Empirical Examination of the Critical Factors in the Sport Consumption Decision Making Process of Millennial Sport Fans Using the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior

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Recently, the Millennial generation, has emerged as an important consumer generation due to their unique characteristics: technology-driven, connected, interactive, having viral impact, authentic, transparent, adamant about sharing opinions, invested in “cause marketing,” highly networked, collaborative, focused on community, and consistent on active participation in the creation and development of products (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Therefore, many marketing researchers in various fields have paid attention to Millennials and identified several consumption-related traits for Millennial consumers: (a) community-driven (e.g., Barker, 2012); (b) emotional (e.g., Getz & Carlsen, 2008); (c) peer pressure-influenced (e.g., Fromm & Garton, 2013); (d) adamant that their voices be heard (e.g., Bolton et al., 2013); and (e) technology-driven (e.g., Herbison & Boag, 2009).

Sport industry is not immune to this phenomenon. However, only few research attention has been garnered. For instance, Yim, Byon, Baker, and Zhang (2016) identified five Millennial sport fan traits that included (a) technology usage, (b) peer pressure and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), (c) social interaction, (d) emotional consumption, and (e) wise consumption (rational choice + desire to be comfortable) through a triangulation method. Then they compared the five traits among the three following segments: (a) Millennials, (b) Baby Boomers, and (c) Generation X. The results showed that Millennials showed significantly higher scores for all five factors than the older generations, indicating the identified five factors were indeed salient to the Millennials. Nonetheless, questions remain unanswered. For instance, to what extent the five factors explicate sport consumption decision making? To fill the void, the current study aims to propose Sport Fan Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (SFMGB) that merged Model of Goal-Directed Behavior (MGB; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001) and the five factors that explain Millennial sport fan characteristics to expound Millennial sport fan behaviors. MGB contains attitudes, positive and negative anticipated emotions, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, desire, intentions, frequency of past behavior, recency of past behavior, and behavior. MGB was modified to fit the sport marketing context using a few more variables that help explain sport consumption of the Millennials. As such, the Sport Fan MGB includes the following Millennial sport fan-specific variables: past satisfaction, fan engagement, team identification, and fan community identity.

Using the Sport Fan MGB, four goal-directed sport consumption behaviors of Millennials were examined: (a) revisit intention, (b) TV viewing intention (c) online behavioral intention, and (d) social media behaviors. As such, a total of 15 hypotheses were proposed for the purpose of the study. Data were collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk (N=603; 222 Millennials, 139 Baby Boomers, and 242 Generation X). Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted for all four behavior models and yielded acceptable model fit. Next, the path relationships of the Millennial (n = 222) Sport Fan MGBs were analyzed by testing multiple hypotheses through SEM analyses. Ten of the fourteen hypotheses were supported; hypotheses 3, 6, 12, and 13 were not supported. More specifically, for all behaviors, attitude and past satisfaction were found to be significant predictors of desire. Perceived control, past satisfaction, team identity, and desire were significant antecedents of behavioral intention. Attitude was significant for all behaviors except for social media consumption, indicating that Millennial sport fan attitude toward social media did not influence their sport consumption desire or intention. Subjective norm was found to be significant only for social media consumption. Subjective norm (i.e., peer pressure) has been found to explain Millennial consumer behavior in the other consumption context such as automobile purchasing (Fromm & Garton, 2013) and tourism (Kim & Jang, 2014), and the motivation to look good to peers is one of the strongest factors in Millennial consumption (e.g., Barker, 2012; Smith, 2012). This finding may imply that Millennial sport fans perceived social networking participation as an acceptable behavior to peers and one they felt obligated to do. The explained variances (R-square) were .62 for attendance desire and .70 for attendance intention. The R-square value was .70 for TV viewing desire and .71 for TV viewing intention. The variance explained was 68% for online activity participation.
desire (80% for intention) and 68% for social media activity participation desire (25% for intention). In sum, the Sport Fan MGB was found to better explain fan behaviors such as attending events, viewing events on TV, and online consumption than the fan behaviors such as social media consumption behaviors.

Through the invariance tests at the CFA (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), SEM (Byrne, 2012), and the corresponding path coefficient t-test levels (Chin, 2004), the moderating effect of generation was found. Specifically, the strength of path coefficients indicated that there were no growth patterns of a certain variable’s effect based on the generational order, implying that the moderation effect was found not because of the age factor but because there were three distinct consumer segments divided by generation.

This study has several theoretical and practical implications for sport marketers. First, this study is the first to explore Millennial sport fan behaviors to identify critical factors that influence their decision making. Second, this study extended the MGB model by incorporating sport fan-specific variables that are unique to spectator sport consumption, such as team identity, fan community identity, past satisfaction, and fan engagement. Third, this study identified that MGB model better explains game attending and TV viewing behavior than social media consumption behavior. Several marketing implications are suggested. First, the consumption differences identified in this study were not due to age but generational difference. The moderation effect of generation was confirmed, so instead of age segmentation, generational segmentation is suggested. Second, as the findings indicate, for the Millennial sport fans, social media consumption is habitual behavior, not goal-directed behavior. The frequency of social media consumption is likely greater than other goal-directed behaviors, making the already appealing mobile advertising market even more attractive when targeting Millennials. When a sport organization wants to reach Millennial sport fans and wants to increase their brand or team awareness, SNSs are likely be a good place to launch new campaigns. Third, subjective norm was found to be a significant antecedent of social media consumption among Millennial fans than the other generation fans. Sport marketers could use this information in their marketing strategies. For example, if sport marketers want to increase their Millennial fan event attendance, they should frame advertising to show that attending the event will be “cool” among Millennial sport consumers.