Curiosity has been defined as a major intrinsic drive as well as a desire and reaction to new extrinsic stimulation that "motivates human exploratory behaviors in order to seek and acquire new knowledge and novel stimuli" (Park, 2007, p. 13). Thus, curiosity has been regarded as one of the major motivators of human exploratory behaviors in many domains such as psychology, education, and business (Reio, Petrosko, Wiswell & Thongsukmag, 2006). While there have been limited number of studies in a sport context, curiosity has also been considered to be an important new motivator that influences various sport fan behaviors (Park, Mahony, & Andrew, 2006; Park & Kim, 2008; Park, Mahony, & Greenwell, 2008; Park, James, Gordon, & Kim, 2009; Park, Mahony, & Greenwell, in press). Although the extant literature provided some valuable insights on the role of curiosity on sport consumption behaviors, the literature has generally focused on the relationship between curiosity and sport fans’ consumptive behaviors for novel sports. For example, the first attempt to extend the concept of curiosity into a sport context was Park and his colleagues’ (2006) study. They investigated how sport fans with trait curiosity were initially attracted to or formed their initial attitudes toward new sports. Even though this research found significantly meaningful findings, the work is limited in that the researchers overlooked the importance of learning process or gathering information associated with consuming new sports. This would be true because individuals would be like to explore or experience a certain product that is unique, novel, or newly introduced to the market. Therefore, more studies are needed to extend our understanding of the learning process associated with the consumptions of novel sports.

According to the literature on curiosity (Berlyne, 1949, 1954, 1960), the concept of curiosity (1949, 1954, 1960), was composed of four major dimensions: Perceptual, Intellectual (i.e., Epistemic), Specific, and Diversive curiosity. Specifically, Intellectual Curiosity has been regarded as the one of the important elements in curiosity in gathering information, facilitating learning process, and motivating and directing individuals’ learning behavior. Due to its close relationship with learning process and behavior, intellectual curiosity helps individual know more about characteristics, attributes, and benefits of a certain new product before they really purchase it (Berlyne, 1978; Lehman, 1994; Park, 2007; Urban, Weinberg, & Hauser, 1996). Therefore, the role of intellectual curiosity could also offer plausible answers about why sport fans gather or search for information on the products they would like to experience or purchase or about what kinds of relationships exist between levels of knowledge and their purchase.

Sport fans’ searching for and gathering information about a certain sports, teams, and players is significantly related to intellectual curiosity in that both would be evoked or facilitated by complex conceptual ambiguity, complicated ideas, or information gap between what people know and what they want to know (Berlyne, 1960; Bernard & Schulze, 2005; Day, 1982; Park, 2007). Considering the characteristic of curiosity related to learning process and gathering information, therefore, it is plausible that individuals in a sport context do not only consume new sport-related products but also hope to learn about the products because they usually search for and learn information about the features or benefits of products before they really experience or purchase it (Park & Kim, 2008). In order to investigate this plausibility and overcome the limitation drawn from the previous work, Park, James, Gordon, & Kim (2009) attempted to investigate the relationship between curiosity and learning process and gathering information via various media platforms. The results showed that intellectual curiosity significantly influences sport fans’ media consumption behaviors. However, the significant relationship between intellectual curiosity and media consumption might be naturally expected result due to the characteristic of curiosity associated with knowledge and information seeking. Furthermore, they did not investigate the relationship between intellectual curiosity and sport fans’ consumptive behaviors for novel sports. This is meaningful in that it can provides both practitioner and researchers with some ideas of how to develop new sport fans or help them become loyal sport fans (Park et al., 2008). Based on the sport fan curiosity literature, therefore, additional works are needed to clarify the relationships among curiosity, information or knowledge seeking via media platforms, and sport fans’ new consumptive behavior. It is also believed that better understanding of the role of curiosity in sport fans’ consumption processes would be meaningful to keep successful in a highly competitive sport industry (Mahony & Howard, 2001). Consequently, the
primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among intellectual curiosity, the intention to watch a new sport, and sport media consumption. The secondary purpose of this study was to examine the moderating effect of the levels of sport media consumptions (heavy, moderate, and light users) on the intention to watch a novel sport.

A total of 657 students were recruited from four different universities in the Midwestern area. The participants were asked to complete surveys containing measures of intellectual (epistemic) curiosity (EC: Litman & Spielberger, 2003), the participants’ level of sport media consumption, and the intention to watch a novel sport. The 10-item of the EC was used to measure intellectual curiosity based on a 7-point Likert-type scale. We modified the scale because the EC developed and only used in psychology does not reflect sport fans’ unique characteristic as well as their knowledge and information seeking. The level of sport media consumption was measured based on frequency of watching TV, using the Internet, and reading magazines or newspapers related to sports, which were three of the most consumed media channels by the participants (Park & Kim, 2009). We utilized structural equation modeling and multiple group analysis using Mplus 5.2. The measurement model fit the data perfectly (RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .00) because the model was a saturated model. AVE value and reliability coefficient for Intellectual Curiosity was .71 and .88 respectively. Result of structural model showed good model fit, (CFI= .99, SRMR= .02, RMSEA= .06). Intellectual Curiosity was a significant variable that explains intention to watch a novel sport (γ=.20, t=5.01). Specifically, 4 % of variance in the intention to watch a novel sport was accounted for by Intellectual Curiosity. Results of multiple group analysis indicated that the model freely estimated the path coefficients across the level of media consumption fit significantly better than the model constrained the path coefficients to be equal across the level of media consumption (Δχ²(2)=11.17). This result indicates that the media consumption level moderated the relationship between the Curiosity and intention to watch a novel sport. The Intellectual Curiosity was a significant variable in the intention to watch a novel sport only in moderate media consumption group (γ=.40, t=6.38). Specifically, in moderate group, 16% of variance in the intention to watch a novel sport was accounted for by Intellectual Curiosity. However, Intellectual Curiosity was not a significant variable in both heavy media consumption group (γ=.14, t=1.86) and light media consumption group (γ=.09, t=1.29).

This study contributes to the expanding literature on sport fan curiosity in the sport industry focusing on Intellectual Curiosity other than trait or state curiosity, by examining the moderating effect the levels of sport media consumptions. In addition, the results of this study would help sport marketers to better understand new sport fans’ behaviors and encourage them highly identified or loyal fans. Considering that the current sport industry is getting bigger and highly competitive, novel sports are having difficulty attracting fans’ interests. Therefore, the results of this study can provide valuable information for novel sports attempting to succeed in a highly competitive industry.

One of the critical findings in the study was that Intellectual Curiosity had significant influence on the intention to watch a novel sport only in moderate media consumption group. This result is meaningful because it can be explained by the curiosity information gap model (Loewensteinein, 1994). According to the model, an individual’s intention to engage in exploratory behavior (e.g., searching for and learning about a new product) would increase when he/she is in a moderate level of knowledge/information gap between what he/she know and what he/she want to know. Based upon the curiosity information gap model, we can infer that people in a moderate media consumption level curiosity may maintain a moderate level of information gap through their exploratory behavior. Therefore, this finding will help sport marketers develop more successful marketing strategies. For example, sport marketers should provide different amount of information to sport fans according to their levels of sport media consumptions (heavy, moderate, and light). In other words, people in a light media consumption level need to be exposed or provided a large amount of information about a sport product, whereas those in a heavy media consumption level should be given a minimum amount of information to keep them a moderate level of information gap. Detailed discussions and future research directions will be provided.