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Rivalry and Group Member Behavior among Fans of Sport Teams and Theme Parks

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Abstract

The current study investigated how group members react to favorite and rival brands among sport teams and theme parks. Specifically, fans of sport teams perceptions of favorite and rival brands were compared to that of theme park fans. Results showed that fans of sport teams reported more positivity toward their favorite brands and more negativity toward their rival brands than did fans of theme parks. Additionally, identifying as a fan of *both* a sport team and theme parks influenced more positive attitudes toward the favorite theme park brand. Finally, the current study places the group member behavior of theme park fans in the Hierarchy of Out-Group Derogation (HOD) and Out-group Derogation Spectrum (ODS) using the Group Behavior Composite (GBC, Havard, Grieve, & Peetz, 2021). Implications for research and practice are discussed, along with future research avenues presented. A version of this study was presented at a previous conference, however with inaccurate data analysis. This presentation will focus on analysis using correct data points and the inclusion of the results in the HOD and ODS.

Introduction

As we seek to understand more about human interaction within society, two phenomena present important information. First, social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978) discusses the desire for individuals to define oneself by the groups in which they seek membership. Second, rivalry and group competition (Havard, 2014) address the numerous ways that individuals within groups perceive and react toward their relevant in- and out-groups. Each is important on its own and in combination because they provide researchers and practitioners with more information to assist in future research and practice with individuals and group members.

The current study addressed both identity with the in-group and relationship with the out-group by investigating how fans of sport teams and fans of theme parks perceive and react to their favorite and rival brands. Specifically, the current study compared how fans of sport teams and fans of theme parks identified with their favorite brands, the attitudes they possess of their and rival brands, and the perceptions and likely behaviors they report toward their rival brands. Previous research has found that fans of sport teams report more negativity toward their rival brands than do fans of mobile phones (Havard, Hutchinson, & Ryan, 2021), Disney Theme Parks (Havard, Wann, Grieve, & Collins, 2021a), comics (Havard, Grieve, & Lomenick, 2020), and streaming services (Havard, Ryan,

& Hutchinson, 2021). However, sport fans report more positive perceptions of their rival brands than do fans of the online gaming (Havard, Fuller, & Padhye, 2021) and political settings (Havard, Theiss-Morse, & Longo, 2022).

Finally, the current study extends work on the Hierarchy of Out-group Derogation (HOD) and Out-group Derogation Spectrum (ODS) which compares group member behavior among various fan and consumer settings (Havard, Grieve et al., 2021). By investigating the differences among fans of sport teams and theme parks in the ways they identify with relevant in-groups and perceive relevant out-groups, the current study provides implications to those studying group member behavior and working with individuals and group relations. Further, updating the HOD and ODS allow readers to further understand how various group member settings such as sport and theme park fandom compare in out-group derogation against other consumer brands and group membership relationships.

Background

Individual and Group Identity

Individual and group behavior can offer a lot of important information and implications to our society (Havard, 2014; Tajfel, 1978). For example, human nature calls on individuals to categorize others and themselves in an attempt make sense of surroundings and place in society (Tuner, 1978). Additionally, people typically want to see their selves in a manner that brings them some amount of happiness, and therefore will associate with groups in which they either share or desire to share positive attributes (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Vople, 2004; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). For example, if someone believes they are hardworking, they may choose to associate with a sport team like the Green Bay Packers or Nebraska Cornhuskers because of the teams' reputation as blue-collar organizations (Aden, 2008).

Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1978) discusses the need for people to associate with groups that reflect positively on their self and public worth. Based on SIT, individuals also strive to make their in-groups look positive, and will therefore describe attributes of the in-group positively (Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Further, people will fluctuate in their associations based on perceived success and failure of the relevant in-group (Cialdini et al., 1976; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Again, these actions occur to allow the individual to manage their self- and public image (Madrigal, 1995).

When faced with a competitive out-group, individuals are more sensitive to highlighting the positive attributes of the in-group, often times by pointing out negative attributes of the out-group. For example, college students highlighted positive attributes of their college and discussed how their college compared favorably to a relevant rival university (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Additionally, linguistic intergroup bias (LIB) explains the tendency of people to stereotype positive actions of in-group members and negative actions of out-group members to all members within a group setting (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989). This behavior in particular is illustrative of group members views toward the in-group and out-group, and leads into a discussion of competition

and the rivalry phenomenon.

