels and mean of the parcels were used as the attitudes variables.

In evaluating the model fit, three types of fit indices (absolute, incremental, and parsimonious) were examined, following Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (2006). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used as absolute fit, in addition to chi-square statistics. We used the comparative fit index (CFI) to measure incremental fit and the parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) as a measure of parsimonious fit. According to Hair et al., RMSEA values less than 0.07, GFI and CFI values greater than 0.90, and PNFI values greater than 0.60 show close model fit.

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation checks

To validate the experimental manipulation of fit in the study, the perceived fit mean scores of two groups (high vs. low fit message) were compared. Participants assigned higher perceived fit scores ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.21$) to high-fit CRSM (college football team donated money from t-shirt sales to Boys & Girls Club or Pop Warner football) messages than to low-fit CRSM (college football team donated money from t-shirt sales to Human Rights Campaign or Planned Parenthood) messages ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.52$). The difference was significant ($t = 15.67$, $p < 0.001$); therefore, the manipulation of fit was satisfied for this study.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

The final sample size was 309; 65.9% of survey participants were males and 34.1% were females. The average age of respondents was 20.6 and a majority of participants was Caucasian (71.75%) and Hispanic (15.91%). Given that 309 students were asked to respond to two different CRSM messages within the same fit condition, a total of 618 (309×2) observations were obtained.

Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of attitudes toward CRSM messages and purchase intention to the advertised product for each condition. Students showed the most positive attitudes ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.10$) and the highest purchase intentions ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.53$) toward CRSM messages associated with Boys & Girls Club, whereas showed the lowest attitudes ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.59$) and purchase intentions ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.79$) toward CRSM advertisement related to Human Rights Campaign. Overall, participants showed more positive attitudes and higher purchase intentions toward high-fit messages than low-fit ones as expected.

Table 3 summarizes means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of four variables in the proposed model. As expected, attitudes showed positive correlations with fit ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), cause organizational identification ($r = 0.324$, $p < 0.001$), and purchase intentions ($r = 0.480$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3. Model evaluation and hypotheses testing

An illustrative summary of the structural equation model is showed in Fig. 3. Model fit was found to be good: χ^2 ($df = 33$, $n = 618$) = 135.17, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.071; CFI = 0.979; PNFI = 0.584). Hypothesis 1 that postulated individuals have more

Table 2
Attitudes and purchase intentions toward CRSM messages.

		Attitudes		Purchase intentions	
		M	SD	M	SD
High fit message	Boys & Girls Club	5.38	1.10	3.82	1.53
	Pop Warner	5.09	1.20	3.66	1.67
Low fit message	Human Rights Campaign	4.20	1.59	3.42	1.79
	Planned Parenthood	4.42	1.53	3.51	1.74

Table 3
Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attitudes	4.77	1.45	–				
2. Fit ^a	0.50	0.50	0.319**	–			
3. Team identification	4.95	1.42	0.050	–0.111**	–		
4. Cause organizational identification	2.48	1.27	0.324**	0.046	0.115**	–	
5. Purchase intention	3.60	1.69	0.480**	0.081*	0.257**	0.306**	–

* $p < 0.01$.

** $p < 0.001$.

^a Fit coded as 0 = low-fit, 1 = high fit.

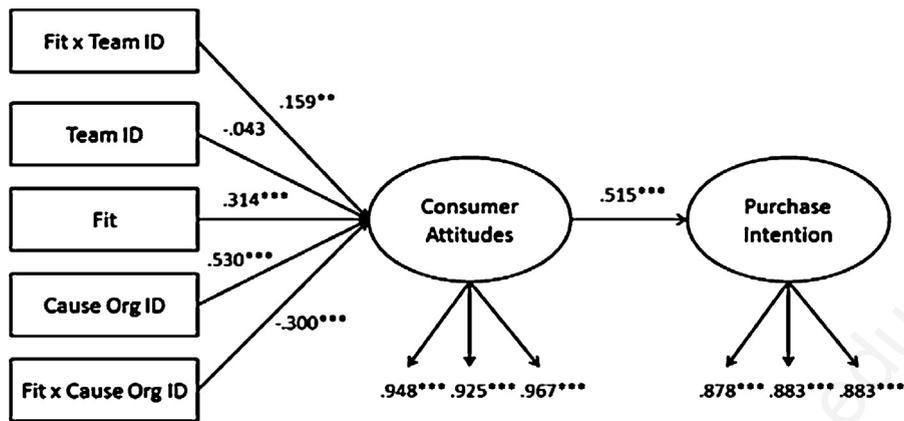


Fig. 3. Illustrated summary of hypothesized model, * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$.

