Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Sport Management Review

Self-categorization process in sport: An examination of the "Linsanity" phenomenon in Taiwan

Kuan-Ju Chen [a,*], Joe Phua [b,1]

[a] National Central University, Department of Business Administration, No. 300, Jhongda Rd., Jhongli Dist., Taoyuan City 32001, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
[b] University of Georgia, Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, Department of Advertising & Public Relations, Journalism Building, 120 Hooper Street, Athens, GA 30602-3018, United States

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The "Linsanity" phenomenon attracted an increase in attention toward the National Basketball Association (NBA) for a short period of time. Drawing on self-categorization theory to elucidate current literature on team identification, this research proposed a conceptual model delineating the social psychological process for international consumers during the phenomenon. Using an online survey with a convenience sample in Taiwan, structural equation modeling, including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis, validated the conceptual model and confirmed the relationships between constructs in the model. Results indicated that Taiwanese identification positively influenced player identification, while player identification mediated the relationship between Taiwanese identification and team identification. Consequently, team identification positively influenced NBA involvement. The research findings together contribute to explicating the mechanism behind consumers' self-categorization process during the "Linsanity" phenomenon while offering implications for international sport marketing. The research concludes with suggestions for future research.

1. Introduction

In February 2012, Jeremy Lin led the New York Knicks to a winning streak of seven games in the National Basketball Association (NBA), becoming an international media sensation. Lin, an Asian American of Taiwanese ancestry, was undrafted to the NBA and waived by two teams before joining the New York Knicks (Roth & Martin, 2012). Positioned as a benchwarmer, he was even hours away from being released by the Knicks prior to his unexpected outstanding performance, which turned him into a rising star (Smith, 2012). He scored 136 points in his first five starts, setting an NBA scoring record since the NBA merged with the American Basketball Association in 1976 (ESPN, 2012). At the end of the 2011–12 NBA season, Lin earned a three-year contract worth $25 million with the Houston Rockets (Roth & Martin, 2012). Lin's underdog story not only caught the attention of international media but also impressed sport fans (Park, 2012). Lin's name created buzz for searches and discussions online, particularly during the period when the coinage of "Linsanity" by Time magazine appeared

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 3 422 2891.
  E-mail addresses: kuanjuc@ncu.edu.tw (K.-J. Chen), joephua@uga.edu (J. Phua).
[1] Tel.: +1 706 542 4984.

(Gregory, 2012). The ensuing media frenzy accelerated traffic to the Knicks' official online store and increased sales of Knicks merchandize. The NBA's Asian television partners, particularly in Taiwan, rushed to broadcast every Knicks games in their television lineups. Most importantly, Lin's Facebook page attracted over 3.5 million fans internationally, with a majority (44.5%) of these fans from Taiwan alone (Socialbakers, 2015).

Becoming a sport fan is a process during which individuals internalize a psychological connection to a team (i.e., team identification) based on its value and significance in sport (Funk & James, 2004; Turner, 1985). The process is concerned with learning and accepting a theme, belief, attitude, and norm shared by a group of team supporters (Wann, 2001). Consequentially, sport fans are likely to become consumers of sport through attending or watching games, purchasing team-licensed products, joining fan communities, and consuming sports news because team identification is relevant to emotional attachment, group associations, and acculturation as well as socialization (Wann, 2001). Although previous research has focused on a sport team as the target of identification, Heere and James (2007) contend that there are external social identities (i.e., demographic categories and membership organizations) that influence consumers' team identification and follow-up behaviors. Stodolska and Alexandris (2004) also suggest that a player's culturally-specific identity, as a form of external social identity, can affect the extent to which international consumers identify with teams.

Indeed, there have been many prior instances of international consumers following players from their respective countries, who embody their culturally-specific identity (e.g., Dong Fangzhou from China, Park Ji-Sung from South Korea, and Shinji Kazawa from Japan). After identifying with these players, consumers then build identification with the professional sport teams that recruited the players (e.g., Manchester United in the Premier League). It is important to understand the mechanism underlying such prevalent phenomena, given the rapid globalization of the sports marketplace. However, there has been scant research providing explicit empirical evidence to explain this social psychological process. The "Linsanity" phenomenon has received worldwide attention, due in part to Lin's identity as an Asian American of Taiwanese ancestry attracting numerous international, particular Asian, consumers. As such, an in-depth investigation of how international consumers choose to show identification with players and teams, using the example of Taiwanese consumers in the context of the "Linsanity" phenomenon, can potentially shed light on an important aspect of international sport marketing.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is two-fold. We first aim to establish a conceptual model that illuminates the self-categorization process for international consumers (i.e., Taiwanese consumers) during the phenomenon by integrating external social identities (i.e., Taiwanese identification) and player identification with the widely adopted team identification. Secondly, we seek to examine the extent to which this self-categorization process influences international consumers' involvement in a professional sports league (i.e., NBA involvement). Theoretically, this research enriches sport management literature by explicating the unprecedented "Linsanity" phenomenon with a perspective from consumer psychology. The findings demonstrate the dynamics in the self-categorization process that drive international consumers to relate their social identity to identification with sport objects (i.e., player and team) and, in turn, become engaged fans of a professional sport. Managerially, this research provides suggestions for professional sports leagues, in the face of events similar to the "Linsanity" phenomenon, to leverage the presence of players' external social identities in marketing strategies that are probable to boost the acquisition of prospective international consumers and their involvement in a particular sport.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Self-categorization and team identification in sport