Rivalry and Out-Group Derogation

Competition occurs when two groups interact (Converse & Reinhard, 2016), and rivalry is the comparison among relevant groups and perceived threat from an out-group (Havard, 2014; Kilduff, Elfenbein, & Staw, 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). In fact, rivalry is so engrained among group members that when faced with the loss of a traditional or long-time competitor (Havard, Wann, & Ryan, 2013), people have to scramble to find another group in which to compare the in-group (Havard & Eddy, 2013; Havard, Wann, Ryan, 2017; Havard, Wann, Ryan, & O'Neal, 2017). Much of what is currently known about rivalry comes from the sport setting, as it allows for groups and individuals to experience competition both directly (i.e., two rival teams interacting) and indirectly (e.g., when a rival plays a team other than the relevant favorite team). Further, rivalry in the sport setting has been used to inform competition and relationships in many fandom and group settings such as business (Havard, 2018a; Kilduff, 2014; Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo, & Reade, 2016), popular culture (Havard, 2018b), entertainment management (Havard, 2020a), theme park fandom (Havard, Wann, Grieve, & Collins, 2021b), and direct-to-consumer streaming (Havard, 2021).

When two groups of supporters or fans interact, they are placed into direct competition with the out-group—although the comparison comes indirectly through favorite team performance (Havard, 2021). When placed in this situation, group members tend to show positivity toward the in-group and negativity toward the out-group (Havard, 2020b). This behavior has been displayed in sports such as soccer (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003; Leach & Spears, 2009), baseball (Cikara, Botvinick, & Fiske, 2012), college and professional sport (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017; Havard & Reams, 2018) among others.

The competitive relationship between two groups often influences the way individuals perceive and behave toward members of the out-group (Havard, 2021). For this reason, people may exhibit excitement not only when their in-group is successful against an out-group, but also when the out-group experiences failure in a situation completely void of the in-group. This is known as Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) (Havard, 2014), and is an extension of *schadenfreude* (Heider, 1958) when close competition and rivalry are present.

Comparative Out-group Derogation

To better understand how group membership influences the ways in which individuals view and behave toward those seen as rivals or competitors, different comparisons were made between consumer settings. In particular, the comparison between fans of sport and fans of Disney Theme Parks revealed that individuals that self-identified as sport fans reported more negative views toward a rival team than did fans of Disney Theme Parks toward the Universal Theme Parks brand (Havard, Wann et al., 2021a). Further, individuals that identified as being a fan of sport and the Disney Theme Parks reported more positive views and behaviors toward both the relative rival sport team and the Universal Theme Parks brand than did individuals that reported being a fan of *only* a sport team or the Disney Theme Parks, suggesting that the common in-group was present among group members (Gaertner,

Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993).

This investigation was followed up by comparisons between fans of sport and fans of Marvel and DC comics (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020), online gaming (Havard, Fuller et al., 2021), Xbox and Playstation gaming consoles (Havard, White, Irwin, & Ryan, 2021), direct-to-consumer streaming services (Havard, Ryan et al., 2021), Apple and Samsung mobile phones brands (Havard, Hutchinson et al., 2021), Star Wars and Star Trek science fiction brands (Havard, Wann, Fuller, & Bouchard, 2021), and politics (Havard et al., 2022). In all but two settings-online gaming and politics- fans of sport reported more negativity toward out-group members than did their study counterparts.

These studies allowed researchers to further investigate the influence of group membership on perceptions and behaviors by comparing an overall measure of out-group behavior (Havard, Grieve et al., 2021). The Group Behavior Composite is a measure that combines the four facets of the Rivalry Perception Scale (Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, & Schaffer, 2013) with the Glory Out of Reflected Failure scale (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017) so that participants are represented by a single score of derogation or negativity toward a relevant out-group. Through the comparison, a hierarchy of out-group derogation (HOD) and out-group derogation spectrum (ODS) were developed to help researchers and practitioners better understand group membership and group member behavior. The current study further contributes to this literature by comparing sport and theme parks fans, and also adds another consumer setting to the HOD and ODS.

