Cosmopolitan Consumer Behaviour: Exploring Fan Identification, Awareness, and Motivation Around the FIFA World Cup

Cheri Bradish, Ryerson University
Nicholas Burton, Ryerson University
Melanie Dempsey, Ryerson University
Deep Bhatia, Ryerson University

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This research paper will explore fan interest, motivation, and awareness around the 2014 FIFA World Cup Finals as a function of national identity and sociocultural identification. As part of a broader line of research examining the evolving Canadian sports fan landscape, and in an effort to better understand how nationality and national identity influence sport fan behavior, the study examines national team supporters across ten different neighbourhoods and ethnic communities throughout the city of Toronto. The resultant findings will offer a new and unique perspective into the role national identification plays in fan involvement and motivation, whilst simultaneously contributing to our understanding of the Canadian sports landscape and the development of international fan communities in Canada.

The study of consumer behaviour and fan motivation has received extensive attention in sport marketing research over the past thirty years (e.g., Sloan, 1989; Funk, Mahony & Ridinger, 2002; Kim & Trail, 2010), with specific interest in identifying those motivating factors behind consumers’ intent to attend sport events (e.g., Trail & James, 2001; Madrigal, 2006; Funk, Beaston & Alexandris, 2012), as well as those constraints which restrict fan attendance or consumption (e.g., Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Zhang et al., 1997; Trail, Robinson & Kim, 2008). Within this literature, a growing body of research into the role team and fan identification play in determining sport consumer behaviour has emerged (e.g., Bodet & Bernache-Assollant, 2011; Trail et al., 2012; Kim, Trail & Magnusen, 2013). However, to date the relevance and potential impact of national identification and sociocultural embeddedness have yet to be examined in any detail within the context of sport fan behaviour and motivations. Intuitively, given the nature of international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, national identity and belonging represent key indicators of fan connection and motivation, particularly for supporters of international teams and competitions. The effects of this identification on behavioural habits and consumption level, however, have largely been overlooked in the extant sport fan behavior literature. This study therefore represents an important first step towards understanding the potential effects of national identification on sport spectators as a potential motivating factor in consumer behavior.

In order to investigate these effects, a cross-sectional, positivist research design was adopted. A survey instrument, comprising 28 items divided amongst five variables (Fan Identification, Engagement, Awareness, New Media Consumption, and Demographics), was developed and tested, drawing on existing scales including Kim & Trail (2010) and Funk et al. (2012).

Data collection was conducted throughout the initial group stage of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in June 2014, canvassing ten cultural and ethnic communities across the city of Toronto. The FIFA World Cup, and the study’s location, were selected based on the highly developed multi-cultural and cosmopolitan nature of Toronto, and the unique impact the World Cup has in activating supporters from different countries and in different ethnic communities around the city. Convenience sampling was employed, in an effort to reach as many football supporters as possible from the targeted communities and nationalities. The ten nations selected for the study were identified based on the presence and size of geographical ethnic communities in the city (e.g., Little Italy, Koreatown, etc), fan populations represented in popular commentary and news media in the lead-in to the World Cup Finals, and the availability of communal viewing locations for national team matches. In total, 585 completed surveys were collected from 18 group stage games. This data was then inputted into SPSS, allowing for a multi-dimensional statistical analysis.
The study’s findings reveal a number of important insights into the effects national identity has on fan behavior and its role as a prospective element of fan motivation. Importantly, these results represent a significant advancement in fan motivation theory for international sport and national team supporters, as well as for sport marketing practice. The level of involvement between supporter and country appears to have a direct impact on the level of awareness and spectatorship, as supporting one’s country reflects an increasingly important element of national identification and sociocultural place for non-domestic supporters (e.g., fans living in a different country to the team they support). This is a potentially valuable contribution for both theory and practice, as the implications of international support for sport marketing and consumer behavior are explored in greater depth and the advances made here are built upon further.

References


Funk, D.C., Mahony, D.F. & Ridinger, L.L. (2002). Characterizing consumer motivation as individual difference factors: augmenting the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) to explain level of spectator support. Sport Marketing Quarterly, 11(1), 33-43.


