

Understanding Spectators of Minor League Baseball: Group differences on External and Internal Factors in Minor League Baseball

Seungeun Lee, York College of Pennsylvania

Timothy J. Newman, York College of Pennsylvania

Hyejin Bang, Florida International University

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Understanding fan behavior has been an important task for sport marketers. Especially, motivation and fan identification have been critical predictors for consumer behaviors such as game attendance (James & Ross, 2006), media and merchandise consumption (Lee & Armstrong, 2008; Zhang, Won, & Pastore, 2005). Related to motivation, many studies have investigated various motives in different sport contexts: James and Ross (2002) compared motives of sports consumers in major and minor league baseball. Some researchers studied fan motivation in different types of sports (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Wann et al., 2008) and other researchers (James & Ridinger, 2002; Robinson et al., 2005) looked into motives of different individuals (e.g., male vs. female, fan vs. spectator). Motivation has also been studied in the minor league context. Some other studied topics in the minor leagues include characteristics and profiles of spectators, influencing factors (e.g., broadcasting, winning record, and marketing size) for attendance. Zhang, Pease, Smith, Lee, Lam, and Jambor (1997) studied five influencing factors (i.e., game attributes, home team, opposing team, economic consideration, game convenience) on spectator attendance. However, there have been no studies investigating spectator motivation along with other external influencing factors (e.g., weather). Including both internal (i.e., motives) and external factors would help better understand spectator behavior.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to see influence of external and internal factors on different groups of spectators based on their demographic (gender and marital status) and psychographic profiles (team and sport identification). A double A minor league baseball team located in central Pennsylvania was used to collect data. An online survey was sent out via email to total of 1340 fans who either have season tickets or have purchased tickets online and 371 subjects (27.6%) completed the survey. The majority of respondents were Caucasian (96%), male (69%) with the mean age of 45.6. In the instrument, team identification and sport identification (i.e., baseball) were measured using two of the seven dimensions of the Point of Attachment Index by Trail et al. (2003). The next section asked the extent to which 11 external factors of three dimensions influence their game attendance. The three dimensions are game-related (i.e., winning record, star player, and game quality), peripheral (i.e., concession, promotion, ticket price, and stadium quality) and convenience factors (i.e., game day, game time, stadium proximity, and weather). For motivation, 7 out of 9 dimensions (i.e., achievement, escape, aesthetic, social, family, drama, and skill) of Trail and James' Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) were used and "environment" dimension was added. Cronbach's alpha for each dimension ranged from .71 to .92.

Using K-cluster classification, respondents were grouped into three clusters (i.e., serious, sport, and casual fan) using scores of team and sport identification (TID and SID, respectively), which later named spectator identification. Individuals in the 'casual fan' cluster had low scores both with the team and sports (TID = 4.03, SID = 3.33), respondents in the 'sport fan' cluster had high sport identification with low team identification (TID = 3.33, SID = 6.36), and respondents in the 'serious fan' cluster had both high team and sport identification (TID = 5.84, SID = 6.34). The data was analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with independent variables of spectator identification (casual n = 81; sport n = 118; serious n = 164), gender (male n = 249; female n = 114) and marital status (single n = 107; married n = 256) and dependent variables of eight motivational dimensions and three influencing external factor dimensions on attendance. The results showed that there are main effects for spectator identification ($F(2, 341) = 5.86, p < .000$), marital status ($F(1, 341) = 4.31, p < .001$), and gender ($F(1, 341) = 3.87, p < .001$). There was also an interaction effect found between spectator identification and gender ($F(2, 684) = 1.65, p = .031$).

Different levels of spectator identification showed differences in game-related (Casual M = 3.73, Sport M = 4.03, Serious M = 4.50) and peripheral dimensions (M = 5.08, 5.17, 5.59, respectively) but not in convenience dimension (M = 5.49, 5.37, 5.35, respectively). Spectator identification also has influences on dimensions of achievement (M = 4.38, 3.98, 5.23 respectively), social (M = 4.82, 4.61, 5.33 respectively), skill (M = 5.62, 6.0, 6.32 respectively), aesthetic (M = 4.67, 5.33, 5.78 respectively), escape (M = 5.50, 5.49, 6.05 respectively), and environment (M = 5.71, 5.99, 6.33 respectively). Marital status has an influence on peripheral factors (single M = 5.1, married M = 5.46) and convenience factors (single M = 5.23, married M = 5.58). In terms of motives, differences were found in drama (single M = 5.42, married M = 5.81), family (single M = 5.18, married M = 5.93), escape (single M = 5.51, married M = 5.85), and environment (single M = 5.90, married M = 6.12). Gender has a main effect on game-related factors (male M = 4.27, female M = 3.90), skill (male M = 6.16, female M = 5.80) and aesthetics (male M = 5.55, female M = 4.97). Lastly, interaction was found between spectator ID and gender on drama where males in "sport

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group” showed higher score ($M = 6.02$ compared to 5.54 and 5.39) and females in “sport group” showed lower score ($M = 5.45$ compared to 5.67 and 5.64). The results of this study have provided evidence that the significant effects of psychological attachment and demographic variables on both internal (motivation) and external factors in the context of the minor league baseball. Thus, sport marketers should use both psychographic and demographic variables as market segmentation criteria. In the context of the minor league baseball, the current study suggested three distinctive groups.

Since the study found the significant group differences in both internal and external factors affecting spectatorship, sport marketers should develop specified marketing plans accordingly. However, more importantly, marketers need to understand the positioning of minor league baseball in spectators. As indicated by grand mean scores of external factors (game-related $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.25$; peripheral $M = 5.40$, $SD = 0.94$; convenience $M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.02$), no matter the level of identification, fans want to have a generally good time, which is only partially driven by game-related factors. As Ross and James (2006) found differences in spectator motivation in major and minor baseball, it is assumed that spectators’ expectation about the level of game (game-related factor) is not that high for minor league sports. This means peripheral factors and convenience factors are more important in the minor league context. Among the eight motivational dimensions, respondents rated ‘environment’ as the most important motivational factor. This might provide general ideas for owners of minor baseball league where to spend their limited budget to attract more people to their stadium and make them satisfied. This study is meaningful in terms that it combined both internal and external factors and profiled fans using two attachment points (i.e., sport and team identification) considering the unique profiles of minor league spectators.