A Model of Consumption Behavior for Sport Tourists

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The prevalence of the impact of sport in North America is well documented in the literature (Broughton, 2002; Meek, 1997). In regard to sporting events, international mega events and even prominent regional ones have drawn enormous attention and are viewed by millions of sport enthusiasts. Super Bowl XXXVII, for instance, attracted over 348,000 fans to San Diego County for the game and related activities, with a reported impact of $367 million to the economy of San Diego County ("Spectator sports", 2006). It has become common marketing practice for travel agents to create featured packages for fans who want to attend such events and for travel companies to offer customized plans for individuals who want to take active vacations (Pitts, 1999). Due to the strong demand and economic magnitude of the sport industry, research on sport tourists’ spectating and other consumption behavior has been of great interest to sport researchers and marketers. Yet, despite the prominent role of sports travel in the global consumption culture, relatively few studies have focused on the factors that influence sport tourists’ travel decisions and their subsequent impact on sport tourists’ consumption behavior. This absence of emphasis on sport tourist behavior has resulted in few theoretical frameworks from which to derive sport tourism marketing practice. Thus, the purpose of this study was to develop and test a preliminary yet comprehensive model of sport tourists’ consumption behavior. Based on an extensive review of literature, a set of five social, psychological, and individual variables, including fan identity salience, psychological attachment, sport tourists’ motivation, sport involvement, and socio-economic status, were considered to explain sport tourists’ consumption behavior. Specifically, the following hypothesized relationships were incorporated in the proposed research model: (H1) psychological attachment was positively related to sport tourists’ motivation (Covell, 2004; Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001; Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; Robinson & Trail, 2005); (H2) psychological attachment was positively related to fan identity salience (Laverie & Arnett, 2000); (H3) sport involvement was positively related to sport tourists’ motivation (Lascu, Giese, Toolan, Guehring, & Mercer, 1995; Park, 2001); (H4) sport involvement was positively related to fan identity salience (Buchanan, 1985; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; McIntyre, 1989); (H5) sport tourists’ motivation was positively related to fan identity salience (Laverie, 1998); (H6) fan identity salience was positively related to sport tourists’ consumption behavior (Laverie, 1998; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Shamir, 1992); (H7) socio-economic status was positively related to sport tourists’ consumption behavior (Attle, 1996; Gibson & Yiannakis, 1994; Yiannakis, 1992).

The sample for this study consisted of 499 adult sport tourists in Colorado. Based on the sample data, the predominant type of adult sport tourist was male (54%), Caucasian (82.2%), married (57.8%), between 25 and 34 (26%), had annual household incomes between $50,000 and $74,999 (20.7%), held a two-year degree (40.4%), and worked full-time (64.6%). The survey was comprised of six major parts with a total of 63 items, including sport tourists’ consumption behavior (5 items), fan identity salience (4 items), psychological attachment (12 items), sport tourists’ motivation (24 items), sport involvement (9 items), and demographics (8 items). Cluster sampling and an Internet survey protocol were utilized to select and recruit the participants. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) LISREL 8.52 was utilized to analyze the data.

With the use of maximum likelihood estimation, the hypothesized model of sport tourists’ consumption behavior was tested. In the SEM analysis, the chi-squared goodness-of-fit test statistic was significant and the ratio of the chi-squared test statistic to its degrees of freedom was less than 2, indicating that the model fit the data well, \(\chi^2(179, N = 480) = 273.87, p < .01\). Fit indices also indicated that the hypothesized sport tourists’ consumption behavior model fit the data reasonably well (RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .96, CFI = .96, SRMR = .06). No post hoc model modification was performed to develop a better fitting, more parsimonious model. Of note is that psychological attachment and sport involvement accounted for 25% of the variance in sport tourists’ motivation; psychological attachment, sport involvement, and sport tourists’ motivation accounted for 61% of the variance in fan identity salience; overall, the model accounted for 40% of the variance in sport tourists’ consumption behavior. Except for the path from sport tourists’ motivation to fan identity salience, all of the hypothesized paths were significant and in the hypothesized direction. In particular, psychological attachment (\(\gamma_{11} = .20, t = 3.21, p < .01\)) and sport involvement (\(\gamma_{12} = .38, t = \)
5.84, p < .01) were found to be positively related to sport tourists’ motivation; psychological attachment (γ21 = .53, t = 10.81, p < .01) and sport involvement (γ22 = .43, t = 8.86, p < .01) were found to be positively related to fan identity salience; socio-economic status (γ33 = .25, t = 5.19, p < .01) and fan identity salience (β32 = .60, t = 11.74, p < .01) were found to be positively related to sport tourists’ consumption behavior.

The present study continued the line of research in sport fan behavior but further expanded the scope to the sport tourism context, taking into account a broad range of social and psychological factors. SEM was employed to test the hypothesized model in an attempt to achieve a more comprehensive and holistic understanding regarding sport tourists’ consumption behavior. The study’s results demonstrated that the hypothesized model is useful for explaining sport tourists’ consumption behavior and the findings have some practical implications for sport marketers. Further discussion of the results and implementation strategies will be provided in the presentation.