Fulfilling Psychological Needs and Improving Life Satisfaction through Sport Consumption Activities: A Comparison with Non-Sport Activities

Jeeyon Kim, Florida State University
Jeffrey James (Advisor), Florida State University
Adrianna Alonso, Florida State University
Casey Cobalan, Florida State University
Daniel Prewett, Florida State University

According to the North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM Ethical Creed, 2004), ‘promoting the general welfare of society through sport’ is one of the ethical creeds of sport marketers. In services marketing, enhancing the well-being of sport consumers is recommended as an effective strategy to advance the field of sport service, by building a mutually beneficial consumer-entity relationship that leads to long-term marketing benefits (Kim & Trail, 2011; Tsiotisou, 2014). In this sense, understanding and promoting sport consumer well-being is recommended as an effective strategy to advance the field of sport management, especially in relation to sport spectating and sport media viewing contexts.

A need is “a deficit state of the organism” (Gordon, 1975, p. 8), which fulfillment contributes to mental health and un-fulfillment leads to negative mental symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness (i.e., need theory; Clarke, Islam, & Paech, 2006). Need fulfillment can be a useful construct in learning the well-being benefits of sport consumption activities. Various researchers identified the needs for detachment-recovery (i.e., psychologically disengaging and recouping from work-related stress), autonomy (i.e., being the perceived origin or source of one’s own behavior), achievement (i.e., feeling a sense of accomplishment, success, and pride), and belonging (i.e., feeling a sense of connectedness with others) as fundamental psychological needs, and fulfillment of such needs are key determinants to one’s well-being (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2002; Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). Comprehensive fulfillment of fundamental needs is required for improving one’s well-being, as un-fulfillment of any of the fundamental needs may hinder one’s pursuit of well-being (Newman et al., 2014).

Needs are fulfilled when an individual is engaged in interesting and meaningful activities-for example, work, study, and socializing (Rodrigues, Latkova, & Sun, 2008). Sport consumption activities—sport participation, sport spectating, sport media viewing—can be effective contexts for the four types of need fulfillment, grounded in entertainment theory, self-determination theory, and social identity theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002; Sloan, 1989; Trail & James, 2013; Wann, 2006). Identifying which needs are fulfilled and to what extent they may be fulfilled through which type of sport consumption activity, may be informative in understanding and building strategies to effectively improve the sport consumer’s well-being. Further, comparing the need fulfillment effects of sport consumption activities to that of non-sport activities may derive novel insight in learning the unique value of sport in improving well-being, as the types and degrees of need fulfillment may vary based on the type of activity engaged. The latter may be due to the distinctive nature of the activity such as direct vs. indirect experience, individual vs. group activity, and intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation.

Therefore, a study is underway investigating how one’s essential psychological needs (i.e., detachment-recovery, autonomy, achievement, and belonging needs) are fulfilled through various sport consumption (i.e., sport participation, sport spectating, and sport media viewing) and non-sport activities (i.e., work, study, socializing, exercising, non-sport media viewing). The types and degrees of need fulfillment in each activity will be examined and compared. Further, the link between need fulfillment and one’s state of life satisfaction will be tested, to verify need fulfillment as a key construct linking activity engagement to improved well-being.

A survey-based cross-sectional field study is in progress. College students are the target population based on the accessibility for recruiting sport consumers across sport participation, sport spectating, and sport media viewing activities. Eight types of activities (i.e., the three sport consumption activities and work, study, socializing, exercising, and watching non-sport content on TV) were selected as key activities of interest, based on the average time college students invest in various activities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Stratified convenience sampling
was conducted at a NCAA Division-I university, mainly targeting NCAA sporting event spectators, sport media viewers, and intramural sport league participants. Data collection is currently in progress with the anticipation of reaching the target sample size of 250 respondents and 2,000 responses by Mid-November.

The questionnaire consists of items measuring detachment-recovery need fulfillment (4 items; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007), autonomy need fulfillment (4 items; Ng, Lonsdale, & Hodge, 2011), achievement need fulfillment (3 items, Kwon, Trail & Lee, 2008), belonging need fulfillment (3 items; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002), satisfaction with life (4 items; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin 1985), demographics, and game outcomes. Respondents are answering eight sets of the questionnaire, each in relation to their most recent experience in the eight activities of interest (i.e., 2,000 responses = 250 respondents x 8 activities). Using the eight activity-specific responses made by the same respondent is effective for having a better comparison of need fulfillment effects across different activities, by mitigating the influence of individual characteristics on the results. For data analysis, a multi-group analysis will be conducted using Mplus7 to test and compare the need fulfillment effect of sport consumption and non-sport activities. Controls for the game outcomes in sport consumption activities and independence assumption violation will take place. Further, a path analysis will be conducted to test the link between the four types of need fulfillment and life satisfaction.

The potential contribution of this study lies in: (1) emphasis on the well-being benefits of sport consumption, (2) focus on need fulfillment as a key construct for understanding the well-being benefits, (3) comprehensive understanding on the three sport consumption activities for a holistic view on sport consumer well-being, and (4) comparison with other non-sport activities to identify the unique value of sport consumption activities. The findings of this study may be useful in laying the fundamental basis of understanding well-being benefits derived from the three sport consumption activities. Through the comparison with non-sport daily activities, the value of sport in improving one’s well-being may be identified, if sport is found to effectively fulfill one’s psychological needs that are not (or less) fulfilled in other daily activities. With such findings, sport consumption activities can be positioned and promoted as a healthy leisure activity. Also, combinations of different types of sport consumption activities may be suggested as a strategy to effectively improve one’s well-being and to encourage sport consumers of one type to consume other types of sporting experiences as well. The findings may be informative for sport consumers, sport marketing practitioners and researchers, and policy makers.