The Current Study

The current study adds to this growing body of research by comparing fans of sport with fans of theme parks in general. It is important to better understand how setting influences perceptions and derogation of the out-group because as companies and brands compete for consumer loyalty (e.g., Disney and Comcast, Havard, 2020a; direct-to-consumer streaming services, Havard, 2021), practitioners and researchers have to pay attention to the ways group members view each other and react to promotions of the competition. For example, the language used in promotions of rivalries influence the way people view members of the out-group (Havard, Wann, & Grieve, 2018), and mediated news headlines can impact the ways people evaluate events (Havard & Eddy, 2019) and behave toward both the rival and favorite brands (Havard, Ferucci, & Ryan, 2021).

Drawing on previous literature regarding the rivalry phenomenon, the following three hypotheses informed the current investigation:

H1: Fans of sport will report more negative perceptions toward their rival brands than will fans of theme parks.

H2: Fans of both sport and theme parks will differ in their perceptions of rival brands than will fans of only theme parks.

H3: Fans of both sport and theme parks will differ in their perceptions of rival brands than will fans of sport only.

Method

Instrument and Participants

The online instrument was constructed using the Qualtrics software and distributed using Amazon MTurk. The survey contained five sections, with participants completing either three or all five. The first section required participants to indicate if they were a fan of a sport team, theme parks, or both a sport team and theme parks. Depending on their responses, participants then completed a section in which they self-reported their favorite and rival brands in sport or theme parks.

They also reported their identification and attitude regarding their favorite brand. Identification was measured using the Sport Spectator Identification Scale-Revised (SSIS-R), and a modified version for theme park fans (James, Wann, & Delia, 2019). Brand attitude was measured using a five-item semantic differential scale (Spears & Singh, 2004).

The third section asked participants to report their attitudes, perceptions, and likely behaviors toward their rival brands. Rival perceptions were measured using the four sub scales of the Rivalry Perception Scale (RPS; Havard et al., 2013), which assess likelihood to support a rival in indirect competition, out-group member behavior, out-group prestige, and the satisfaction felt when the in-group defeats the out-group in direct competition. Likely behaviors were assessed using the Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORFing) scale (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017). Someone self-identified as a fan of both a sport team and theme parks, they completed sections three and four, which replicated sections two and three while focusing on either sport or theme park fandom. Finally, the sub scales of the RPS and GORFing measures were combined to form the Group Behavior Composite (GBC) for analysis, which measures the overall level of negativity toward a relevant out-group.

A total of 94 participants returned surveys that were used in data analysis. 53.2% of respondents were male, and age ranged from 21 to 76 years of age ($M = 35.94$, $SD = 11.73$). Regarding fandom, 37.2% reported being a fan of a sport team, 29.8% being a fan of theme parks, and 33.0% reported being a fan of *both* a sport team and theme parks. Among fans of theme parks, the three most identified favorite brands were Disney (36.2%), Six Flags (10.6%), and Universal Studios (3.2%). These three brands were also identified by many participants as the main rival to their favorite brands (Disney - 19.1%, Universal Studios - 13.8%, Six Flags - 6.4%).

Results

Responses for each scale used in the study were averaged so that a single number represented a participant data point used in analysis. Each scale in the current study showed reliability, with alpha ranging from .784 to .942. Descriptives are available in Table 1.

Overall, participants were strongly identified with their favorite sport and theme park brands, and reported positive attitudes for relevant favorite brands. Further, participants were somewhat negative or neutral regarding their rival brands, and somewhat to strongly likely to celebrate indirect failure by the rival brand (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptives and Reliability of Scales Used in Study

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Sport Favorite Team Identification (SSIS-R)	6.58	1.22	.916
Sport Favorite Team Attitude	6.20	0.80	.791
Sport Rival Team Attitude	4.63	1.67	.943
Sport Rival Team Support (OIC)	4.53	1.85	.890
Sport Rival Team Fan Behavior (OB)	4.78	1.67	.891
Sport Rival Team Prestige (OP)	4.41	1.75	.881
Sport Rival Team Sense of Satisfaction (SoS)	5.34	1.28	.789
Sport Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORF)	5.30	1.44	.882
Sport Group Behavior Composite (GBC)	4.70	0.85	.789
Theme Park Favorite Identification (SSIS-R)	5.70	1.53	.857
Theme Park Favorite Attitude	5.88	0.91	.870
Theme Park Rival Attitude	5.46	1.13	.909
Theme Park Rival Support (OIC)	5.27	1.10	.784
Theme Park Rival Fan Behavior (OB)	3.97	1.99	.942
Theme Park Rival Prestige (OP)	4.12	1.83	.870
Theme Park Rival Sense of Satisfaction (SoS)	4.98	1.40	.828
Theme Park Rival Glory Out of Reflected Failure (GORF)	4.36	1.84	.908
Theme Park Group Behavior Composite (GBC)	4.05	1.26	.823

Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 stated that fans of sport would report more negative perceptions of their rival brands and out-group members than would fans of theme parks. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used in analysis, and Wilk's Lambda indicated significant differences were present ($F(14, 54) = 3.79, p = .001, \eta^2 = .359$). Significant differences were present regarding identification ($F(1, 61) = 16.84, p < .001$), favorite brand attitude ($F(1, 61) = 4.41, p = .04$), rival brand attitude ($F(1, 61) = 9.01, p = .004$), out-group behavior ($F(1, 61) = 5.55, p = .022$), likelihood of celebrating rival indirect failure ($F(1, 61) = 6.94, p = .011$), and overall Group Behavior Composite score ($F(1, 61) = 8.27, p = .006$). In all instances, fans of sport reported more positive identification and views of the in-group, and more negativity toward the out-group and rival than did fans of theme parks. Hypothesis 1 was supported (see Table 2).

Table 2. Fan Identification, Attitude, RPS, and GORFing by Sport vs. Theme Park Fandom

Item	Sport		Theme Parks	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Brand Identification	6.60#	1.07	5.24#	1.54
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	6.04*	0.88	5.56*	0.92
Attitude toward Rival Brand	4.41^	1.71	5.51^	0.99
Out-group Indirect Competition	4.52	1.83	5.24	0.84

Item	Sport		Theme Parks	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Out-Group Prestige	4.56	1.69	4.21	1.74
Out-Group Behavior	5.13*	1.32	4.21*	1.78
Sense of Satisfaction	5.32	1.16	5.10	1.22
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	5.26*	1.41	4.17	1.89
Group Behavior Composite	4.78^	0.70	4.10^	0.98

*Significant at .05 level; ^Significant at .01 level; #Significant at .001 level

Hypothesis 2 stated that fans of *both* a sport team and theme parks would differ in their perceptions of rival brands that would fans of *only* theme parks. A significant MANOVA supported this assertion (Wilk’s Lambda .615(8, 50) = 3.91, p .001, $\eta^2 = .385$). Specifically, fans of *both* a sport team and theme parks reported more positive attitudes of the favorite theme park brand than did fans of *only* theme parks (Both - $M = 6.17$, $SD = 0.82$; Only Theme Parks – $M = 5.56$, $SD = 0.92$). Hypothesis 2 was supported (see Table 3).

Table 3. Fan Identification, Attitudes, RPS, and GORFing by Fans of Theme Parks vs. Fans of Theme Parks and Sport

Item	Theme Parks		Theme Parks and Sport	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Brand Identification	5.24	1.54	5.86	1.49
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	5.56^	0/92	6.17^	0.82
Attitude toward Rival Brand	5.51	0.99	5.42	1.26
Out-group Indirect Competition	5.24	0.84	5.30	1.31
Out-Group Prestige	4.21	1.74	4.03	1.93
Out-Group Behavior	4.21	1.78	3.74	2.17
Sense of Satisfaction	5.10	1.22	4.88	1.56
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	4.17	1.89	4.53	1.80
Group Behavior Composite	4.10	1.18	4.01	1.34

*Significant at .05 level; ^Significant at .01 level; #Significant at .001 level

Hypothesis 3 stated that fans of *both* a sport team and theme parks would differ in their perceptions of relevant rival sport team than would fans of *only* a sport team. In this analysis, the MANOVA did not reach significance (Wilk’s Lambda .850(8, 57) = 1.25, p 286, $\eta^2 = .150$), indicating that differences were not present (see Table 4).

