Addressing Issues in the Measurement of Sport Attendance Motives

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Marketing
Abstract 2016-179
Friday, June 3, 2016
1:40 PM
Poster
(Legacy North)

Scholars of sport management and sport psychology have paid much attention to the study of consumer motives. Given the enormous revenues that sports organizations generate both directly (e.g., gate receipts: PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2014) and indirectly (e.g., television subscriptions: Greenwald, 2013), it is unsurprising that marketers are keen to understand what factors drive sport consumer behavior. In the vast majority of empirical studies, scholars have compared the consumption motives of different demographic groups (e.g., James, 2002; James & Ridinger, 2002), or those who consume different sports (e.g., James & Ross, 2004; Wann, Grieve, Zaplac, & Pease, 2008). It is intuitive that different groups are motivated to attend/watch games for different reasons, and this is well established in the aforementioned research; however, the measures that have been used to measure sport consumer motives have a number of flaws, some of which have not been addressed in the existing literature.

In the current study, the authors addressed two important issues with the most rigorously constructed measure, the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC: Trail & James, 2001). First, items should be oriented toward (a) a sport team, or (b) a sport; however, the items in the existing MSSC are a mixture; thus, the object of measurement is confused. Second, items should be oriented toward attendance behavior, as opposed to a general sentiment toward the sport/team. Based on these issues, the author proposes a number of changes to the original items of the MSSC, which provided the basis for an empirical study of the relationship between attendance motives and actual attendance. Differences between the motives of fans and spectators were also analyzed, in line with previous studies (Robinson & Trail, 2005), using the revised items. To address the aforementioned issues, the authors conducted a two-part study using a revised set of MSSC items: 1) A comparison between participants’ responses for individual motives (e.g., escape from daily routine) as they relate to a sport, or a particular team. In other words, are people’s motives for watching a specific team different to those for watching that sport in general?; and 2) a comparison of the motives of fans and spectators for attending games.

It is important that scholars continue to refine the measures that are used to ascertain the factors that motivate consumption behaviors. This is the case because a) the object of measurement in academic studies should be clearly defined in order to inform our understanding of the phenomena; and b) effective marketing action require appropriate basis, as it pertains to the different motives of fans and spectators, and to specific teams and sports in general.

Method

Participants and procedure: Participants were attendees at a Division I college football game (n = 161; 52% male, 48% female; mean age = 34). Measures were distributed to participants in the form of a paper survey, containing attendance motive items pertaining to nine motives taken from the original MSSC: achievement, action, aesthetics, empathy, escape, family, physical skill, team affiliation, and team effort. Each item asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements, using seven-point Likert scales, from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (7). In addition to demographic information, a single Likert scale item from the study of Trail and James (2001) was used to ascertain the extent to which participants were fans of the team or spectators.

Data analysis: Attendance motives reported by spectators and team fans were compared using one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). T-tests were conducted for each of the six motives included in the original MSSC to investigate differences between the sport- and team-specific motives (e.g., sport-related drama and team-related drama). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated to ensure the internal consistency of the team-specific and sport-specific motive constructs, with all demonstrating X between .71 (team escape) and .95 (sport family).

Results
Comparison of sport- and team-specific motives: The authors observed significant differences (p < .01) between each of the nine sport- and team-related motives. The largest differences were seen between the reported mean scores for motives related to empathy (S = 3.53, T = 4.70), and drama (sport (S) = 5.40, team (T) = 5.01).

Comparison of fan and spectator motives: The authors observed significant differences between the motives of fans and spectators for both sport-specific motives, F (11, 149) = 3.806, p < .0005; Wilks Λ = .781, partial η² = .219, and for team-specific motives, F (11, 149) = 15.937, p < .0005; Wilks Λ = .459, partial η² = .541.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of the present study, it is evident that there are significant differences between the sport-related and team-related attendance motives of attendees of Division I college football games. The original MSSC contained items within motive subscales that articulated to sports, teams, or a combination of sports and teams (Trail & James, 2001); thus, the measure was unable to differentiate between different focal objects in previous research (James & Ridinger, 2002; Robinson & Trail, 2005). The present revision of those original items enabled the authors to highlight these differences.

Although significant differences were observed between spectators and fans for all nine of the measured motives, the results for the empathy and drama motives could be indicative of practically meaningful differences. For example, it could be extremely important for marketers to understand that fans of a team are less likely motivated by drama—a key motive for general sport spectators—while appealing to their high levels of identification with the team could provide incentive to attend.

In the present study, the authors provided evidence that the conflation of sport-specific and team-specific attendance motives in the original MSSC has obscured important differences in the reasons for which people choose to attend sport events. The revised items, which demonstrated good internal consistency, are recommended for use to suit the specific aims of future research—i.e., what sport/team-related motives are salient.