Investigating Spectator Motivation of New Sport Franchises

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Research on spectator motivation and team identification has focused on the realm of long-existing sport franchises in professional sport. Researchers across different disciplines have attempted to isolate the motives that drives fans and spectators to attend sporting events.

Although motivation may not exhibit a causal relationship with consumer decision-making, “it is a concept that explains why certain human behaviors occur” (Wlodkowski, 1986, p.71). Therefore, studying motivation is essential to studying consumer behavior within sports (Lee, 2000).

While numerous studies have investigated potential motives and their influence on spectator decisions, there have been several motives common to most studies including: eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family (Wann, 1995; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001).

Funk, Ridinger, and Moorman (2004) focused on results linking specific behaviors with consumer involvement. Involvement was first introduced in the field of psychology to explain social judgment theory and behavior (Sherif & Hoveland, 1961). The concept was later applied to the study of spectator sport. The development of the Team Sport Involvement (TSI) model, investigated the connection between 18 antecedents and 4 facets, notably attraction, self-expression, centrality to lifestyle, and risk. It assessed how each antecedent integrated into its respective facet. Funk, Ridinger and Moorman then used this concept to “identify motives at the antecedent level of involvement and examine their relationship to outcome variables” (2004, p.52).

While fan motives have been examined at the individual spectator level, differences related to the gender of the sporting team involved have also been observed. In Fink, Trail, & Anderson (2002), spectators of women’s basketball reported the environmental influences of promotions, social support and ticket pricing pose a significantly greater influence than what was reported by spectators attending men’s basketball. Studies have shown two particular factors to be more influential regarding women’s basketball than men’s basketball, notably self-fulfillment (Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas & Aiken, 2001) and players as role models (Funk, Mahony & Ridinger, 2002; Ridinger & Funk, 2006).

There is extensive literature chronicling aspects of spectator motivation, such as team identification, vicarious achievement, social identity, etc., which centers on spectators of established teams with a rich history. However, a void exists in the literature regarding spectator motives of fans of new teams. This research sought to extend previous literature by investigating the spectator motives of consumers of new sport franchises. Specifically, the following questions were examined:

• What motives are most salient for spectators of new franchises?

• Are there significant differences in motives between spectators of new franchises in women’s soccer as compared to minor league baseball?

Two Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS) franchises and three minor league baseball teams, all in their first year of existence, were sites for data collection. Participants completed the Team Sport Involvement (TSI) scale (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004) which measured 16 different motives; a team identification scale drawn from the work of Trail and James (2001); and a series of demographic questions. All scales showed good reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha scores ranging between .77 and .91.

A one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to investigate the research questions. The type of sport (soccer, baseball) was used as the fixed factor and the 16 motives (entertainment,
atmosphere, team, excite, role model, knowledge, drama, customer, service, sport, escape, family, vicarious achievement, community, friends, social, and players) served as the dependent variables. Preliminary assumption testing for normality and linearity found no violations. The overall model was significant \( F(16,106)=2.99, p<.001, \eta^2=.311 \). When the dependent variables were considered separately, there were significant differences found between the motives of community \( F(1,121)=8.64, p=.004, \eta^2=.067 \) and atmosphere \( F(1,121)=9.63, p=.002, \eta^2=.074 \). When looking at the mean scores, spectators of the new minor league baseball teams rated both of these variables higher than spectators of new women’s soccer franchises (Community: soccer M=4.74, baseball M=5.35; Atmosphere: soccer M=5.72; baseball M=6.26).

Additionally, the top ranking motives of spectators of new minor league baseball teams and spectators of new women’s soccer franchises were also different. Spectators of minor league baseball rated atmosphere (M=6.26), entertainment (M=6.25), and team (M=6.17) as the top motives for attendance while new spectators of women’s soccer rated role model (M=6.16), drama (M=6.02), and team (M=6.02) as the top motives for attendance.

Study results support existing literature on spectator motivation, as it relates to established teams. However, results do suggest some interesting phenomenon regarding spectators of new franchises. For instance, atmosphere and community represent the only statistically significant differences between spectators of baseball and soccer. Although community was significantly different between the two groups, neither group reported it as a chief motivation. Atmosphere, comparatively, was the highest rated motive for attending new minor league franchises, while soccer spectators did not rate atmosphere as high. This outcome may reflect the larger resources being devoted to the spectator and fan experience at minor league baseball games as compared to the game experience being fostered by WPS franchises. Furthermore, researchers considered how consumer expectations of the experience may lead to perceptions of atmosphere. For instance, women’s soccer spectators are motivated by the ability to witness role models, while the crowd atmosphere at these events may be secondary.

The full analysis of all 16 motives and a thorough discussion of outcomes will be included on the poster presentation.