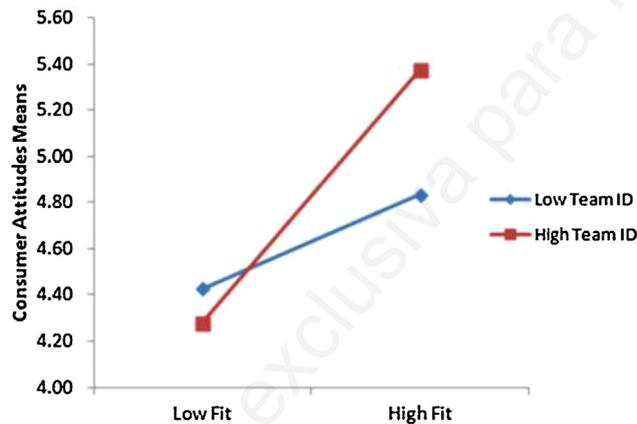


Fig. 4. Moderating effects of team identification between fit and attitudes.

positive attitudes toward high-fit CRSM messages was supported ($\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 suggesting the direct impact of team identification on attitudes was rejected ($\beta = -0.043$, $p > 0.05$). However, Hypothesis 3 that suggested the moderating effects of team identification was supported ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < 0.01$). Both Hypothesis 4 and 5, suggesting the direct and moderating effects of cause organizational identification were supported ($\beta = 0.530$, $p < 0.001$, and $\beta = -0.300$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Lastly, Hypothesis 6, which postulated the positive relationship between attitudes and purchase intentions, was supported ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$).

Figs. 4 and 5 shows the nature of interaction effects of team and cause organizational identification between fit and attitudes. Based on the middle point (4) in a seven-point Likert scale, both team and cause organizational identification groups (high and low) were formed. High team identification group consists of 239 subjects ($M = 5.57$) and low team identification group has 70 subjects ($M = 2.82$). For cause organizational identification groups, high organization identification group consists of 62 respondents ($M = 4.78$) and low organizational identification group includes 278 subjects ($M = 2.25$). As shown in Fig. 4, the effect of fit on attitude toward CRSM is higher in the high team ID group (the slope² of the high team ID = 1.096) relative to those in the low team ID group (the slope of the low team ID = 0.405). Regarding moderating impact of cause organizational identification, fit does not have an impact on attitude in highly identified group (with a cause) whereas fit has larger impact on attitude in lowly identified group (the slope of the low org ID = 0.993) (see Fig. 5).

² The slope of the high team ID line in Fig. 4 equals to mean differences between consumer attitudes in high fit and low fit condition among high team ID groups ($5.376 - 4.279 = 1.096$). It shows how much consumer attitudes means increased or decreased as low fit (coded 0) changes to high fit (coded 1) condition. The slope = $(M_{\text{high fit}} - M_{\text{low fit}}) / (Y_{\text{high fit}} - Y_{\text{low fit}})$.

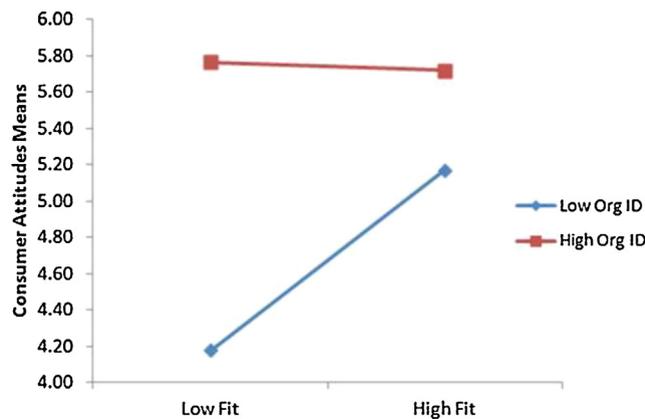


Fig. 5. Moderating effects of organizational identification between fit and attitudes.

