

## Chapter 7

# The Influence of Sports Fan Ethnocentrism on Major League Baseball Game Viewing Behavior: A Cross-Cultural Study of Korea and Taiwan

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The aim of this chapter is to investigate the influence of Sports Fan Ethnocentrism (SFE) on the viewing behavior toward Major League Baseball (MLB) games in Korea and Taiwan. The survey was conducted by interviewing respondents from Korea and Taiwan who watched MLB in the 2013 season. It was discovered that Korean viewers have stronger SFE than Taiwanese viewers, and male viewers have a higher level of SFE than females in both countries. Moreover, the results of testing the proposed model revealed that SFE has a positive influence on the attitude toward MLB, which in turn has a positive influence on MLB viewing intention. Although a direct relationship between SFE and viewing intention was not found, a full mediation effect of the attitude toward MLB on the relationship between SFE and viewing intention was confirmed. Differences of the model for Korean and Taiwanese fans are observed and discussed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The central concept of ethnocentrism is to understand outgroup attitudes and intergroup relations. Ethnocentrism was first introduced to the sociological literature over 100 years ago where Sumner (1906) defined ethnocentrism as “the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (p. 13). Segall (1979) also asserted that ethnocentrism is the tendency for any people to put their own group in a position of centrality and consider themselves superior to outgroups. Moreover, many scholars have claimed that ethnocentrism functions by helping to secure the survival of groups and their cultures in addition to increasing a group’s solidarity, conformity, cooperation, loyalty, and effectiveness (Catton, 1960; Lynn, 1976; Mihalyi, 1984; Sumner, 1906).

In the past two decades, the notion of ethnocentrism has been widely applied in marketing research. Shimp and Sharma (1987) initially proposed the concept of “consumer ethnocentrism” to investigate how ethnocentrism can influence consumers’ purchasing behaviors and product decisions. Subsequently, the results showed that ethnocentric consumers have a higher propensity to purchase domestic products rather than foreign products. Additionally, ethnocentrism gives the consumers a sense of identity, feelings of belonging, and, most importantly, an understanding of what purchase behavior is acceptable or unacceptable for the intergroup (Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Their studies triggered an increasing concern for the effect of ethnocentrism on consumer attitudes toward domestic products. A review of a series of empirical studies reported consistent results in which variations of ethnocentrism levels influence consumers’ attitudes toward domestic products and their intention to buy them (Han, 1988; Herche, 1992; Hsu & Nien, 2008; Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998; Olsen, Biswas, & Gran-

zin, 1993; Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995; Suh & Kwon, 2002; Tsai, Yoo, & Lee, 2013; Watson & Wright, 2000). This shows that consumers who have stronger ethnocentrism are more likely to favor and purchase domestic products.

However, most of the previous marketing research on ethnocentrism investigated the consumption of tangible products (i.e., domestic and imported goods) of different brands. In the sports industry, some scholars have undertook to apply the concept of consumer ethnocentrism to sports consumer behavior and have asserted that sports consumers may be influenced by their ethnocentrism levels (A. W. Hu & Bedford, 2012; Pyun et al., 2011). In line with the consumer ethnocentrism, A. W. Hu and Bedford (2012) first proposed the term ‘sports fan ethnocentrism (SFE).’ A. W. Hu and Bedford (2012) suggested that ethnocentrism also exists in spectator sports. Because athletes are considered as the core element of sport products (Green, 2001; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2007), the viewing habits of sports fans can be viewed as consumer behavior in regards to sports competitions (James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002). Like the preference of consumers for domestic products, sports fans are more like to watch sport games when athletes from their own country participate. In order to understand the sports fan behavior toward their national athletes, A. W. Hu and Bedford (2012) developed a valid and reliable 7-item scale of SFE. The study subsequently investigated the influence of SFE on the viewing behavior of sports fans toward the Taiwanese pitcher Chien-Ming Wang, who was considered a New York Yankee star and won 19 games in the 2006 and 2007 seasons in American Major League Baseball (MLB). The findings showed that SFE is a common value in spectator sports where local athletes are supported. In addition, Taiwanese MLB viewers generally possess SFE, and SFE has an influence on the viewing behavior of sports fans.

Like Taiwan, there have also been many outstanding Korean players in MLB including Shin-Soo Choo and Hyun-Jin Ryu. As shown in

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