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Rivalry in sport is the topic of general conversation on an almost daily basis. It is difficult to turn on the television and not see or hear something about a sport rivalry. At the collegiate level, rivalries exist on many levels and vary from team to team and conference to conference. With the number of times that the word rivalry is used to describe competition between two teams in sport, it would be expected that a plethora of research addressing the phenomenon would exist. This is not the case however. Prior research has used rivalry as a variable to help explain consumer behavior (Davies, Veloutsou, & Costa, 2006; Hilman, Cuthbert, Bradley, & Lang, 2004; Luellen & Wann, 2010; Mahony & Moorman, 1999; Sierra, Taute, & Heiser, 2010; Spaaij, 2008; Wann, Haynes, McLean, & Pullen, 2003; Wann et al, 2006), but currently no research has been conducted to investigate what constitutes a rivalry. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to develop and test an instrument for reliability and validity that will help to explain the factors underlying the construct of rivalry in sport. The following research question guided the investigation:

Research Question: What identifiable factors explain rivalry according to fans of intercollegiate athletics?

Self-identity theory states that a person will affiliate with others similar in characteristics and interests in an attempt to maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel, 1978). Further, people strive to maintain balance in their lives (Heider, 1958), and this balance also affects the type of relationships people will have with other individuals and groups. Addressing consumption, people tend to purchase products or services that will make them look good in the eyes of others (Mowen, 2004), and perceptions of products and services can differ among individuals (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Since people tend to associate with groups of similar others and choose to consume a product or service depending on how the action will affect their image to others, research in fan identification was conducted to determine why some fans associate or distance themselves from teams and players.

Cialdini et al., (1976) found that fans are more likely to associate with a team that is perceived to be successful than unsuccessful. Additionally, Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, (1986) found that individuals would distance themselves from a group if the group was perceived to have failed in completing a task. This research helps to explain the tendencies of fans to associate and distance from a team depending on the on-field/on-court success or failure of the team. The question remains however, how is a person’s identification and perceptions of their favorite and rival teams affected by the relationship between the two teams?

Research in intergroup relations asserts that individuals in a group will band together against members of an out-group (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Further, members of an in-group tend to describe the attributes of the in-group more favorably than the out-group (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989). In sport, fans of a team have been found to evaluate the performance of a potential collegiate basketball recruit more favorably when they believed he would be playing for their favorite team than when they believed he would be playing for the rival team (Wann et al., 2006). This in-group favoritism can be explained with the help of the Disposition of Mirth Theory (Zillman & Cantor, 1976), which states a person is happy when someone he/she likes is successful and someone he/she dislikes is unsuccessful. In support of the Disposition of Mirth Theory, fans of college football and basketball indicated they tend to gain pleasure from the success of their favorite team and the failure of their most hated, or rival team (Havard, 2010). It is this relationship and the phenomenon of rivalry that warrants further investigation and development of a scale to properly measure its importance to fans.

In order to answer the research question, Churchill’s (1979) technique for creating marketing measures is being used to develop such an instrument. Using Churchill’s technique requires that the researcher (a) specify the construct(s) being studied, (b) generate sample items, (c) collect data to initially test items, (d) purify the measure, and (e) collect data to assess reliability and validity. Over the past calendar year, a literature review identified the construct of rivalry and interviews were conducted to identify trends and generate sample items. At the preset time, steps 1 and 2 of the technique have been completed and data from two samples will help identify factors explaining rivalry and test the reliability and validity of an instrument measuring the construct of rivalry in sport.

Data collection is currently underway and includes multiple steps that will be completed by February 2011. An expert panel will review the statements and items for clarity and understanding before the instrument is distributed to fans of college football and basketball. The data collected from this sample will be used to run exploratory Principal Components Analysis (PCA) in SPSS 18 to identify factors and items that explain the rivalry construct. An expert panel will review the results of the PCA, and further modifications to the instrument will be made before distributing the survey to a second sample of participants. Data from the
second sample will be used to assess the reliability and validity of the measure using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in LISREL 8.8. Data analysis to measure the fit of the model includes chi square test, Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Standardized Root Mean Residual (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). To test the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach’s α’s and inter-item correlations will be calculated. Lastly, the Average Variance Explained (AVE) scores will be examined to determine the validity of the instrument.

Findings from the current study will provide academics and practitioners with a measure that can be used to provide applicable and relevant information addressing rivalry in sport. For academics, the development of a scale to measure rivalry in sport will help guide future investigation into the phenomenon. Practitioners will benefit from the development of such a scale in that they will be better able to prepare for contests involving rival teams and use the on-field/on-court success and failure of a rival team to better market the favorite team.