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) argument about social identity suggests that individuals have the tendency to perceive group membership because they can reinforce their self-concepts based on the social groups they belong to. Tajfel (1978) define social identity as the part of "an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). As a logical extension, Turner's (1985) self-categorization theory posits that perceived group membership involves individuals' identification with the most representative prototype of the group and a motive of conforming to such prototypical a social identity, which permits them to become interchangeable exemplars of the group. In other words, self-categorization is concerned with the "operation of a context-sensitive categorization process, in which people see themselves as either sharing category membership with others (i.e., in terms of a shared social identity, 'us'), or not (seeing those others either as 'them' (vs. us) or 'you' (vs. me))" (Haslam, Reicher, & Reynolds, 2012, p. 206).

More specifically, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) propose that individuals can define their self-concepts at varying levels of categorization. They categorize the self as a human being (i.e., human identity) at the superordinate level, as a member of a social group (i.e., social identity) at the intermediate level, and as a unique individual (i.e., personal identity) at the subordinate level. Based on the metacontrast principle, self-categorization drives individuals to identify with the prototype that characterizes the salient attributes, including attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, of the group. By doing so, individuals can distinguish shared in-group similarities from out-group differences (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). This perception makes the group homogeneous and well-structured (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Drawing on self-categorization theory, Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) establish team identification as the primary framework to delineate individuals' self-categorization process in sport contexts. They define team identification as the extent to which individuals establish a sense of belonging to a particular team and view the team as an extension of themselves. Individuals feel attached to the team they identify with and connect to a fan group with which they share a

prototypical social identity (e.g., geographic, ethnic, and vocational identity) represented by the team (Heere & James, 2007). Extant research has examined various factors influencing team identification, such as the need for social relationships (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003), family and friends (Funk & James, 2001), as well as team history and performance (Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). In terms of behavioral outcomes of team identification, individuals show evidence of increased knowledge about the team (Wann & Branscombe, 1995), favorable attitudes toward fellow fans (Funk & James, 2004), frequent involvement in team-related activities (Phua, 2012), and positive socio-psychological well-being (Wann, Dimmock, & Grove, 2003).

2.2. External social identities and team identification

Yet, prior research has critiqued team identification regarding its unidimensional focus on teams and its development with samples predominantly from Western countries (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012). As far as the "Linsanity" phenomenon is concerned, team identification may not fully account for the self-categorization process for international consumers, even though basketball is a team sport. Extending social identity complexity theory, Heere and James (2007) conceive demographic categories and membership organizations as two main types of external social identities that inevitably affect individuals' team identification. Demographic categories refer to social categories individuals were born into (e.g., ethnic identity, gender identity, and social class identity), whereas membership organizations refer to social categories individuals choose to get involved in (e.g., vocational identity, religious identity, and political identity). In line with Heere and James' (2007) demographic categories in social identity, other researchers suggest that international consumers' culturally-specific identity can be an antecedent exerting an influence on their team identification (Adair, Taylor, & Darcy, 2010; Andrews, 2013). Such culturally-specific identity is pertinent to individuals' ancestry beyond biological attributes, covering diverse characteristics with respect to family descent, language, religion, and nationality (Thomas & Dyall, 1999).

In light of this, we define this culturally-specific identity in our Taiwanese sample as "Taiwanese identification," comprising two particular dimensions: ethnicity and nationality, that shaped their self-categorization process during the "Linsanity" phenomenon. The Taiwanese population consists of a majority population of ethnic Han Chinese immigrants from Southeast China, and a minority population of indigenous Taiwanese aboriginals (Huang, Liu, & Chang, 2004; Yu & Kwan, 2008). Over the years, Taiwan's tumultuous history of colonization and political democratization has unified these diverse ethnic groups, creating a burgeoning nationality deeply rooted in today's Taiwanese society (Hall, 2003). The aggregation of Taiwanese identification evokes a consolidated social identity for Taiwanese people and yields a constellation of group (i.e., as Taiwanese) to which they become attached (Chen, 2014). With reference to sport contexts, Taiwanese consumers thus seek to validate and extend their social identity by identifying with players who represent the prototype of Taiwanese identity (Yu & Kwan, 2008). For instance, Chen (2012) found that Taiwanese consumers identified strongly with Chien-Ming Wang, a former Taiwanese player for the New York Yankees in the Major League Baseball (MLB), due to their shared Taiwanese identification. Consequently, they identified with the Yankees, and even regarded them as Taiwan's national team.

