Knowledge as Power or the Fear of Missing Out? Digital Sport Consumption in the 21st Century

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A growing body of literature has begun to look at the increasingly pervasive phenomenon of sport consumers substituting media consumption for attendance (e.g., Larkin, Fink, & Trail, 2014a, 2014b; Pritchard & Funk, 2006), an issue that has been identified by practitioners as one of the most pressing concerns facing the industry today (Luker, 2012). Nevertheless, still very little is known about the characteristics and nature of this burgeoning consumption mode and the processes through which these characteristics may motivate sport fans to stay home and substitute media consumption for attendance. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of sport media consumption at home through an application of self-determination theory (SDT). Specifically, a model will be proposed explaining the process through which the Information Attainment characteristic of sport media consumption influences individuals to substitute media consumption for attendance. This is posited to occur both directly as well as through feelings of Psychological Empowerment and the Fear of Missing Out, relationships that are hypothesized to be significantly more pronounced for those high on Team Identification. These concepts are elaborated below.

According to SDT, individuals’ intrinsically motivated behavior stems from the innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As they explained “social-contextual events…that conduce feelings of competence during action can enhance intrinsic motivation for that action” (p. 70). Research has indicated that Information Attainment factors such as the ability to take in multiple games simultaneously, advanced angles and replays, and information distributed by team media through social mediums have instilled feelings of competence in consumers (Larkin et al., 2014b). However, while feelings of competence are instrumental in motivating human behavior, it is critical that these feelings also be accompanied by a sense of autonomy, or the feeling that one’s behavior is truly self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To that end, sport media consumption represents a truly customizable experience characterized by a higher degree of control than the experience of consuming live at the sport venue. The aforementioned Information Attainment characteristic of sport media consumption gives consumers a heightened sense of autonomy and control over how they consume the sport product compared to the live venue. The final component of self-determined, intrinsically motivated behavior is a sense of security or relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Attending a game at the live venue has traditionally been the only means by which one could publicly display their association with their favorite team whilst rooting alongside other fans (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998), thereby satisfying their relatedness needs. However, it now appears that fans can satisfy these needs just as well and perhaps more effectively through social media (Larkin et al., 2014b; Reichart Smith & Smith, 2012). In brief, because the Information Attainment characteristic of sport media consumption allows fans to fulfill fundamental needs, it serves to motivate individuals to substitute media consumption for attendance.

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between Information Attainment and Substitution Intention

In their seminal work on psychological empowerment, Conger and Kanungo (1988) employed Bandura’s (1986) conception of self-efficacy, whereby empowerment reflects a process in which one’s belief in their own self-efficacy is strengthened. This belief is thought to “stem from internal need-states such as the intrinsic need for self-determination,” and the need for competence (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 474). Among the antecedents to psychological empowerment is access to information (Spreitzer, 1995). Tengland (2008) suggested that certain types of knowledge acquisition—that is, those that one intends to apply as a means of exhibiting control over their lives—contribute to feelings of empowerment. Thus, for the casual sport fan, an increase in Information Attainment when consuming at home may not suffice to empower because these individuals would be less apt to apply the sport knowledge as a means of exhibiting control over their lives. However, because sport fandom is central to their self-
concept, highly identified fans would be more likely to perceive this Information Attainment as a vehicle through which they can enhance their fandom, thus exhibiting control over a central aspect in their lives.

H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between Information Attainment and Psychological Empowerment
H3: The relationship between Information Attainment and Psychological Empowerment will be greater for those high on Team Identification
H4: There will be a significant positive relationship between Psychological Empowerment and Substitution Intention

Fear of missing Out (FoMO) refers to the phenomenon whereby individuals possess “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841). It has been posited to stem from a deficit in basic need satisfaction (Przybylski et al., 2013). In the sport domain, highly identified fans have been shown to report similar feelings of being out of the loop when watching at the stadium and being restricted to just that one game and perhaps a very narrow view of it (Larkin et al., 2014b). Furthermore, they reported missing out on all the other games and content they could normally access at home. However, the extent to which the Information Attainment that characterizes home consumption is perceived as rewarding should depend on one’s level of interest and fandom. Thus, it follows that the relationship between Information Attainment and FoMO will be more pronounced for those high on Team Identification.

H5: There will be a significant positive relationship between Information Attainment and FoMO
H6: The relationship between Information Attainment and FoMO will be greater for those high on Team Identification
H7: There will be a significant positive relationship between FoMO and Substitution Intention

The proposed model will be assessed through the use of structural equation modeling (SEM). The Information Attainment subscales will be developed for use in this study, while Psychological Empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013), Team Identification (Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004), and Substitution Intention (Trail and James, 2012) will be adapted from past work. A target sample of 370 sports fans will be recruited from Amazon’s mTurk service for participation in the study. The measurement model will be assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) before proceeding to assess the structural model. From a theoretical standpoint, the authors expect that the study will extend the literature on team identification, sport media consumption, and SDT, by illustrating how fans’ abilities to obtain information at an unprecedented rate at home in this day and age serves to motivate their substitution of media for attendance, both directly and through the feelings of empowerment and FoMO. In addition, while highly identified fans have long been shown to possess a greater propensity to attend games (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001), the current model would indicate that such individuals are gaining a sense of empowerment from—and also fear missing out on—the information that can be attained at home. Thus, practitioners must take heed of the fact that consumer loyalty may result in different behavioral manifestations than in years past.