A Cross-Cultural Approach for Understanding Motivation Differences Between American and Korean Sport Fans

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Because motivations of consumers might differ across cultural contexts, studies have suggested that sport marketers should understand dynamics of culture when they attempt to develop their marketing and promotional strategies (Armstrong, 2002; Pons et al., 2001). Although some attempts have been made to examine segmenting sport fans based on culture (Kwon & Trail, 2002), more work is still needed. Studying motivations among individualist and collectivist consumers is one way to expand work in this area. Results of this study may contribute to the diversification of marketing strategies in global sport settings and expand the knowledge base for culturally varied sport consumers. This study could also assist American sport marketers to understand how to effectively approach American and Asian sport fans despite their cultural differences.

The previous studies have put emphasis on cross-cultural approaches based on the premise that culture shapes the general perceptions of people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Common findings of the existing research indicated support for particular differences among people with different cultural backgrounds (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 2001). In regards to sport spectator motivation, the findings of studies imply that sport fans may also have different spectating motivations according to their cultures (Armstrong, 2001). The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between sport fan motivations and cultural value orientations (i.e., individualism and collectivism). In order to accomplish this purpose, this study first examined whether motivation differences existed across individualist and collectivist sport consumers regardless of gender and nationality. The study then assessed whether there are differences in the cultural value orientations of sport fans in two different cultural contexts (i.e., the United States and South Korea). The current study also examined whether spectator motivations of sport fans differ across their nationalities.

Two instruments were used for this study. The first was the individualism-collectivism scale, called the INDCOL (Triandis, 1995), and the second was a sport spectator motivation scale. Since the original INDCOL met the purpose of the present study, the full version of it was employed without any revisions. In regards to the sport spectator motivation scale, it was a new scale developed using factors and items in three existing measurement scales: the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann, 1995), the J. League spectator motivation scale (Mahony et al., 2002), and the Sport Interest Inventory (Funk et al., 2002). All motives were selected because they have been regarded as influential drivers of sport spectating for both American and Korean consumers. The motives were then classified as individualistic and collectivistic motives in order to examine the relationships between individualism/collectivism and motivation. The individualistic motives were those that bring pleasure to the individual, but did not necessarily involve or need any connection to others. The collectivist motives, on the other hand, were those that involve some connection to others as a key part of the pleasure for the fan. The internal consistency measures (Cronbach’s alphas) of individualistic motives were as follows: aesthetics (α = .86), entertainment (α = .67), escape (α = .94), self-esteem (α = .64), eustress (α = .75); the measures for collectivistic motives were community pride (α = .93), family bonding (α = .88), group affiliation (α = .63), player attachment (α = .76), team attachment (α = .89). The alpha coefficients for 16-item individualism and 16-item collectivism subscales from the INDCOL were .75 and .72, respectively.

This study sampled two cultural groups: Americans and South Koreans. The reason for using samples of Americans living in the United States and South Koreans living in South Korea was because the two groups have culturally and geographically different contexts (Park, 1993). Americans have traditionally been classified as individualists (Hui, 1984), while Koreans have been known to have highly collectivistic cultural traits (Ha, 1999). These factors are related to the key purpose of this study that examines cultural impacts on sport fan motivation. The data from the United States and South Korea were collected from a Midwestern university (a student body of 21,000) in the United States and from a Korean university (a student body of 35,000) in Seoul, South Korea. 341 American and 310 Korean college students completed survey questionnaires. The present study focused on fans in a team sports setting.
Accordingly, all participants were asked to think of only one favorite sports team when responding to sports-related questions.

Three separate multivariate analyses of variance (MANCOVAs) were conducted to answer the three research questions. The first MANCOVA was utilized to examine the adjusted mean differences between individualist and collectivist sport fans while controlling for gender and nationality (research question 1). Another MANCOVA was conducted to investigate the adjusted mean differences in individualism-collectivism scores across nationalities (research question 2). The third MANCOVA was used to test the adjusted mean differences in sport fan motivations across nationalities (research questions 3). The outcomes regarding motivation by individualism-collectivism groups (1st research question) show that collectivists tended to emphasize collectivistic motivations including community pride, family bonding, and group affiliation when compared to their individualist counterparts. However, individualists and collectivists did not respond differently to their perceptions of individualistic motivations.

Based on such a perspective, marketers can develop marketing plans by understanding the dominant underlying value orientation of their target market for major global sporting events. If their chosen market is predominantly collectivistic, marketers may want to emphasize these collectivistic factors. Providing potential sport consumers with several social gathering opportunities (e.g., family fun night activities) sponsored by the team could be a good approach in order to build stronger bonds with these socially motivated people. In regards to cultural value orientation by nationality (2nd research question), American sport fans were more individualistic than Korean sport fans. However, Koreans were not more collectivistic than Americans. The findings related to sport spectator motivation by nationality (3rd research question) indicated American sport fans preferred all proposed individualistic motivations (aesthetics, entertainment, escape, self-esteem, and eustress), as well as most proposed collectivist motivations (community pride, family bonding, team attachment, and group affiliation) when compared to their South Korean counterparts.

Based on these results, sport marketers need to focus on fulfilling the individualistic desires for American consumers. For example, they could design their advertisements to highlight entertainment by putting more emphasis on dramatic moments performed by highly skilled players in close game situations (e.g., a dramatic buzzer beater in basketball) (Al-Thibiti, 2004). However, it appears that marketers should not overlook collectivistic factors as motives for American consumers when attempting to maintain them as part of the fan base. Therefore, marketers may also develop family/group-oriented leisure activities surrounding sporting events to appeal to these fans. On the other hand, this study revealed the overall fan motivations of South Koreans were weaker than their American counterparts. This result could be related to insufficient media coverage for sports in South Korea (Cho & Park, 2001). Therefore, each sport organization may consider special plans in order to build constructive relations with the media and gain “positive media exposure for a sport product” (Blann, 1998, p. 180).