Applied to the present study, while Jeremy Lin is Asian American, his grandparents and parents are Taiwanese natives from whom he inherited his Taiwanese ancestry. Lin also possesses the multidimensional Taiwanese identity that Taiwanese consumers commonly share and can identify with. Through this common social identity, Taiwanese consumers may thus build an understanding toward Lin and his team, and self-categorize themselves as part of the in-group showing affiliation with the team. During the "Linsanity" phenomenon, which highlighted the victory of Lin's team within the NBA, they might regard the team as a prototypical example of Taiwanese identity in a professional sport. This initial connection to the team via Taiwanese identification may then trigger the self-categorization process, resulting in increased team identification. We propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Taiwanese consumers' Taiwanese identification will positively influence their team identification.

Additionally, a sport team not only serves as a source of identity for fans, but also symbolizes a broader collection of social identities in terms of owners, coaches, and players, among others (Robinson & Trail, 2005). These social identities would have an additive effect on sport fans' team identification when they resonate with certain individuals, players for example, within the team. Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000) define this mechanism as player identification, referring to individuals' orientation to exhibit attachment to, or close relationship with, a particular player in sport. By means of player identification, individuals regard "the successes and failure of the player as their personal experiences," thus affecting their own attitudinal judgments and behaviors (Wu, Tsai, & Hung, 2012, p. 179). Neale and Funk (2006) demonstrated that when consumers regarded the player as a contributing team member, they tended to develop stable player identification. To provide a clear differentiation, Gladden and Funk (2002) have shown that consumers' identification with star players, rather than identification with teams, influenced their frequency to attend the MLB and NBA games. Other research also illustrates that player identification is a motive for fans to get involved in team-related activities (Funk & James, 2004; Trail & James, 2001).

Considering the distinctiveness of player identification, Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) examined factors determining individuals' origination, continuation, and cessation of team identification, and found that identification with the abilities and traits of the players was one of the major reasons for individuals to form and maintain their team

identification. Also, loss of specific players resulted in the cessation of team identification. Correspondingly, Chen's (2012) observation on the career of Taiwanese player Chien-Ming Wang demonstrated the change in identification for Taiwanese consumers, depending on Wang's relationship with the Yankees. He argues that Wang was conceived as the link connecting Taiwan and the Yankees based on a reterritorialized perception (i.e., Taiwanese identification). Nevertheless, Taiwanese consumers' team identification with the Yankees was terminated when Wang departed from the Yankees, while their player identification with Wang sustained for a long time. The Yankees was once a highly popular team to Taiwanese fans, but turned into the "Evil Empire" after his departure.

Similarly, in the current research, since Lin is a NBA player and a member of an NBA team, his embodiment of the Taiwanese identification in the NBA can be at both the player and team levels (Lock et al., 2012). At the player level, Lin's remarkable performance along with exceptional contributions to the team manifested during the "Linsanity" phenomenon communicated a story of Taiwanese success in a top-tier sport competition. Taiwanese consumers might be prone to form player identification with Lin in order to positively reflect their social identity via his accomplishments. That is to say, Lin's relation to and representation of Taiwanese identification would help constitute Taiwanese consumers' player identification, apart from their team identification. We thus posit the following hypothesis:

H2. Taiwanese consumers' Taiwanese identification will positively influence their player identification.

Prior research has provided evidence examining the simultaneous elicitation of player identification and team identification and explicated the relationship between these two constructs. Wu et al. (2012) investigated the roles of player identification and team identification in re-patronage intention (e.g., spectating games and purchasing team products) in the context of the professional baseball league in Taiwan. Their model specified that team identification exerted a direct influence on re-patronage intention, while the influence of player identification on re-patronage intention was mediated by team identification. Moreover, Hong, McDonald, Yoon, and Fujimoto's (2005) research suggests that sport fans' identification with star players positively affects their choice of favorite team. Their findings illustrate that player identification is an antecedent of team identification. In the same vein, Taiwanese consumers' enjoyment of Lin's contributions to his team's victories during the "Linsanity" phenomenon may also serve to heighten player identification immediately (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002). As a result, Taiwanese consumers' perceptions of vicarious achievement through Lin may precede and predict their team identification. We postulate the hypothesis:

H3. Taiwanese consumers' player identification will positively influence their team identification.

2.3. Team identification and NBA involvement

Previous research has shown that team identification is associated with individuals' involvement in sport activities (Funk et al., 2002; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Fisher and Wakefield (1998) define this involvement as domain involvement, or the "perceived personal relevance of the object based on the need, values, and interests on the individual" (p. 27). They conducted a field study on professional hockey and pointed out that domain involvement was a predictor of team identification for sport fans, especially for those identifying with an unsuccessful team. In contrast, the performance and success of a team was a crucial factor influencing team identification for sport fans who identified with a successful team. Lock, Taylor, and Darcy (2011) found that, in the absence of vicarious achievement, sport fans' existing desire to get involved in a particular sport determined their identification with a new sport team.