5. Discussion

This study aims at examining the impact of sport/cause fit on consumer attitudes toward hypothetical cause-related sport marketing (CRSM) messages within intercollegiate sports contexts, as well as the moderating role of team identification and cause organizational identification between sport/cause fit and attitudes. Results from data analysis supported all hypotheses except **Hypothesis 2**. The major findings include: (a) students showed more positive attitudes when they viewed high-fit CRSM advertisements than low-fit messages (**H1**), (b) when students were highly identified with the related cause organizations, they were more likely to have positive attitudes toward CRSM (**H4**), (c) team identification and cause organizational identification moderated the relationships between sport/cause fit and attitudes toward CRSM (**H3** and **H5**), and (d) positive attitudes toward CRSM led to increased purchase intention of the cause-related product (**H6**).

Consistent with the previous studies (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004), the data confirmed that high-fit CRSM elicited more positive consumer attitudes. Similar to Cornwell and Coote (2005), individuals who identified with the related cause organizations displayed more positive attitudes toward CRSM. Positive relationships between attitudes and purchase intentions also confirmed the results of previous studies (see Cunningham & Kwon, 2003).

Hypothesis 2, which suggested a direct impact of team identification on attitudes, was not supported. This result makes sense considering the fact that team identification was not manipulated in the experiments; rather, subjects varying their team identification level were randomly assigned in high-fit and low-fit groups. We hypothesized that the higher team identification will lead to more positive attitudes toward CRSM regardless of sport-cause fit. However, direct impact of team identification on attitudes was not significant due to the fact that respondents evaluated their attitudes toward CRSM based on sport-cause fit levels (supported in **H1**) rather than on team identification level.

Instead, team identification moderated the relationship between fit and attitudes. The higher were the levels of team identification, the larger was the impact of fit on attitudes (see Fig. 4). This supports the moderating effect of team identification between sport/cause fit and attitudes. This result indicates that congruence between the football and the cause was important to those highly identified with the football team, perhaps as a way to reinforce the image from which they identify. A low-fit cause may actually detract from the football image and lower identification. For example, fans highly identified with a football team might have more concerns about “their” team’s image than those lowly identified with a team, when the team involves in supporting causes that may be controversial (e.g., Planned Parenthood and Human Rights). Association with cause organization that may hurt a team image due to negative publicity or debates could have a higher impact on those highly identified with a team. In Lee and Ferreira’s (2011) experiment, high-fit and low-fit cause organizations affiliated with a sport team had different appeal and familiarity to respondents (the low-fit cause had broader appeals and higher familiarity than the high-fit cause). Moreover, both cause initiatives were not controversial. However, all cause initiatives used in the current study had similar levels of familiarity and appeal among the students and low-fit causes had somewhat controversial nature. This might be reasons why this study showed higher impact of fit among those highly identified with a football team.

In accordance with the previous findings (Barone et al., 2007; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006), cause organizational identification had a direct impact on attitudes toward CRSM. Moreover, cause organizational identification also moderated the relationship between fit and attitudes. The effect of fit on attitudes was larger among those lowly identified with a cause than among those highly identified. This result is in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in that individuals who are highly identified with a cause evaluate sport-related CRSM initiatives more positively as they may consider the cause as in-group relationships regardless of whether the cause itself has a consistent image with football. This implied that the success of a CRSM does not depend not only on fit, but also to the degree to which consumers identify with the cause. Therefore, a cause that is not congruent with a sport/event may still be successful depending on how relevant it may be to the target

audience. For example, if the target audience values health issues, practitioners could benefit more from CRSM programs associated with health issues independent of the sport/cause fit level.

In comparing moderating effects of fan-team identification and fan-cause organizational identification in the relationship between the fit and CRSM attitudes, Figs. 4 and 5 clearly demonstrated differences. Whether a football team supports high-fit causes (Boys and Girls Club or Pop Warner) or low-fit causes (Human Rights Campaign or Planned Parenthood) matters more for those who are highly identified with team compared to those lowly identified with the team. In contrast, the degree of fit matters more for those who are lowly identified with a cause. This result indicates that when people believe they belong to certain social groups (e.g., a sport team or cause organization), they are more likely to pursue goals that may benefit their groups most. Fans highly identified with a team perceive low-fit CRSM might hurt their team's image or integrity by involving in controversial partnerships, so they showed less positive attitudes toward low-fit CRSM. Rather, those who are highly identified with a cause organization only seemed to care more about benefits provided by teams that support their cause. Therefore, they still showed very positive attitudes toward low-fit CRSM. Therefore, it would be significant for sport teams to figure out what social causes are considered high-fit with the team, as well as to find social causes that most of their target markets are concerned about.

