Developing and Validating a Scale to Measure Excessive Sport Fan Behavior

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Fan behavior is vast. However, a great deal of sport management and marketing research has focused solely on direct consumption behavior such as live attendance, merchandise acquisition, and media usage. While these modes of consumption are important for sport organizations, sport researchers have begun to suggest that sport fandom exists in many forms beyond direct consumption including relationship maintenance through team-centered discourse and social rituals such as game day ceremonies (Crawford, 2003; Williams, 2007). In addition, the frequency and avidity of team-related behaviors vary greatly among sport fans as the emotion and passion associated with sport fandom result in intense attachments for some and casual relationships for others (Giulianotti, 2002). As a result of these differences and propositions, the purpose of this study was to develop and validate a scale to measure excessive sport fan behavior (ESFB).

Fournier’s (1998) relationship theory was utilized to guide the study. This theory was introduced as a mechanism to explain the roles brands play in the life of a consumer. Relationship theory conceptualizes the brand as a behavioral entity and an active partner within a consumer’s many relationships (Fournier, 1998). The theory has been applied to several different groups and contexts but has yet to be applied to sport. Relationship theory was targeted as a guiding framework for the current study for many reasons. Most notably, its firm behavioral foundation stemming from passionate and emotional connections to brands provides a natural fit for explaining the relationship between a sport fan and his/her favorite team.

Method
The current study implemented Churchill’s (1979) multi-step procedure for developing and validating the ESFB instrument. First, a review of fan loyalty and brand relationship theory literature was conducted to specify the domain for the current study. Next, a semi-structured topic guide was composed, and two, six person focus groups were facilitated to begin the item generation process. The data were then transcribed, coded, and refined by three independent investigators. In total, 88 distinct statements were identified as possible items for the scale. Three rounds of item refinement followed as the statements were tested for content and face validity via a pilot test, expert review, and the revisiting of the study’s domain. In the end, 34 behaviors were settled upon and converted into frequency-based items on a five point Likert-type scale (1=Never; 5=Always).

Additional data collection followed as the 34-item instrument was sent to a sample of undergraduate and graduate students at a large, urban, Mid-Atlantic university. Following data collection, a principal component analysis (PCA) with promax rotation was conducted, after which factor loadings, eigenvalues, and item correlations were interpreted as a means of measure purification. In addition, the results of the PCA were once again analyzed by three independent sport consumer behavior experts to ensure factors and items accurately measured the specified domain. Through both the data collection and independent expert analysis, several items were removed or reworded. The resulting in a scale contained 14 items under the following four dimensions: Instigation, Committed Viewership, Vicarious Impact, and Superstition.

The final step of Churchill’s (1979) procedure, assessment of instrument reliability and validity was achieved by sending the revised instrument to a sample of Philadelphia area sports fans through a partnership with the Philadelphia Inquirer. A Satorra-Bentler maximum likelihood of estimation method confirmatory factor analysis was performed in mPlus to verify the underlying factor structure. The scale scores were then subjected to reliability (Cronbach’s α & inter-item correlations), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted [AVE]), discriminant validity (AVE test), and criterion-related (concurrent) validity assessments.
Findings & Discussion

Following the focus groups, 459 sports fans were surveyed through two distinct sample procedures. Ultimately, correcting for the slight factor validity issues, the final ESFB scale was refined from 88 initial behaviors to four dimensions and 12 behaviors (see below). The resulting scale scores indicated an adequate to good fit to the data, strong internal consistency, and sound convergent, discriminant, and concurrent validity for the instrument. Interestingly, an additional construct validity test provided evidence that those scoring high on the ESFB were more likely to irrationally consume branded team merchandise.

Final ESFB Factors and Items

Instigation
- I use social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to antagonize fans of other teams.
- I interact with strangers wearing merchandise of the [Favorite Team]’ opponent.
- I talk trash with fans of the opponents of the [Favorite Team].

Committed Viewership
- When I watch the [Favorite Team] on television, I watch every play of every game.
- If I can’t watch the [Favorite Team] game live on television, I will DVR the game and watch it later.
- I avoid distractions when the [Favorite Team] play.

Vicarious Impact
- I yell at the television when the [Favorite Team] play.
- I refer to the [Favorite Team] as “we” or “us.”
- When the [Favorite Team] are playing poorly, I alter my behavior with hope it will impact the team (e.g., sit in a different seat).

Superstition
- I wear the same merchandise every gameday.
- I wear the same jersey or colors the [Favorite Team] are wearing on gamedays.
- I sit in the same spot every time the [Favorite Team] play.

The future use of the ESFB scale could be valuable for several reasons including segmenting sport fans and testing varying levels of sport fan loyalty. In addition, the concurrent and construct validity results suggest ESFB may predict other important forms of attachment and direct sport fan consumption. Ultimately, in having a better understanding of the most zealous sport fans, sport organizations can capitalize on activities most important to this valuable group. Lastly and in addition to the practical application of this scale, the findings provide theoretical impact. Specifically, the results reinforce the value of relationship theory in explaining the behavior of sport fans and provide evidence of important brand experiences beyond direct sport team consumption.

References


