Sport Spectator Motivation and Behavioral Involvement

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Introduction

Sport is an integral and pervasive component of the American culture. Children compete in Little League Tee-Ball games as early as 4 years of age, and the oldest competitors at the National Senior Games are over 100 years old. In addition to active sport participation, Americans also consume sports through other means such as watching sport themed movies, playing virtual games, attending live sporting events, etc. For example, the football film Remember the Titans grossed more than $115 million, and the Fantasy Sports Trade Association (2009) reported that approximately 27 million adult Americans play fantasy sports. The sports business industry is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States. Street and Smith’s (2009) annual survey of the size of the 2008 sports business industry was estimated at $213 billion, of which 13.4% was generated by sports spectators’ expenditure on tickets, luxury seating, concessions, etc. The impact of spectator expenditure and attendance at sporting events is significant hence it is important to understand the interrelationships between spectator motives and behavior. This research will investigate the interrelationships between spectator motivations and behavioral involvement.

Related Literature

Motivation studies on attending sport events, ranging from intercollegiate sports to the International Federation of Association Football World Cup, exist in the sport and event tourism literature. Game attendance motivations include external or environmental factors such as alternative entertainment choices (Zhang, Smith, Pease, & Jambor, 1997), venue characteristics such as seating comfort (Tomlinson, Buttle, & Moores, 1995), wholesome environment (Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001), etc. A relatively large body of research also exists on the factors internal to sports spectators. Wann (1995) based his Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) on sport sociology literature and identified 8 internal factors which include Self-esteem, Eustress, Entertainment, Economic opportunities, Aesthetics, Affiliation, Family, and Escape. Since then other motivation scales have been developed and they include overlapping factors. For example, the Scale of Attendance Motivation by Zhang, Pease, Lam, Bellerive, Pham, Williamson, and Lee (2001) included Stress and Entertainment, Achievement Seeking, Catharsis and Aggression, etc. The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption by Trail and James (2001) identified factors such as Drama, Family, Escape, Achievement, Social Interaction, etc. Motivation attend NFL games is the dependent variable and Wann’s (1995) SFMS was used in this study.

Several terms such as commitment and loyalty have been used to illustrate the broad concept of involvement. Different types of spectators and fans, ranging from casual to highly identified, may have different types and levels of motivations. For purposes of this study, it was assumed that the frequency to which a spectator attends games, and the money spent on the sport are behavioral indicators of the depth of involvement. In this study the two independent variables were annual game attendance and annual NFL related expenditure.

Methodology

The convenience sample consisted of Lucas Oil stadium spectators who attended the 2008/09 regular season NFL Indianapolis Colts games. Participants were approached prior to the start of the games and took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The sample size was n=158 and Cronbach’s alpha was .89. Spectator motivation was the independent variable measured by the 23 item SFMS (Wann 1995). It is a reliable and valid measure of sport spectator motivations (Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999) and the 8 factors are Self-esteem, Eustress, Entertainment, Economic, Aesthetic, Group Affiliation, Family, and Escape. Annual NFL related expenditure was the independent variable and it was measured using an open-ended question. Frequency of annual attendance was the second independent variable measured by an open ended question.
Results

The study sample composed of 100 males (63.3%) and 58 females (36.7%). The age of the fans ranged from 18 to 66 years (M = 35.66 years; SD = 11.74). 79.1% of the participants had beyond college education, and 86.7% of the participants were Caucasian. With regard to marital status, 55.7% were either married or partnered and 32.3% were singles.

Two stepwise discriminant function analyses (DFA) were conducted to determine the ability to predict the group difference of expenditure and attendance using the motivation factors. In the first DFA, Wilks’ lambda was significant - (Wilks’ l= .822, c²(8, N=118) = 21.92, p<.01) – indicating that the overall predictors differentiated between the two expenditure groups (high and low). Canonical correlation revealed that 17.8% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by this model. The relative importance of each of the eight motivation factors in determining the discriminant function score can be identified by the absolute value of the standardized function coefficients. Self-esteem, Entertainment, and Eustress demonstrated a stronger relationship to the discriminant function than Economic, Aesthetic, Group Affiliation, Family, and Escape.

The second DFA investigated differences between high and low attendance groups. It was found that Wilks’ lambda was significant - (Wilks’ l= .818, c²(8, N=135) = 25.90, p<.01). Canonical correlation showed that 18.2% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by this model. In this analysis, Self-esteem and Entertainment were found to be significant factors differentiating between high and low attendance group.

Discussion

The study examined the interrelations between motivations and behavioral involvement among spectators who attended NFL Colts games. Results showed that respondents in the high expenditure group showed higher levels of self-esteem, entertainment and eustress motivations than those in the low expenditure group. In addition, respondents in the high attendance group showed higher levels of self-esteem and entertainment motivations than those in the low attendance group. Study results provide support for previous studies. For example, in the 2002 Wann, Royalty, and Rochelle study of college basketball fans, Self-esteem and Eustress had the highest relationship with participants who were scored high on team identification. A spectator who identifies greatly with a team is more involved and likely attend matches and spend money on the sport. The findings are important and can facilitate sport administrators’ and facility managers’ understanding of spectator motivations and behavioral involvement. Identifying fans with different motivations will facility and event managers to better target fans with different spending propensity and attendance frequencies. For example, ticket and concessions executives should identify spectators motivated by self-esteem, entertainment and eustress factors to increase attendance. In addition sport marketers can craft marketing campaigns aimed at highlighting entertainment and self-esteem to encourage greater NFL expenditure. The sample size was small and data was only collected at home games. Further investigation is recommended to expand involvement to include both behavioral and psychological constructs.