In short, this study provides theoretical as well as practical implications. Based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this study examined both moderating effects of team and organizational identification between sport/cause fit and attitudes toward CRSM by using experimental design. Data supported significant moderating impacts of team and organizational identification in line with social identity theory which assumes people tend to have in-group favoritism (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Since people are more likely to value in-group members, sport/cause fit matters more in those highly identified with a sport team (highly identified fans show positive attitudes toward sport-related causes but negative toward partnership that may hurt their favorite team). Also, the effect of fit on attitude is lower in those highly identified with a cause than in those who lowly identified because people identified with a cause would support CRSM initiatives regardless of fit.

Given Leone and Schultz (1980) notion that replication is the key to generalization, this study confirmed the impact of brand/cause fit on consumer responses toward cause-related marketing campaign (e.g., Becker-Olsen et al., 2006) in the intercollegiate sport contexts. Moreover, the positive relationship between attitudes and purchase intentions was also verified in the model. However, this study expanded extant knowledge by supporting the notion that team and cause organizational identification moderate the relationship between fit and attitudes toward CRSM programs.

From a practitioner's standpoint, the results suggest that cause-related marketing programs can be potentially successful in the context of intercollegiate sport licensed products. Carefully designed CRSM programs may engender positive consumer attitudes and in turn increase purchase intentions. Specifically, college athletic programs can be more successful by choosing partner causes that possess a high degree of congruence with sport programs and are highly valued among consumers (e.g., Boys & Girls Club). Based on the results, intercollegiate athletic departments may analyze what social causes their target segments (e.g., student body, alumni, or local residents) consider most important, and launch CRSM initiatives on many of their team-licensed products. For example, if senior alumni group appreciate health-related organizations most, marketing directors might consider making CRSM campaigns supporting American Cancer Society or other health-related causes.

Not only intercollegiate athletics organizations, but other sport organizations could benefit from this study's findings. Many sporting events from youth to professional level face with financial challenges to increase fundraising or revenues. Local and regional amateur sport events may consider adopting cause-related marketing campaign to attract participants' interest and to drive fundraising by associating with high-fit social causes or non-profit organizations. Selling event t-shirts is one of the most popular ways for fundraising, CRSM campaign with social cause organizations that event participants are identified most will lead to positive attitudes and purchase intentions among the event participants. Moreover, professional sport teams are gaining significant amount of loyalty from licensing agreements. If they could identify what causes satisfy highly identified fans and with which initiatives their target fans are more identified, professional sport teams or leagues might generate more revenues by implementing CRSM campaigns on their licensed products (e.g., hats, t-shirts, uniforms, or mug cups).

5.1. Limitations and future research directions

Despite contributions of this study, there are several potential limitations. First, this study focused on CRSM initiatives using sport licensed products (t-shirt) advertisements related to social causes. Although the relationships hypothesized in the model were supported, they were supported under the conditions tested. To generalize the findings of the model, more research is needed, especially by employing other methods in different sport contexts. Second, it is difficult to include or control for all different explanatory factors into only one model. For example, to control for selection bias, four cause organizations (two high-fit and two low-fit organizations) were selected in the study. The replication of the results for two pairs of high-fit and two low-fit organizations was necessary to make results more robust than if results were shown for only one pair. However, many other pairs could have been selected. It is plausible to conceive that if many different organizations are included in the model that an interaction effect of organizations may be identified. For example, is it possible that the effects are more evident among health-related cause organizations than among those that are related to education? Future studies should explore the potential dimensionality of organizations and examine whether the results are independent of organization type.

Lastly, given the nature of experimentation, this study was limited to one setting. Therefore, it was not possible to examine cultural or political differences that can potentially impact the effectiveness of CRSM initiatives. Other studies, including field studies across many settings, would allow the examination of these differences, if they exist. The setting where this study was conducted can be more (or less) conservative, with a more (or less) unique college culture than other universities. The characteristics and the degree of students' loyalty toward the athletic teams might also have been unique to this setting. Hence, replicating this study at other settings would be important to generalize the results.

In conclusion, this study made a meaningful contribution to the extant literature by determining the moderating effects of two identification constructs (team identification and cause organization identification) between sport/cause fit and consumer attitudes toward CRSM. Based on the results, future research should continue to investigate the potential psychological constructs that can impact consumer responses toward CRSM.

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