Online Sport Consumption Motives: Why Does an Ethnic Minority Group Consume Sports in a Native and Host Country through the Internet?

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Ethnic minority populations in the U.S. constitute over one-third (approximately 126 million) of the total U.S. population in 2010 (approximately 300.8 million) (The U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Given that the current sport industry is a highly competitive and saturated (Gladden & Sutton, 2009), it is critical for sport marketers to target ethnic minorities as a niche market in a way of expanding fan base and increasing revenues (Ha, Park, Greenwell, & Hums, 2011).

With the rapidly increasing diversity of the U.S. population, numerous researchers in sport marketing have investigated sport consumption behavior of ethnic minority groups to better understand their culturally specific desires and needs (Armstrong, 1998; Bilyeu & Wann, 2002; Harrole & Trail, 2007, 2010; Kwon & Trail, 2000; McCarthy, 1998; Wann, Bilyeu, Brennan, Osborn, & Gambouras, 1999). One of the primary ways to understand ethnically diverse sport consumers is to explore what motivates them to attend or watch sports. Recognizing the importance of their motivations in a sport consumption context, many scholars have attempted to examine culturally specific sport consumption motives for ethnic minorities (e.g., Armstrong, 2002; Bilyeu & Wann, 2002; Kim, Andrew, & Greenwell; 2009, Kwon & Trail; 2001; Wann et al., 1999). Even though the previous studies found specific and unique motives for minorities, they were limited in that researchers have solely focused on motives in offline sport consumption environments, such as attending sports and watching them on television, as opposed to online sport settings. Considering one of the attractive characteristics of the Internet is the elimination of the geographic distance, sport fans have easily available sport-related information and knowledge about their favorite teams, players, or sports wherever they are. In particular, this unique characteristic of the Internet may allow newcomers (e.g., immigrants, international students) in the U.S. to obtain sport-related information and knowledge of a homeland and host country (e.g., the U.S.) or both.

When moving to a new society, either temporarily or permanently, immigrants often face the following two situations: (a) maintain their own cultural values and identity or (b) follow those of a host country (Berry, 1990, 1997; Nguyen, Messe, & Stollak, 1999). Applying this to online sport consumption behavior, people in the first situation would be likely to consume sports in a native culture via the Internet, whereas those in the second situation would be likely to consume sports in the host culture. Grounded in this concept, it may be true that there are different online sport consumption motives between individuals consuming sports of the native country and consuming sports of the host country. Identifying differences in online sport fan motivations between the two situations would provide meaningful information for both sport marketers in a native country and host country in attempting to expand fan bases and increase revenues. Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to examine differences in online sport consumption motives of an ethnic minority group (Koreans in this study) living in the U.S. between when they follow sports of a native country (i.e., Korea in this study) through the Internet and when they follow sports of a host country (i.e., the U.S. in this study) through the Internet. Furthermore, this study attempted to investigate the relationship between the motives and their actual usage of sport-related websites (i.e., frequency and time spent) in each of the two situations (i.e., consuming sports in Korea and in the U.S. through the Internet).

A total of 212 participants were recruited from three large Midwestern universities and one large Midwestern city using the combination of online and paper surveys. Based upon the review of existing literature on online and offline sport consumption motives (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Wann 1995; Seo & Green, 2008), we adopted and modified 28 items based on comments and feedback provided by a panel of experts. The 28 items consisted of eight online sport consumption motives: (a) Socialization/Interpersonal Communication (4 items), (b) Information (4 items), (c) Entertainment (3 items), (d)
Diversion/Escape (5 items), (e) Fan Expression (3 items), (f) Pass Time (3 items), (g) Fanship (3 items), and (h) Technical Knowledge (3 items). In addition, we generated three items to measure actual usage of sport-related websites. Participants were first asked to complete the survey questionnaire associated with sports of the native country (Korea) and then were asked to complete the survey relative to those of the host country (the U.S.). Through this procedure, we compared their motivations between the two different online sport consumption situations.

In order to analyze data, we used a repeated measure MANOVA and two stepwise multiple regressions. The overall MANOVA was statistically significant, $F(8, 204) = 26.73$, $p < .01$, with $\eta^2 = .51$. Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant difference due to sport contexts (sports in Korea vs. sports in America) in the following six motives: Socialization [$F(1, 211) = 81.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .27$], Information [$F(1, 211) = 127.04$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .37$], Entertainment [$F(1, 211) = 39.20$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$], Escape [$F(1, 211) = 44.02$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .17$], Fan Expression [$F(1, 211) = 32.81$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$], and Pass Time [$F(1, 211) = 39.45$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$]. Mean scores for all six motives in the context of Korean sports were significantly higher for those in the context of the U.S. sports. For the stepwise regression with Korean sport context, Fanship, Entertainment, and Pass Time were significant predictors for actual usage of the Internet. The final model with the three motives was statistically significant, $F(3, 208) = 230.62$, $p < .001$. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta$) revealed that Fanship ($\beta = .65$) explained the most variance, followed by Entertainment ($\beta = .20$), and Pass Time ($\beta = .19$). For the stepwise regression with American sport context, the following four motives were significant predictors for actual usage of the Internet: Escape, Pass Time, Information, and Entertainment. The final model with the four motives was also statistically significant, $F(4, 207) = 63.09$, $p < .001$. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta$) indicated that Escape ($\beta = .96$) explained the most variance, followed by Pass Time ($\beta = .44$), Information ($\beta = .35$), and Entertainment ($\beta = .28$).

This study contributes to the expanding literature on online sport consumption motives of an ethnic minority by examining the difference in the motives between the two different online sport consumption environments. In addition, the results of this study would help sport marketers in both a native and host country better understand sport fans’ needs and desires by identifying specific motives in which they prefer. Specifically, sport marketers can implement more effective marketing and promotional strategies, based on the identified important motives in each of the two sport contexts. One of the critical findings in the study was that fanship was the most significant predictor for Korean sport consumption context. Hence, Korean sport marketers may need to more focus on online contents associated with fanship than other motives. In the context of the US sport consumption, American marketers should emphasize on online contents associated with escape motive, since it was found to be the most significant predictor. Therefore, developing suitable promotional and advertising campaigns depending on motives in the two online consumption situations would provide an opportunity for marketers in both countries to expand or maintain fan base. More detailed discussions, limitations, and future research directions will be provided in presentation.