However, the popularity of basketball among Taiwanese consumers was on a smaller scale compared to that of the main Taiwan national sport, baseball (Chen, 2012), indicating that they are not necessarily NBA fans. It is thus inadequate to attribute scant NBA involvement to the extraordinary fever surrounding the "Linsanity" phenomenon. One reason is that geographical distance sets up time and space boundaries which decrease Taiwanese consumers' willingness to closely follow the NBA or show support for NBA teams (Wann, 2001). Second, the players in the NBA are skewed toward Caucasians and African Americans, rather than Asians or Pacific Islanders, and as such, it may not be easy for Taiwanese consumers to relate to the players nor identify with the team (Andrews, 2013).

Notwithstanding, specific to the international sport context, Hong, McDonald, Yoon, and Fujimoto (2005) examined motivations for Japanese consumers' interest (i.e., involvement) in the MLB, given the increasing number of Japanese MLB players. They indicated that Japanese consumers tend to identify with teams that Japanese players are on, and show more involvement as spectators of these teams' games. Ratten and Ratten (2011) suggest that Asian consumers increased their involvement with the NBA due to the presence of Chinese players, such as Yao Ming, and advances in television broadcasts and internet streaming. In addition, Stodolska and Alexandris's (2004) in-depth interviews with Korean and Polish immigrants in the United States demonstrated that immigrants' identification with teams that drafted players from their home country heavily influenced their long-term involvement with certain sports.

Building on the basis of this logic, international consumers, such as Taiwanese consumers, are inclined to become involved with an overseas professional sport when there is a legitimate chance to elevate their social identity through a representative prototype within that sport (Turner, 1985). Researchers have argued that team identification increases individuals' sport involvement because of opportunities for them to publicly display their social identity (Funk & James, 2004). Therefore, elicited team identification with Lin's team during the "Linsanity" phenomenon would become the driving force for Taiwanese consumers to be involved with activities related to the professional sports league. To this end, we suggest
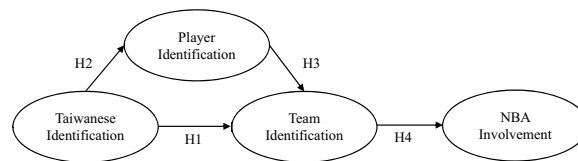
Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model.

that when Taiwanese consumers show team identification toward Lin's NBA team, they are also more likely to exhibit NBA involvement, which gives rise to the hypothesis:

H4. Taiwanese consumers' team identification will positively influence their NBA involvement.

In summary, we propose a conceptual model (Fig. 1) to delineate the self-categorization process underlying the "Linsanity" phenomenon in Taiwan. Taiwanese consumers would self-categorize themselves as an in-group building on the external social identity, Taiwanese identification. The common Taiwanese identification between Lin and Taiwanese consumers could result in team identification (H1). At the same time, Taiwanese identification would influence player identification (H2), which would, in turn, impact team identification (H3). Finally, team identification should positively influence the exhibition of NBA involvement (H4).

3. Method

3.1. Sampling and procedures

We conducted an online survey with a convenience sample from Taiwanese universities. Taiwanese undergraduate and graduate students were the target population for the current research since they are the demographic group most likely to engage in sport-related consumption and discussions. We distributed the survey through the Bulletin Board System (BBS) of National Taiwan University, the most popular BBS among Taiwanese college students. Because students needed to register with their Taiwanese ID card number to log into the BBS, all respondents of the survey were Taiwanese citizens. We conducted this research during the 2012–13 NBA season, and thus, used Jeremy Lin and his team, the Houston Rockets, in the survey.

The survey measured Taiwanese consumers' self-categorization process, including Taiwanese identification, player identification, and team identification, as well as NBA involvement. We translated the survey into Chinese and asked two Chinese-English bilinguals to evaluate the translation, followed by a pretest ($N = 34$) with Taiwanese students, who were fluent in both Chinese and English. We randomly assigned these pretest respondents to complete either the Chinese or English version of the survey. Pretest results showed that there were no differences between the same manifest variables measured in the two versions of the survey. The translations were loyal to the original measures so that it was viable to administer the survey in Chinese.

3.2. Measures

We adopted all measurement items for the constructs from previous research with 7-point Likert scales, anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree unless specified. In order to measure Taiwanese identification, we adopted and modified seven items from Roberts et al.'s (1999) affirmation-belonging scale to fit in the research context. For player identification, we adopted and modified three items from Robinson and Trail's (2005) points of attachment scale along with one item from Wakefield and Bennett's (2010) instrument. For team identification, we used six items from Wann's (2001) sport spectator identification scale. Lastly, we adopted and modified Wann's (2002) sport fandom scale to measure the extent to which participants perform NBA involvement. Table 1 shows a description of the measurement items included in the study and Table 2 shows the correlation matrix of the constructs.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The survey research method collected a total number of 293 responses. After deleting incomplete responses, there were 231 valid responses for further analysis. Among respondents, 58.4% were male and 41.6% were female. The average age was 24.6 ($SD = 5.43$). Of the respondents, 45.9% indicated that they were undergraduate students and 54.1% were graduate students. Among undergraduates, 7.4% were freshmen, 6.1% were sophomores, 9.1% were juniors, and 23.4% were seniors.

