Antecedents and Consequences of Trust in Spectator Sports

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The sports business industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States. Specifically, sport spectating behavior is one of the most prevalent recreation cultures in North America. During the 2006-2007 seasons, approximately 150 million spectators attended the four major professional sport leagues’ games. Due to a recent economic downturn, however, sport organizations faced serious challenges including spiraling costs, increased competition in a saturated market environment, economic disconnect of middle class spectators, and the emergence of new technology (Howard & Crompton, 2005).

In the realm of (sport) marketing literature, therefore, scholars call for systematic consumer research on spectator behavior. To date, a significant number of studies have been conducted on such topics as fan identification (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000), commitment (Kwon & Trail, 2003; Mahony, Madrigal & Howard, 2000), service quality (Kelly & Turley, 2002; Ko & Pastore, 2004; Leeuwen, Quick, & Daniel, 2002), and perceived value (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007; Murray & Howat, 2002).

However, consumers’ trust received little attention by sport marketers and scholars. In the field of marketing and business industry segment, trust is one of the most important factors to establishing successful relationship between customers and organizations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Berry, 1995). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) defined trust as “the perception of confidence in the exchange partner’s reliability and integrity.” Anderson and Weitz (1989) defined trust as “one party’s belief that its needs will be fulfilled by actions undertaken by the other party” (p. 312). Morgan and Hunt (1994) indicated that trust could reduce opportunistic behavior, Berry (1995) identified that trust reduce customers’ mistrust and provide more opportunities to build a relationship with organization and Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner (1998) suggested that trust provide more psychological advantage.

In this study, the authors developed a conceptual framework that focused on the antecedents and consequences of trust. The antecedents of trust are perceived event quality, perceived value of the event, and prestige of the team. Consumer’s perceived prestige is defined as one’s cognitive connection with his/her organization derived from the images that an individual believes outsiders use to form opinions about said organization (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). The focal interest of the model as it pertains to the antecedents of trust is the effect that perceived event quality, perceived value of the event and prestige of the team has on spectator trust towards a team. Of secondary interest is whether one’s perceived event quality is mediated by the perceived value of the event and/or team prestige on its way to influencing spectator trust towards the team and/or if perceived event quality directly influences spectator trust towards the team.

The consequences of trust are satisfaction, commitment, and consumption behavior. The focal interest of the model with respect to the consequences of trust is the effect that trust has on satisfaction, commitment and consumption behavior. Of secondary interest is whether trust directly influences consumption behavior and/or if its influence is mediated by satisfaction and commitment.

We also hypothesize that perceived event quality directly influences satisfaction and indirectly influences satisfaction through perceived value of the event and/or trust. Additionally, perceived event quality directly influences commitment and indirectly influences commitment through perceived prestige of the team and/or trust. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the antecedent variables of trust both directly and indirectly influence the consequences of trust.

Our intent in creating this model was to improve our understanding of spectator behavior by focusing on trust, which has been understudied in sport marketing literature. Our proposed model, when empirically tested, will add value to the body of literature as a whole, by strengthening the understanding of trust as it pertains to consumer
behavior and more specifically, in the specialized sport context. Furthermore, this model will have practical importance in aiding organizations and marketers in understanding their client base, while at the same time providing new ways to cater to their ever-growing needs and wants.

In our presentation, we will discuss the value of the proposed model as well as the scientific and practical implications created by it.