A Study of Intercollegiate Athletes’ Viewership Behavior of Sport Programming on Television

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Sport fans consume sports to a much greater extent indirectly through television and media sources. However, it is difficult to describe consistency or to develop explanations on the effects of television in particular generation, such as Generation Y (Gen Y) whose media consumption may be unique enough compared to other cohort group. More specifically, one distinctive group in Gen Y worth studying is college student athletes due to their unpredictable and ever changing characteristics (Stevens, Lathrop, & Bradish, 2005; Zhang, Bennett, & Robin, 2003). Considering no previous research has examined the student athlete’s media consumption behavior, first, it is important to clarify their sport media consumption behavior in a sport setting, such as hours of watching and types of media for media consumption. Then, the overriding goal is to identify underlying motivational factors of watching sport programs on television.

To identify sociological motivation, Wann’s Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) (Wann, 1995), and Lee, Ko and Chun’s questionnaire (2005) were adapted, modified, and utilized with the 7-point Likert scale. All data was collected by using convenience sampling in Division I universities in the Midwest regions of the United States. The targeted subjects were intercollegiate athletes with ages of 18 or over. The total number of subjects used for the research was 225 (N=225), comprising 153 males (n=153, 68%) and 72 females (n=72, 32%). The behavioral variables for this study were media preference, hours of sport viewing, types of consuming sport program, and network preference. The majority of respondents (n=212, 94.2%) consumed sports through television, followed by the Internet (n=12, 5.3%). For the hours of sport viewing, 99 (44%) participants watched sport programs on television less than 1 hour on their game days. 48% of student athletes (n=108) watch sport programs on television 1 to 3 hours on their game days. During their non-game days, 60 (26.7%) participants watched sport programs on television less than 1 hour. The most important motivation item of watching sport programs is ‘One of the main reasons that I watch sport programs is doing so makes me feel good when my favorite team wins’ (Mean=5.90), and the least important one is ‘One of the main reasons that I watch sport programs is so I can bet on the game’ (Mean=1.63).

The factorability of the 13 items was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .84, above the recommended value of .6 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998), and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant. Various criteria to decide the number of factors were considered, and three-factor model was selected as the most appropriate. The first factor was named “arousal motivation”, which explained 30.74% of the variance, and this factor includes away, beauty, feel, artistic, and pump. Arousal motivation explains that student athletes are motivated by excitement out of watching sport programming. This is consistent with what Birrell and Loy (1979) identified. They identified four functions sport media fulfill, and arousal was one of them. Due to the diverse channels and programs available through the television, television viewers are motivated by this entertainment-oriented arousal factor. Second factor was termed “socializing motivation”, and this factor explains 19.95% of variance. It includes family, escape, and friends. This factor indicates group affiliated motivation. This motivational factor refers to a student athlete’s needs to spend time with family or friends to share group affiliation experience by staying away from their social routines. Several studies identified socializing factor (Birrell & Loy, 1979; Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass, 1973) previously, and this factor is related to television viewers’ intangible psychic rewards. The last factor was labeled “internalizing factor”, which explains 16.73% of the variance. Life, group, recreation, and crowds are included in this factor. This factor refers to overall integrative experience associated with media consumption (Katz et al., 1973). The three-factor model solution explained 67.43% of the variance. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was also computed, and the reliabilities for the extracted factors are ranged from .72 to .85.

Regarding the results of the study, several notable findings should be mentioned. Despite prevalence of the Internet as a convenient, informative, resourceful, and entertaining media tool, sport media consumption from student athletes through the Internet is still somewhat minimal. This result advocates the fact that television is still...
the most dominating tool of media consumption. Also, interestingly, gambling item is very low motivation factor (mean=1.63). This result is contradicting to previous research by Huang, Jacobs, Derevensky, Gupta, and Paskus (2007). Earlier, Huang et al (2007) alarmed gambling prevalence among student athletes. In their sample of 20,739 of student athletes, they reported that 62.4% of male student athletes and 42.8% of female student athletes participated in some type of gambling activity. However, this study does not hint the serious issue associated with gambling. Based on this study, it is not sure how prevalent or serious the gambling issue is among student athletes, yet, to some extent, it is believed that due to the nature of the self-report nature of the study, some student athletes may feel pressure to select ‘socially desirable’ answers, which may lower the mean score of the ‘gambling’ item. In addition, as this study identified three motivations; arousing, socializing, and integrating motivation, these motives are somewhat similar to previous studies which identified sport spectatorship motivation (Lee et al, 2005), or identified television characteristics (Katz et al, 1973). It is believed that although television presently is providing multiple channels or diverse programs, whether it is sport or not, television viewers seek very similar wants and needs from media consumption; put differently, television viewers in general may exhibit very similar media consumption behavior.