Contemplation of Need Fulfillment through Sport Media Consumers: The Role of Flow, Team Identification, and Perceived Performance Level

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ESPN spent $100 million for the right to broadcast the 2010 and 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the average official viewership for each match in 2010 FIFA World Cup was 188.4 million (Ozanian, 2014). Reflecting this tremendous popularity of sport events, various types of sports organizations have increasingly recognized the significance of the behavioral patterns of their target customers in media consumption (Goff & Ashwell, 2009; Raney, 2006). When it comes to disclosing the dynamics of various behavioral patterns of these sport media consumers, from a principle of marketing, need fulfillment of the customers is one of the most invaluable elements for creating profitable relationships with customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011).

Ryan and Deci (2000) contended that “a basic need, whether it be a physiological need or a psychological need, is an energizing state that, if satisfied, conduces toward health and well-being but, if not satisfied, contributes to pathology and ill-being” (p. 74). Especially, fulfilling individuals’ psychological needs through leisure activities has a significant impact on their physical and mental health, psychological development, and life satisfaction (Insley and Tinsley, 1986). In the field of sport, personal needs interact with culture and personality, and have an impact on personal values and goals, and eventually consumer behavior (Trail & James, 2013). Taken together, needs fulfillment can be considered an important factor in understanding consumer’s behavior, yet insufficient academic attention has been paid to needs fulfillment in the context of sport media consumption. To fill this void, this study aims to explore and examine factors affecting sport media consumer’s needs fulfillment.

Essentially, sport consumption has experiential aspects such as fantasies, feelings, and fun; sport consumers fantasize that they are part of the action (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Of the experiential aspects, flow is an optimal experience characterized by a feeling of concentration and deep enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikzentmihaly, 1991). Madrigal (2006) conceptualized flow as a dimension of sport event consumption, and Chang and colleagues (2012) maintained that flow can happen while watching sports on TV. In addition, flow is correlated with not only enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) which may fulfill hedonic need, but also personal expressiveness (Waterman et al., 2003) which may fulfill eudaimonic need. Based on the previous studies, it can be maintained that flow experience can be a factor which affects sport media consumer’s needs fulfillment.

Additionally, team identification, the degree to which a fan feels a psychological connection with a sport team, can be another influential factor for needs fulfillment (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Especially, team identification is known as a vehicle for fulfilling social needs (Wann, 1997); enjoyment (Raney, 2012); belongingness and self-worth (Branscombe & Wann, 1991); self-esteem (Wann & Pierce, 2005); and positive psychological health (Wann, 2006), which may lead to overall needs fulfillment. Besides, according to Chang and colleagues (2012), team identification affects sport viewer’s flow experience. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that sport media consumers’ team identification would influence their flow experience, and overall needs fulfillment.

Considering the inherent nature of sport in which possibilities of losing and poor performance always exist (Trail & James 2013), it is needed to examine the impact of outcome or performance factor on sport media consumer’s need fulfillment as it may determine the degree of overall needs fulfillment. Several studies have shown that perceived performance level affects spectator’s mood and self-esteem (e.g., Trail, Anderson & Fink, 2005), self-worth (e.g., Gantz, 1981), enjoyment (e.g., Kim & Kwak, 2013), and group identity (e.g., Sloan, 1979), which are related to overall needs fulfillment. Spectators watching exciting athletic performances also experience flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Bennett 1971; Mitchell 1988; Smith & Westerbeek, 2004), so perceived performance level can be thought of as an
antecedent of a flow experience. According to the findings from previous research, this research hypothesizes that perceived performance level while watching a sport game would affect flow experience and needs fulfillment.

In order to examine the role of flow, team identification, and perceived performance level on needs fulfillment among sport media consumers, the present study examined a total of 386 sport viewers who watched the 2014 FIFA World Cup match between Korea and Russia collected by quota sampling based on gender and age. We collected 1,444 tentative sport viewers before the match to gather demographic information, and investigate the level of team identification and level of expectation about need fulfillment. After the match, we also sent out the second survey to the same 1,444 sport viewers in order to investigate flow, perceived performance level, and level of need fulfillment. Among the 506 respondents who answered both surveys, 386 respondents were selected after excluding respondents who did not watch the match.

We employed multiple items to measure team identification (Wann & Branscombe, 1993); perceived performance level (Madrigal, 2003); flow experience (Martin & Jackson, 2008); need fulfillment (Cook & Wall, 1980), and then modified them for the purpose of the study. To assess univariate and multivariate normality, we performed Shapiro-Wilk's test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965); the modified Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (D’Agostino, Belanger & D’Agostino, 1990) using SPSS 18.0; and Mardia’s (1985) multivariate kurtosis using AMOS 18. Further, reliability and validity of the measures were examined by factor analysis, Cronbach’s alpha, and average variance extracted (AVE) value using SPSS 18.0. To evaluate overall fit of the measurement model, we adopted x2/df, RMSEA, CFI, SRMR CFI, and SRMR (Weston & Gore, 2006). Finally, we conducted Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Satorra Bentler scaling method using Mplus 7 because of violation of assumption for multivariate normality.

The results confirm a good overall fit of the measurement model (\(\chi^2 /df=335.86/194=1.731, \text{RMSEA}=.044, \text{CFI}=.979,\) and \(\text{SRMR}=.029\)), and all the items have significant factor loadings on their theorized factor (.743 – .980). All of the measures of Cronbach alpha coefficient and AVE values except for social need (AVE=.49) indicates good reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2005). On top of that, the AVE values for all constructs are larger than the corresponding squared inter-construct correlations, providing support for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larker 1981).

The hypothesized model indicates a good overall fit (\(\chi^2 /df=335.86/194=1.731, \text{RMSEA}=.044, \text{CFI}=.979,\) and \(\text{SRMR}=.029\)), and most paths are significant except for the path from flow experience to eudaimonic and social need fulfillment at alpha level .05. Specifically, perceived performance level affects flow experience (\(\gamma = .25, p< .05\)), hedonic need (\(\gamma = .35, p< .05\)), eudaimonic need (\(\gamma = .36, p< .05\)), and social need (\(\gamma = .22, p< .05\)). In addition, team identification affects flow experience (\(\gamma = .43, p< .05\)), hedonic need (\(\gamma = .29, p< .05\)), eudaimonic need (\(\gamma = .28, p< .05\)), and social need (\(\gamma = .25, p< .05\)). Lastly, flow experience affects hedonic need (\(\gamma = .16, p< .05\)), but does not have a significant influence on eudaimonic need (\(\gamma = .09, p> .05\)), and social need (\(\gamma = .07, p> .05\)).

Based on the results, sport marketers need to design optimal media environment to enhance flow experience which leads to hedonic need fulfillment. For example, application of augmented reality technology may improve flow experience by providing interactive media environment. Additionally, the results suggested that team identification does not always have a positive impact on sport media consumer's need fulfillment.