Acknowledging Versus Ignoring the Identity-Relevance of Rivalry: Why Endorsing Dual Identities Decreases Spectator Aggression and Downplaying Makes Things Worse

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Three studies show that the managerial practice of publicly downplaying rivalries to reduce spectator aggression is counter-productive. We suggest an alternative approach—dual identity statements—that acknowledges rivalry as an important part of sport fans’ identity. Endorsing dual identities reduces aggressiveness via increased levels of superordinate identity and lower reactance.

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Acknowledging versus Ignoring the Identity-Relevance of Rivalry: Why Endorsing Dual Identities Decreases Spectator Aggression and Downplaying Makes Things Worse
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Spectator sports are an emotional intergroup setting in which animosity tends to become overheated and crowds quickly shift from peaceful to violence. Incidents of spectator aggression mainly occur around clashes of rival teams, a problem that is prevalent across different sports and countries. While professional sport teams generally promote rivalries to generate interest and boost attendance, they are afraid to add further fuel to the fire as hostilities tend to escalate quickly between rival spectator groups. Countermeasures include public statements that remind spectators of appropriate and inappropriate behavior at sports venues. A widespread approach is the attempt to play down the importance of rivalry games, with officials stating that the game is “no war” or “only for three points.” Although the attempt to downplay the importance of the game appears intuitively useful, the effects of such statements on spectator aggression are unclear. Drawing on the intergroup conflict literature, this research identifies so-called dual identity statements and argues that such statements are more effective in reducing aggression between rival spectator groups than the managerial practice to downplay. The present research also examines the mechanisms that underlie the effects of dual identity statements and assesses the source of the statement as a potential boundary condition.

A strength of the dual identity approach is that it refers directly to consumers’ identity, which is the basis of the conflict. A public dual identity statement must include two important aspects to decrease the hostility toward the rival spectator group: 1) it acknowledges the rival spectators’ subgroup identities, including their respective distinct features (e.g., team colors, rituals) and 2) it reframes group boundaries by defining and promoting a common superordinate identity, which is accepted and valued by both spectator groups.

The dual identity approach explicitly promotes a superordinate identity that includes the rival spectators. When spectators are encouraged to reconsider previous group boundaries, the context in which social comparisons take place will contain a sense of shared existence and common identity (e.g., similarity in geography, tradition).

Holding both the subgroup identity and the superordinate identity reduces intergroup bias by creating a sense of commonality (Hornsey and Hogg 2000). This should reduce the initial ingroup-favoring bias and makes the opposing group less of a target of aggressiveness:

We also expect the strength of the superordinate identity to mediate the effects of the type of message on spectator aggressiveness.

Three famous rivalries in the German soccer league Bundesliga served as the empirical setting to test our hypotheses in experimental field studies. Study 1 used a pen-and-paper survey among supporters of Dortmund (N = 419; \( M_{\text{Age}} = 27.32 \pm 11.23 \), 66% male), while studies 2 and 3 used online surveys among supporters of Brunswick (N = 949; \( M_{\text{Age}} = 42 \pm 14.03 \), 89.5% male) and Nuremberg (N = 625; \( M_{\text{Age}} = 33.30 \pm 13.06 \), 89% male), respectively. In the dual identity condition, the statement in the press article promoted a superordinate identity by alluding to a shared love of the rival spectator groups for their region and tradition. In the downplay condition, the statement deemphasized the importance of the game.

To capture the dependent variable, we measured both aggressive affect (“When thinking about [rival] supporters, I feel hate / anger / disgust”, Kteily, Hodson and Bruneau 2016) and aggressive behavioral tendencies (“I feel the desire to hurt / inflict pain on fans of [rival]”, Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000) and collapsed these measures into an index of aggressiveness. Reactance was added as a mediator in studies 2 and 3. Team identification and trait aggression serve as controls.

The results show that sport spectator aggressiveness in rival competitions can be reduced by dual identity statements compared to both downplay statements and remaining silent. The superiority of dual identity statements over the no-statement control condition indicates that the use of public statements can help sports teams to reduce spectator aggressiveness surrounding rivalry games. The managerial practice to deemphasize the importance of rivalry games produced even higher levels of spectator aggressiveness than the no-statement condition. This finding suggests that the widespread use of downplay statements is not only ineffective but may even be counterproductive.

We contribute to the literature by unravelling the theoretical mechanisms underlying the effects of the different types of statements. Consistent with our theorizing, the superiority of dual identity statements can be explained by their ability to strengthen a superordinate identity that spectators share with rival spectators. Theoretically, rival spectators move from outgroup to ingroup to some extent and, therefore, become less of a target of aggressiveness.

Studies 2 and 3 confirm that increased levels of psychological reactance are partially responsible for the counter-intuitive finding that downplay statements increase aggressiveness compared to saying nothing. Spectators’ get upset when teams deemphasize the importance of rivalry because the conflict with the rival spectators marks a crucial part of their identity. Disentangling these causal mechanisms adds to our understanding of how team sport consumers respond to public statements from professional sport teams and spells a basis to design effective statements.

Interestingly, the source of the statement (ingroup, outgroup or both groups together) did not have an influence in our studies. Previous research provides a potential explanation for this unexpected finding. Gomez et al. (2008) show that the endorsement of a superordinate identity from the outgroup is acceptable if people know that fellow ingroup members also accept the superordinate connection. Our study participants may have assumed that fellow spectators accepted the superordinate identity and, therefore, the dual identity statement was perceived favorably even when it came from the rival team’s players.