Table 1
Measurement items.

	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Composite reliability	AVE
Taiwanese identification				.94	.69
I have a clear sense of my Taiwanese identity and what it means for me.	5.27	1.37	.66***		
I am happy that I am a member of the Taiwanese group which I belong to.	5.58	1.27	.81***		
I have a strong sense of belonging to my own Taiwanese identity.	5.71	1.33	.87***		
I understand pretty well what my Taiwanese identity means to me.	5.48	1.29	.91***		
I have a lot of pride in my Taiwanese identity and its accomplishments.	5.48	1.34	.92***		
I feel a strong attachment toward my own Taiwanese group.	5.45	1.38	.84***		
I feel good about my Taiwanese identity.	5.58	1.26	.79***		
Player identification				.91	.71
Jeremy Lin is my favorite NBA player.	5.85	1.12	.82***		
I identify more with Jeremy Lin than with the Houston Rockets.	5.85	1.35	.91***		
I am a big fan of Jeremy Lin more than I am a fan of the Houston Rockets.	5.48	1.55	.92***		
I consider myself a fan of Jeremy Lin rather than a fan of the Houston Rockets.	5.16	1.63	.73***		
Team identification				.90	.62
How important is it to you that the Houston Rockets win? (Not important/Very important)	4.56	1.66	.78***		
How important is it being a fan of the Houston Rockets to you? (Not important/Very important)	3.41	1.58	.91***		
How strongly do you see yourself as a fan of the Houston Rockets? (Not at all a fan/Very much a fan)	3.48	1.62	.80***		
How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of the Houston Rockets? (Not at all a fan/Very much a fan)	2.97	1.71	.76***		
During the season, how closely do you follow news about the Houston Rockets? (Never/Almost every day)	4.47	1.81	.87***		
How often do you display the Houston Rockets' name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing? (Never/Always)	2.03	1.48	.55***		
NBA involvement				.92	.75
I consider myself to be a NBA fan.	4.91	1.83	.84***		
I believe that following NBA is the most enjoyable form of entertainment.	5.32	1.47	.79***		
My life would be less enjoyable if I were not able to follow NBA.	4.77	1.75	.91***		
Being a NBA fan is very important to me.	4.39	1.80	.93***		

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Correlation matrix of the constructs.

	Mean	SD	Taiwanese identification	Player identification	Team identification	NBA involvement
Taiwanese identification	5.51	1.13	1			
Player identification	5.59	1.25	.30	1		
Team identification	3.49	1.34	.27	.45	1	
NBA involvement	4.25	1.43	.08	.19	.16	1

4.2. Structural modeling for testing hypotheses

To test the overall relationships (H1–H4) hypothesized in the conceptual model, we employed a two-step modeling approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) using the statistical software package SPSS AMOS. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) assessed the measurement model in terms of construct reliability and convergent as well as discriminant validity. Next, a path analysis evaluated the relationships suggested in the hypotheses. The CFA showed that the measurement model achieved an acceptable fit for the data ($\chi^2 = 446.79$, df = 183, χ^2/df = 2.44, RMSEA = .079, SRMR = .066, NFI = .891, CFI = .932, TLI = .922). The constructs had good composite reliability ($>.70$). Factor loadings of the construct indicators are all above .50 and t values were significant, indicating good convergent validity for each of the construct items (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria, the results achieved satisfactory discriminant validity, since the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor was above .50 and greater than the squared correlations between each pair of constructs (Table 1).

As follows, we used factor scores to construct the path model in order to test each hypothesis. The path analysis showed adequate fit of the conceptual model ($\chi^2 = 447.44$, df = 185, χ^2/df = 2.42, RMSEA = .079, SRMR = .067, NFI = .891, CFI = .933, TLI = .924). The results (Fig. 2) showed that respondents' Taiwanese identification did not influence their team identification
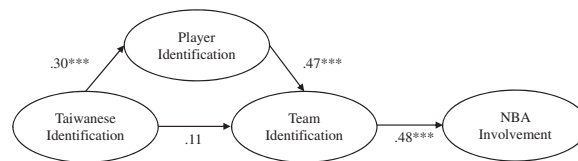
Fig. 2. Path coefficients of the conceptual model. ***$p < .001$.

($\beta = .11$) because the path coefficient was not significant ($p = .08$). We did not find support for H1. For the relationship between Taiwanese identification and player identification, the results showed that respondents' Taiwanese identification positively influenced their player identification ($\beta = .30$). The path coefficient was significant ($p < .001$) and supported H2. For the relationship between player identification and team identification, respondents' player identification exerted a strong effect on their team identification. The path coefficient was positive and significant ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$). The results supported H3. Finally, the influence of participants' team identification on their NBA involvement was strong and positive ($\beta = .48$). The path coefficient was significant ($p < .001$) and supported H4.

