
Youngho Park, University of Michigan
Dae Hee Kwak, University of Michigan

Marketing - Consumer Behavior (Professional Sport) 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Session: Consumer Behavior 3

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In the wake of Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the U.S., Nielsen has conducted a study exploring the perceptions among U.S sports fans towards social/racial inequity (Nielsen, 2020). The report showed that over 70% of sports fans indicated they support the BLM movement, and 77% believed brands are more powerful when they partner with sport organizations to drive social change. More importantly, the study found that sports fans are more supportive of racial justice than the general population (62%). While the numbers are overwhelmingly supportive of the BLM movement, the current study sought to investigate whether there are potential sources of response bias that might inflate the responses. More specifically, the present study aims to examine the empirical evidence of the presence of social desirability bias (SDB) among sports fans by replicating the Nielsen’s survey regarding the BLM movement.

SDB refers to the tendency of individuals exaggerating positive qualities of themselves by overrating desirable behaviors (Kuokkanen, 2017). Consequently, SDB compromises the quality of measurement tools in capturing the psychometric properties of the constructs. Survey respondents are particularly vulnerable to the sensitive topics in situations that socially desirable answers seem to exist. In this regard, we consider the BLM movement a very sensitive topic and presents a case where respondents might find it difficult to disagree with athletes and teams promoting BLM movements in and out of the field. In line with the literature, our study adopted procedural and statistical methods (Miller & Thomas, 2005) to explore the empirical evidence of SDB in responding to the BLM movement among sports fans.

Self-identified sports fans (N=335) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. We used BLM (Player and Team) and Social Justice as dependent variables (DVs) and used both direct and indirect questioning (Fisher, 1991). We also measured Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR) which consists of Impression Management (IM) and Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE) as subscales of SDB to see if they correlate with DVs, which shows additional evidence of SDB. Examinations of scores on DVs pertaining to BLM showed that respondents are supportive of sport activism. However, we found that the respondents overreported their scores when being asked directly, showing SDB. Additionally, we conducted a permutation test to compare the correlations among the DVs between direct and indirect questioning, and the test result was statistically significant (tobs = .55, p = .04) indicating that the questioning yields a systematic variance in responding. Lastly, we examined the correlations between BIDR and the DVs in direct questioning and found the significant correlations between the DVs and SDE as a form of socially desirable responding.

The results showed empirical evidence that the respondents tended to overreport their responses supporting BLM-related items. This finding contributes to the literature when situations involve a sensitive topic, people are prone to respond to the questionnaires in a more socially desirable way. Given the popular use of self-report surveys in sport marketing research, our findings shed new methodological insight on identifying potential sources of response bias and implementing measures to avoid them.