A caveat of our field experimental approach is a higher degree of noise, limited control over the procedures and a higher number of inattentive participants compared to laboratory settings.

REFERENCES


Optionally Green: The Role of Green Attribute Optionality in Influencing Performance Evaluations

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As firms seek to develop green products, they may find that consumers are unwilling to alter their consumption behavior due to a perceived performance reduction. However, past literature has often viewed green products homogeneously, whereby a product is either green or non-green. In contrast, we state that a product can feature a green attribute, but that it is not required for the base product to function (termed green attribute optionality), potentially overcoming the negative green product performance stigma.

Building on the innovation locus literature that recognizes the distinction between core and peripheral innovations (e.g., Gatignon, et al. 2002), we extend the concept of peripheral to include optionality. When optional the attribute may enhance a product’s green benefits, but is not required for it to function. Thus, we posit that performance risk is not transferred from the attribute to the base product, enhancing performance evaluations.

In addition, we state that optionality includes two default policies. Based on choice architecture and default literature, a product may possess a green attribute that is default, but may be deactivated (opt-out). Alternatively, the green attribute may be deactivated, allowing the user to activate it when needed (opt-in). As defaults act as a carrier of meaning (Brown and Krishna, 2004), we posit that when the green attribute is the default option (opt-out), performance evaluations will be reduced.

Additionally, we explore the moderating role of cognitive style and the mediating variable of green product typicality. In the former, we posit that holistic thinkers will view product attributes as interconnected, focusing on the degree to which differing attributes are connected and form an entity. In contrast, analytical thinkers may be able to detach the attribute from the product, viewing each attribute as separate (Nisbett, et al., 2001). Based on this, we posit that the impact of green attribute optionality on performance evaluations will be negated when an analytical mindset is activated. In the latter, we predict that an opt-out strategy, whereby the green attribute is default, will lead to an increase in the extent to which the product is viewed as typical of similar green products, thus degrading performance evaluations.

Three experiments were conducted to examine the effect of green attribute optionality on performance evaluations. In Study 1a, we explore both the optional and non-optional conditions. In Study 1b, we introduce the default policies, investigating opt-in, opt-out and non-optimal strategies. In Study 2, we examine the moderating variable of cognitive style. Finally, in Study 3, we present the mediating mechanism of green product typicality.

In Study 1a, we performed a one-factor (green attribute optionality: non-optional vs. optional) between subjects’ experiment with 75 respondents. Green attribute optionality was manipulated by presenting respondents with an advertisement for a washing machine along with a heading that outlined the product’s eco-friendly mode. Located at the bottom of the advertisement, a statement indicated that the eco-mode was user-activated. In the non-optional condition, no statement was presented. Finally, we measured performance evaluations. An ANOVA revealed that when the environmental attribute was optional respondents rated the product as higher in performance ability than if it was non-optional (F (1, 73) = 5.796, p < .05).

Study 1b introduced choice architecture and the two default optionality policies. One hundred and twenty-five respondents were recruited to test a one-factor (green attribute optionality: non-optional vs. opt-in policy vs. opt-out policy) between-subjects experiment. All respondents were given a press release for a washing machine, like Study 1a. In the opt-in condition, participants read that the user “can activate the EcoX technology” compared to the opt-out condition that read that users “can deactivate the EcoX technology”. There was no optionality information in the non-optional condition. Next, we measured performance evaluations, green evaluations and environmental consciousness. An ANCOVA, including environmental consciousness as a control variable, revealed a significant main effect (F (1, 121) = 4.364, p < .05), whereby opt-in was significantly higher than both the opt-out and the non-optional. Moreover, there was no significant difference between the non-optional and the opt-out conditions. Finally, no significant effect was found on green evaluations (p = .128).

Study 2 introduces the moderating variable of cognitive style. We recruited 245 respondents to examine a 3 x 2 between-subjects experiment. The manipulations for optionality were the same as in Study 1b, while cognitive style was manipulated by asking respondents to write about a meaningful event that took place in their lives alone (analytical) or with friends and/or family (holistic). A significant main effect was found (F (1, 238) = 9.887, p < .05), whereby opt-in enhanced performance evaluations. In addition, a significant interaction was found (F = (1, 238) 4.363, p < .05), where the analytical condition negated the effect of choice architecture. Finally, there was no main effect for green evaluations (p = .764).

Finally, in Study 3, we test a 2 x 2 between subjects’ experiment with 149 respondents to examine the mediating variable of green product typicality, which was measured along with performance and green evaluations and environmental consciousness. In this study, the non-optional condition was removed. Cognitive style was manipulated as in Study 2, while optionality was manipulated via an advertisement for a kettle, in which the green was described similarly to Study 2. A two-way ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction between green attribute optionality policy and cognitive style (F (1, 144) = 4.690, p = <.05). Furthermore, a significant direct effect was found (F (1, 144) = 5.014, p < .05). Finally using Process Model 7 (Preacher and Hayes, 2008), we found a significant moderated mediation with a 95% confidence interval excluding zero (CI = -.3895 to -.0029).

Taken together, we show that optionality enhances performance evaluations. Specifically, the optionality policy of opt-in. In addition, this perceived performance enhancement does not come at the expense of perceived greenness. Additionally, we find support for the moderating variable of cognitive style and the mediating role of green product typicality. Our results provide both theoretical implications, as well as practical contributions for green product development.