With the validated conceptual model, we performed a post hoc test to evaluate the mediation of player identification on the relationship between Taiwanese identification and team identification. A formal test of mediation analysis using a bootstrap procedure ($N = 2000$ samples) showed that the direct effect from Taiwanese identification to team identification was .11, with a bootstrap standard error of .07. Because the 95% confidence interval fell between −.008 and .22, which included zero, the direct effect estimate was not significant ($p = .13$). On the other hand, the indirect effect from Taiwanese identification to team identification through player identification was .14, with a bootstrap standard error of .04. Because the 95% confidence interval fell between .08 and .22, which did not include zero, the indirect effect estimate was significant ($p < .01$). The insignificant direct effect and significant indirect effect indicated that player identification fully mediated the relationship between Taiwanese identification and team identification.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Implications and contributions

Inspired by the "Linsanity" phenomenon, the current research explicated the self-categorization process for international consumers, and attempted to demonstrate how the process influences their domain involvement in sport. We describe the social psychological mechanism underlying the "Linsanity" phenomenon with a Taiwanese sample, in which we empirically tested a conceptual model specifying the relationships between several identity-related constructs. We further explain why they become fans of an overseas professional sport. First, international consumers (e.g., Taiwanese consumers) may become aware of a player (e.g., Jeremy Lin) with whom they share a similar external social identity (e.g., Taiwanese identification), which prompts them to develop identification with the specific player, due to his/her prototypical representation of such an identity. This development of player identification increases international consumers' interest in, and understanding of, the team in which the player is a part of (e.g., the Houston Rockets), which then significantly contributes to team identification. As a result of the process, team identification turns international consumers into fans of the team, and also increases the extent to which they engage with an overseas professional sports league (e.g., the NBA). It is also noteworthy that player identification fully mediates the influence of the external social identity on team identification, indicating a distinguishing feature of the self-categorization process for international consumers.

Theoretically, our findings support current sport management literature which found team identification to be the main driving force behind the self-categorization process (e.g., Funk & James, 2001; Wann, 2001). Furthermore, the validated conceptual model sheds light on the significant roles of culturally-specific identity and player identification within the self-categorization process. We thus provide empirical evidence adding another layer of complexity to the widely adopted team identification framework for international consumers. Through highlighting specific socio-cultural elements of a sport team and its players, it can be easier to induce international consumers' self-categorization as interchangeable members of an in-group. Specifically, as in the case of the "Linsanity" phenomenon that highlighted a particular player's external social identity, including his ethnicity and nationality, international consumers may perceive the player as an exemplar of the in-group prototype. Such perception could arouse international consumers' awareness of and resonance with the player given their tendency to enhance their self-concepts by identifying with this in-group prototype. With the establishment of player identification, international consumers could augment their team identification, giving rise to the team becoming part of the in-group as well.

Being an antecedent of team identification, player identification is not only as vital as team identification but also mediates international consumers' relationship with a sport team. The mediating role of player identification even in team sports is consistent with previous research (e.g., Trail et al., 2000) which posits that consumers form player identification in conditions when they perceive the player as a significant contributor to the team. Our findings also support prior

research (e.g., Robinson & Trail, 2005), which found multiple points of attachment during the identification process. Namely, we argue that international consumers may develop feelings of close attachment to different aspects of a particular player concurrently, ranging from his or her readily observable traits (e.g., physicality and personality) to inherently rooted characteristics (e.g., ancestry), and transfer these positive feelings of attachment to the team. International consumers' player identification could thus mediate the effect of external social identity on their team identification. Overall, our research implies that external social identity and player identification should be an integral part of team identification, in order to precisely explicate the dynamics of the self-categorization process among international consumers.

Also, international consumers' increased involvement in an overseas professional sport following team identification indicates a distinct process through which they internalize themselves as fans of a sport. Previous research (e.g., Lock et al., 2012) points out that consumers usually have a stable social psychological connection to a favorite team if they consider themselves as sport fans, and exhibit high involvement with a particular sport. Nevertheless, our research shows that international consumers would primarily identify with sport objects, including players and teams, so as to generate involvement in a sport and in turn become sport fans. The findings echo a strand of research (e.g., Kunkel, Funk, & Hill, 2013) that illustrates the perceived values of a team, compared to the perceived values of a sports league, as the dominant driver of sport involvement for a segment of consumers. These consumers get involved in a sport due to their interests in team-specific characteristics, such as players and team performance. Considering this, our research implies that involvement in a specific sport resulted from team identification, especially for international consumers who have not formed a priori sport spectatorship, may be a way to secure in-group membership and conform to in-group norms. It hence depicts the motivation behind international consumers' domain involvement in sport.

