Examining the Relationships between Fan Motivation and Sociodemographics for the Chinese Professional Baseball League of Taiwan

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Outstanding performances of Taiwanese baseball teams in international competitions since 1970 have gradually transformed baseball into Taiwan's national sport. Community enthusiasm for baseball has positively influenced mass participation in baseball, media attention, government investment, and market demand for professional baseball. Due to the growing interest in professional baseball, the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) was established in 1989. Since its inception, the league has faced many challenges, such as market competitions for consumers' interests and competitions of star players from regional and international professional leagues. These challenges have resulted in diminishing revenues from game attendance, which dropped from an average of 6,000-7,000 per game attendance in 1990-1996 to 2,500-3,500 since 1997. Getting consumers back in the ballparks has become the foremost priority for the league and its teams. To regain consumer interests, CPBL administrators need to better understand consumers' motivation associated with attending CPBL games.

Motivation is the reasons that cause, channel, and sustain an individual's behavior. According to Schiffman et al. (2001), consumers' unfulfilled needs would create a state of tension that could result in product consumption. In sport settings, spectators are often driven to attend sport events to fulfill their needs. It is important to uncover and understand the inherent needs that motivate people to consume sport product. Sloan (1989) submitted five sets of theories to explain social motivations of sport fans: (a) salubrious effect theories, (b) stress and stimulation seeking theories, (c) catharsis and aggression theories, (d) entertainment theories, and (e) achievement seeking theories. Following these concepts, many studies have conducted in recent years to examine the constructs of fan motivation and their predictability of game consumption (e.g., Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001; Pease & Zhang, 2001; Wann, 1995). These studies generally revealed that fan motivations were positively related to game consumption.

Segmenting spectators according to sociodemographics (i.e., state of being) is another commonly adopted approach to study consumers in clusters. Previous studies revealed that to a varying extent, sociodemographic variables of spectators were related to their game consumption levels (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Noll, 1991; Simmons Market Research Bureau, 2005). However, to retain current spectators and attract new consumers through targeting population segments, studying sociodemographic variables alone are inadequate. These variables need to be studied together with other marketing variables on how they function interactively on attendance frequencies. More vital information, such as where, why, and how this relationships exist were consistently missing in previous studies. It is necessary to examine the possibility that there are some controllable variables, such as fan motivation factors, that mediate the relationship between sociodemographics and game consumption (Williamson, Zhang, Pease, & Gaa, 2003). According to Mullin Hardy, and Sutton (2007) and Pitts and Stotlar (2002), sociodemographics and psychographics are two of the most constructive segmentation approaches in sport marketing studies. Thus, understanding the relationships between sociodemographics and fan motivation is necessary. A few studies have provided preliminary findings on the relationships (e.g., James & Ridinger, 2002; Wann, 1995; Williamson et al., 2003). Yet, to what extent previous research findings are applicable to the CPBL setting needs to be further studied.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between sociodemographics and fan motivation of CPBL spectators. A questionnaire was formulated that included two sections: (a) the Sport Interest Inventory (Funk et al., 2001) that contained 54 items under 18 factors: Support of Taiwanese Baseball, Escape, Interest in Baseball, Entertainment Value, Aesthetics, Bonding with Family, Vicarious Achievement, (Drama, Bonding with Friends, Customer Service, Interest in Players, Role Model, Socialization, Interest in Team, Sport Knowledge, Excitement, Sport Image, and Wholesome Environment. Item wording modifications were made to reflect the CPBL setting; and (b) sociodemographic variables. Items in the questionnaire were translated into Chinese, the primary language in Taiwan. Translation accuracy was examined by a panel of 10 graduate students with expertise in both English and Chinese linguistics, followed by a panel of 10 CPBL consumers who could read in both languages. Research participants were 320 CPBL fans who responded to an on-line survey. Of them, a majority of these respondents were...
male (69.4%), single (95.9%), between 18 and 42 years old (92.2%), and with an undergraduate or advanced degree (92.2%). Alpha reliability coefficients of the fan motivation factors were all greater than .70, indicating acceptable internal consistency of the factors. Regression analyses revealed that to a varying extent, age, educational level, and family income were significantly (p < .05) related to many fan motivation factors. MANOVA further revealed that the fan motivation factors was significantly (Λ = .859; p = .000) different between genders, where male fans were higher in Interest in Baseball, Drama, and Bonding with Friends; whereas, female fans were higher in Aesthetics and Sport Image. These research findings indicated that the CPBL league and its teams need to develop differential promotion strategies to motivate fans of different sociodemographic backgrounds. Further discussions are focused on marketing practices that address specific areas of the relationships between sociodemographics and fan motivation.