Table 4. Fan Identification, Attitudes, RPS, and GORFing by Fans of Sport vs. Fans of Sport and Theme Parks

Item	Sport		Sport and Theme Parks	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Brand Identification	6.60	1.07	6.57	1.39
Attitude toward Favorite Brand	6.04	0.88	6.39	0.66

Attitude toward Rival Brand	4.41	1.71	4.88	1.62
Out-group Indirect Competition	4.52	1.83	4.53	1.89
Out-Group Prestige	4.56	1.69	4.25	1.83
Out-Group Behavior	5.13	1.32	4.38	1.94
Sense of Satisfaction	5.32	1.16	5.37	1.42
Glory Out of Reflected Failure	5.26	1.41	5.34	1.50
Group Behavior Composite	4.78	0.70	4.61	0.99

Discussion

The current study further investigated group member behavior by comparing how fans of sport teams and fans of theme parks perceived and reacted to relevant out-groups. Overall, fans of sport teams reported higher identification and more positive attitudes of their favorite brands (i.e., teams) than did fans of theme parks. Further, fans of sport teams also reported more negativity toward their relevant out-group (i.e., rival teams) than did fans of theme parks. These findings are consistent with previous research that compared rivalry and group member behavior in sport with mobile phones (Havard, Hutchinson et al., 2021), direct-to-consumer streaming services (Havard, Ryan et al., 2021), gaming console brands (Havard, White et al., 2021), Disney Parks (Havard, Wann et al., 2021), science fiction (Havard, Wann et al., 2021), and comics (Havard, Grieve et al., 2020). Sport fans also reported more negativity than fans of theme parks in overall GBC scores, which supports previous findings (Havard, Grieve et al., 2021).

Regarding the common in-group hypothesis (Gaertner et al., 1993), the current studies finding that being a fan of *both* sport and theme parks was correlated with higher identification with an individual's favorite theme park brand was supportive of previous research. It is interesting that the common in-group theory did not influence significant differences in the way sport fans viewed their favorite and rival brands and out-group members. Even given this finding, it is important that researchers and practitioners continue to look for common interests between relevant out-group members.

Implications

The current study continues a growing amount of research comparing how setting influences group member behavior. Research implications include furthering understanding of how social identity theory and group membership inform the ways that individuals view others in their respective in-groups and out-groups. Further, the current study also provides additional information on the rivalry phenomenon and the ways that consumers view various brands and group settings. Through the work of the GBC and the current study, we can also report that the theme park setting ranks as a medium negative setting on the HOD and ODS. This means that the theme parks setting causes more out-group derogation than gaming consoles brands, Disney Parks, science fiction, and comics fandom, and less derogation than direct-to-consumer streaming services, mobile phone brands, sport, politics, and online gaming.

The current study carries implications for practitioners working with individuals and groups that view each other as competitors or rivals. Knowing how theme park preferences and group identity influence out-group derogation is important for practitioners in planning ways to work with such individuals and attempt to decrease out-group derogation, animosity, or negativity. Further, the current study also provides practitioners with another setting that influences lower levels of out-group derogation on the HOD and ODS, which can help when identifying potential ways to decrease animosity between out-group members. For example, looking for common interests regarding theme park fandom may be a better path than trying to find common interests regarding favorite sport team or political affiliation since it influences lower levels of out-group derogation than both settings.

Future Investigation

Just as the current study adds to our understanding of group behavior, future research should also focus on investigating how additional consumer settings influence derogation and negativity. Settings such as beer brands, athletic shoe brands, Greek life in higher education, and religious affiliation will help add to literature regarding rivalry, out-group derogation, and group member behavior. Further, future research should also focus on how such settings influence planned and spontaneous behaviors among group members in addition to perceptions and likely behaviors. Such comparisons can be made using experimental design. Qualitative investigation can also help shed more light on why individuals choose to affiliate with brands and identify others as competitors or rivals. Further, qualitative data adds depth to understanding how the ways brands communicate with consumers influence behavior, and using qualitative investigation would help provide individual information regarding study participants and consumers.

Conclusion

The current study investigated how fans of sport teams and fans of theme parks differed in the ways they viewed their favorite and rival brands and groups, and found that derogation tends to be more pronounced in the sport setting. Further, the common in-group hypothesis seemed to influence theme park fans while not impacting sport fans views on out-groups and out-group members. As we continue to progress in society and attempt to find ways to decrease out-group derogation, the current study provides additional information to help both researchers and practitioners build more understanding, which is something that benefits individuals and society.

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