Personality, Fan Identification, and Mediated Sports Consumption: A Phenomenological Approach

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Mediated sports consumption, ranging from home television, on-line streaming, social media, to sports bar, has become a serious competitor of live attendance (Howard & Crompton, 2014; Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006). Sports fans have had unprecedentedly more opportunities to follow their favorite sport or team via numerous mediated channels. The US Sports Media Consumption Report 2014 showed that online fans access sport content via the internet through a computer or a smartphone, representing 65% of the total sports fan base (SportBusinessGroup, 2014). In 2012, American viewers see more than 43,700 hours of live sporting events on broadcast and cable television provided by 26 national cable networks (Nielsonwire, 2012; Howard & Crompton, 2014). Also, in 2014, the number of fans in the U.S. using social networking platforms such as Facebook or YouTube has reached over a third of fans consume sports on these platforms (SportBusinessGroup, 2014). The market cannibalism between mediated sports and live attendance is a fairly complex issue in sports. Media right is a significant revenue source for sports, but it also creates a tremendous threat to sports. Given that foregoing media revenue is not even a choice, how to effectively compete with mediated sports becomes the key to solve the dilemma. Particularly, how to lure the consumers of mediated sports to the stadium is the most significant challenge faced by contemporary sports marketers and managers.

Rein, Kotler and Shields (2006) predicted that the sports industry is facing with an unprecedented elusive fan crisis as a result of pressurized competitive environment, higher fan expectations, paradox of commercialism, new technology, individualism, changes in family structure and behavior, time pressure and so forth. They characterized the sports market after 1990 as “highlight generation” when the communication marketplace is saturated with information and attracting and keeping fan attention has become much more challenging. Whereas a voluminous literature exists on the motivations of sport consumers’ game attendance behavior (e.g., Funk & James, 2004; G. Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; G. Trail & James, 2001; G. T. Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008; Daniel L. Wann, 2001; D. L. Wann & Ensor, 1999). There is still a pocket on the factors that drive mediated sports consumption (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Seo & Green, 2008).

This study, utilizing a phenomenological approach, focuses on understanding the unique motives and experiences the mediated sports consumers have vis-à-vis to those of traditional spectators. Specifically, the purposes of this study are two-fold: 1) to explore benefits sought by mediated sports users and spectators, and categorize those benefits into mediated-sports-specific, live-game-specific, and shared benefits; and (2) to profile the internet sport consumers’ characteristics by using Big-Five personality and fan identification variables.

Theoretical Background

Consumers are benefits seeking. Sports consumers are no exception. Scholars have taken great interest in understanding individuals’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and constraints to attend sporting events (e.g., Funk & James, 2004; Zhang, Lam, & Connuahgton, 2003; Carroll & Alexandris, 1997). These studies have revealed the benefits or desired ends of attending sporting events. However, research on mediated sports consumption is relatively sporadic and previous studies have primarily utilized a deductive, positivistic approach (Hur et al., 2007; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Seo & Green, 2008). The means-ends chain model (Gutman, 1982) posits that people consume a product as a means to achieve their desired ends. Based on this framework, we conceptualize there are three clusters of desired ends of consuming sports in general. While some of the ends can be satisfied by both live attendance and alternative mediated methods, there are other ends that can only be satisfied by either live attendance or mediated consumption.
Sports consumers have different desired ends. One of the predictors is consumers’ personality traits (Ko, Jang, Sagas, Spengler, & Cho, 2015). The big-five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism to Experience) suggested by Digman (1990) are the most widely accepted approach to understand individuals’ personality. And this typology can be used to explain their unique experiences between the mediated consumers and live sport spectators.

Additionally, fan identification is one of the most salient benefits of sport consumption (Delia & James, 2015). It is likely a key variable that differentiates mediated consumers and spectators. There are numerous frameworks, which often involving a psychological continuum from a low involvement to high involvement level, to differentiate fans (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997). Those different levels of fan identification can have different needs, which will be subsequently reflected in their consumption practice.

Method

A phenomenological approach is employed in order to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual sport consumer’s experience with different consumptions (Patton, 2002). This approach can be useful for detecting an essence to sport consumer’s behavior of the internet to examine unique expressions and to identify the essence. Following others who have emphasized the importance of context and lived experience in sport research (e.g., Bowers & Green, 2013), a phenomenological approach to interviewing was taken. Interviews were conducted until common themes saturated. A purposive sampling method is used. Interviews lasted 60 to 90 minutes per participant. The interview is accompanied by a questionnaire. The questionnaire is used to subdivide the sport consumers’ characteristics by using Big-Five personality and fan identification. Personality is measured by using Digman’s (1990) Big-Five personality traits (Digman, 1990) and fan identification is measured by Sutton et al. (1997).

Results and Discussion (In progress)

Through a pilot study with 15 interviewees, some unique motives have been extracted from the mediated sports consumers, such as possibility of multitasking, flexible access, and less consumption uncertainty. This study is currently in formal data collection stage, expected to be completed by early next year. The results of this study and managerial implications for sports marketers and managers will be discussed in this presentation.

References