While our conceptual model draws on the "Linsanity" phenomenon, it may also be applicable to predicting international consumer behavior in similar sport events involving players for both their outstanding achievements and being from a particular demographic category. Marketers of sport organizations should seize the opportunity to expand to international markets and attract prospective international consumers by recruiting players with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Accentuating players' innate characteristics via marketing strategies would intensify international consumers' identification with these players and their respective teams, resulting in increased involvement in the sport. For example, the NBA recently held preseason exhibition games in South Africa and Brazil with teams that have international players from these countries. Other preseason games featured a match between a NBA team and a team from European or Russian basketball leagues. The FIFA World Cup is another case in point, as teams that played in the World Cup consisted of players representing the nationalities of each country. These culturally identifiable players form the teams that play against defined out-groups (i.e., rivalry teams).

Specific to the Taiwanese market, the need for prototypical representation, combined with Lin's common ancestral background and his emergence on the NBA stage, may have promptly attracted Taiwanese consumers to become NBA fans. It thus explains the enduring self-categorization process even when Lin was traded to the Houston Rockets as we conducted this research. With the trend of increasing player diversity in professional sports, along with multiple Taiwanese players appearing in sport competitions around the world (e.g., Pei-Hung Huang of Electrocash Caceres in the Spanish Volleyball League and Dai-Kang Yang of Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters in the Japanese Professional Baseball), sport organizations' marketing communications could take advantage of employing various media platforms, such as mobile applications and social media pages, to tailor the coverage of these Taiwanese players. By doing so, it is probable to cultivate Taiwanese consumers' spectatorship behaviors toward the professional sports leagues for which they are usually unaccustomed. In the long run, the sport organizations are likely to establish enduring relationships with the market niche in Taiwan following the marketing module analogous to the "Linsanity" phenomenon.

5.2. Limitations and future research

Due to the scope of this research, we should take some limitations into consideration when interpreting the current research. This exploratory study was an attempt to explicate the self-categorization process for international consumers behind a sport phenomenon rather than generalize the findings as a universal mechanism for all consumers of sport. Particularly, while our conceptual model supported the effect of team identification on NBA involvement, other literature suggested a contrasting relationship between team identification and domain involvement (e.g., Lock et al., 2011). This suggests that the conceptual model may only be applicable in cases akin to the "Linsanity" phenomenon. We encourage further research to test the boundary conditions of the self-categorization process delineating the model in different phenomenal settings and samples across countries. Future researchers should conduct cross-cultural analyses to examine whether there are nuances in the self-categorization process that differ across international consumers. The implementation of survey research with close-ended questions may ignore some factors, other than ethnicity and nationality, that influence the self-categorization process. Further research using qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could uncover factors unexplained in the current research.

Overall, this exploratory research sheds light on the self-categorization process with respect to the "Linsanity" phenomenon among a specific international consumer (i.e., Taiwanese) population. Our research contributions lie in the explication of the "fan psychology" for international consumers in the sport management literature. Last but not least,

this research provides suggestions and implications for marketers looking to employ effective marketing strategies that can facilitate the outreach of international consumers and improvement of their involvement in overseas professional sports.

References

Adair, D., Taylor, T., & Darcy, S. (2010). Managing ethnocultural and 'racial' diversity in sport: Obstacles and opportunities. *Sport Management Review, 13*, 307–312.

Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structure equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin, 103*, 411–423.

Andrews, D. L. (2013). Reflections on communication and sport: On celebrity and race. *Communication and Sport, 1*, 151–563.

Chen, R. (2014). Reconstructed nationalism in Taiwan: A politicised and economically driven identity. *Nations and Nationalism, 20*, 523–545.

Chen, T. (2012). From the "Taiwan Yankees" to the New York Yankees: The glocal narratives of baseball. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 29*, 546–558.

ESPN (2012, February 15). *Lin-vestigating history*. ESPN Retrieved from http://espn.go.com/blog/truehoop/post/_/id/36972/lin-vestigating-history

Fisher, R. J., & Wakefield, K. (1998). Factors leading to group identification: A field study of winners and losers. *Psychology & Marketing, 15*, 23–40.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research, 18*, 39–50.

Funk, D. C., & James, J. (2001). The psychological continuum model: A conceptual framework for understanding an individual's psychological connection to sport. *Sport Management Review, 4*, 119–150.

Funk, D. C., & James, J. (2004). The fan attitude network (fan) model: Exploring attitude formation and change among sport consumers. *Sport Management Review, 7*, 1–26.

Funk, D. C., Mahony, D., & Ridinger, L. (2002). Characterizing consumer motivation as individual difference factors: Augmenting the sport interest inventory (SII) to explain level of spectator support. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 11*, 33–43.

Gladden, J. M., & Funk, D. C. (2002). Developing an understanding of brand associations in team sport: Empirical evidence from consumers of professional sport. *Journal of Sport Management, 16*, 54–81.

Gregory, S. (2012, February 27). *Linsanity*. Time Magazine Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2107031,00.html

Gwinner, K. P., & Swanson, S. (2003). A model of fan identification: Antecedents and sponsorship outcomes. *Journal of Services Marketing, 17*, 275–292.

Hall, B. (2003). Modernization and the social construction of national identity: The case of Taiwanese identity. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 47*, 135–169.

Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, S. J. (1996). Perceiving persons and groups. *Psychological Review, 103*, 336–355.

Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S. D., & Reynolds, K. J. (2012). Identity, influence, and change: Rediscovering John Turner's vision for social psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 51*, 201–218.

Heere, B., & James, J. D. (2007). Sports teams and their communities: Examining the influence of external group identities on team identity. *Journal of Sport Management, 21*, 319–337.

Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory, 16*, 7–30.

Hong, J., McDonald, M. A., Yoon, C., & Fujimoto, J. (2005). Motivation for Japanese baseball fans' interest in major league baseball. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing, 1*, 141–154.

Huang, L., Liu, J. H., & Chang, M. (2004). 'The double identity' of Taiwanese Chinese: A dilemma of politics and culture rooted in history. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 7*, 149–168.

Kunkel, T., Funk, D., & Hill, B. (2013). Brand architecture, drivers of consumer involvement, and brand loyalty with professional sport leagues and teams. *Journal of Sport Management, 27*, 177–192.

Lock, D., Taylor, T., & Darcy, S. (2011). In the absence of achievement: The formation of new team identification. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 11*, 171–192.

Lock, D., Taylor, T., Funk, D. C., & Darcy, S. (2012). Exploring the development of team identification. *Journal of Sport Management, 26*, 283–294.

Neale, L., & Funk, D. C. (2006). Investigating motivation, attitudinal loyalty and attendance behaviour with fans of Australian football. *International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship, 7*, 307–318.

Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Park, M. (2012, August 24). Asian fans cheer 'Linsanity'. *CNN* Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/24/world/jeremy-lin-hong-kong/

Phua, J. (2012). Use of social networking sites by sport consumers: Implications for the creation and maintenance of social capital. *Journal of Sports Media, 7*(1), 109–132.

Ratten, V., & Ratten, H. (2011). International sport marketing: Practical and future research implications. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 26*, 614–620.

Roberts, R. E., Phinney, J. S., Masse, L. C., Chen, Y. R., Roberts, C. R., & Romero, A. (1999). The structure of ethnic identity of young adolescents from diverse ethnocultural groups. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 19*, 301–322.

Robinson, M. J., & Trail, G. T. (2005). Relationships among spectator gender, motives, points of attachment, and sport preference. *Journal of Sport Management, 19*, 58–80.

Roth, R., & Martin, J. (2012, July 19). Houston Rockets sign Jeremy Lin as New York won't match offer. *CNN*.

Smith, S. (2012, February 12). "Linsanity"… five and counting! *NBA* Retrieved from http://hangtime.blogs.nba.com/2012/02/12/linsanity-five-and-counting/

Socialbakers (2015, November 3). Jeremy Lin Facebook statistics in Taiwan. *Socialbakers* Retrieved from http://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/detail/1456505354584068-jeremy-lin?country=taiwan

Stodolska, M., & Alexandris, K. (2004). The role of recreational sport in the adaptation of first generation immigrants in the United States. *Journal of Leisure Research, 36*, 379–413.

Tajfel, H. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London, UK: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Thomas, D. R., & Dyall, L. (1999). Culture, ethnicity, and sport management: A New Zealand perspective. *Sport Management Review, 2*, 115–132.

Trail, G. T., Anderson, D. F., & Fink, J. S. (2000). A theoretical model of sport spectator consumption behavior. *International Journal of Sport Management, 1*, 154–180.

Trail, G. T., & James, J. (2001). The motivation scale for sport consumption: Assessment of the scale's psychometric properties. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 24*, 108–127.

Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behavior. *Advances in Group Processes: Theory and Research, 2*, 77–121.

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building service brands via social identity: Lessons from the sports marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 9*, 1–13.

Wakefield, K. I., & Bennett, G. (2010). Affective intensity and sponsor identification. *Journal of Advertising, 39*(3), 99–111.

Wann, D. L. (2001). *Sport fans: The psychology and social impact of spectators*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Wann, D. L. (2002). Preliminary validation of a measure for assessing identification as a sport fan: The Sport Fandom Questionnaire. *International Journal of Sport Management, 3*, 103–115.

Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1995). Influence of identification with a sports team on objective knowledge and subjective beliefs. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 26*, 551–567.

Wann, D. L., Dimmock, J. A., & Grove, J. R. (2003). Generalizing the team identification-psychological health model to a different sport and culture: The case of Australian rules football. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 7*, 289–296.

Wann, D. L., Melnick, M. J., Russell, G. W., & Pease, D. G. (2001). *Sport fans: The psychology and social impact of spectators*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Wann, D. L., Tucker, K. B., & Schrader, M. P. (1996). An exploratory examination of the factors influencing the origination, continuation and cessation of identification with sports teams. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 82*, 995–1001.

Wu, S., Tsai, C. D., & Hung, C. (2012). Toward team or player? How trust, vicarious achievement motive, and identification affect fan loyalty. *Journal of Sport Management, 26*, 177–191.

Yu, F. T., & Kwan, D. S. (2008). Social construction of national identity: Taiwanese versus Chinese consciousness. *Social Identities, 14*, 33–52.