Beyond Spectator Sports: Scale Development and Validation for Mediated Sports Consumption

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Spectator sports, embedded in the fabric of tradition and way of life, have been established as part of the greater culture in the United States. Spectator sports play a significant part in sports consumption behavior (Shank & Lyberger, 2014) as evidenced by an increased gate revenue from $17.7 billion in 2014 to $18.3 billion in 2015 (Forbes, 2015). However, the rapid development of media technologies has transformed the way sports fans consume sporting events. Sports fans utilize a combination of media channels to follow their favorite teams or athletes. American viewers saw more than 43,700 hours of live sporting events on broadcast and cable television provided by 26 national cable networks in 2012 (Nielsen, 2012). One apparent technology-driven change is the increase of consumption of sporting events via online outlets. 68% of fans consume sporting events through online sources and over a third of fans in the U.S. using social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube to consume sports in 2014 (SportBusinessGroup, 2014). Various media outlets facilitate contemporary sports fandom culture. As a result, sports consumption through mediated channels leads to a new category of sports spectators (Dwyer, Shapiro, & Drayer, 2011).

Mediated sports refers to sports programming at multidimensional channels that are distributed to sports fans as alternative solutions to spectate live sporting events, including home television, on-line streaming, social media, and sports bars (Kim & Mao, 2016). Mediated sports consumption, accordingly, is defined as the consumption of sports contents using multiple mediated distribution systems as opposed to live sports spectating. While mediated sports consumption has gained significant attention in the sport industry due to the diversification of opportunities for sports fans, they also challenge the traditional form of sports consumption (e.g., live attendance). For example, Sanderson (2011) argued that social media lures audiences away from traditional distribution. Similarly, past studies showed that the nature of sport can have fluctuated due to the media consumption, especially Twitter (Hull & Lewis, 2014; Sanderson, 2011); as a result, shifting in the audience new marketplace (Clavio & Walsh, 2014).

To date, many scholars have studied the continuous growth of spectator sports in the United States (Ross, 2006; Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003). Various quantitative studies have examined the factors that influence motivation to attend sporting events. For instance, Trail and James (2001) developed the Motivation Scale for Sports Consumption (MSSC) and discovered nine different motives that can be used to better understand sports consumption. Wann (1995) empirically developed a scale to measure spectator motivations (e.g., eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economic, aesthetic, group affiliation, and family). In addition, many researchers have conducted analyses of sport fans’ live attendance behavior (e.g., Funk & James, 2004; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000; Trail & James, 2001a; Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008; Wann, 1995; Wann, 2001; Wann & Ensor, 1999). Other researchers have conducted various studies to further understand sports consumer’s motivational differences, such as gender difference (James & Ridinger, 2002), various demographic differences at the collegiate level (Snipes & Ingram, 2007), relationships between fans of different sports (Robinson & Trail, 2005), and individuals’ varying team attachments (Koo & Hardin, 2008). Most of these studies were based on the live attendance of sports events (Dwyer et al., 2011).

There is only a limited body of research that has examined factors that drive mediated sports consumption (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Seo & Green, 2008). For instance, Trail and James (2001)’s research has considered the relationship between consumer motivation and media consumption. Considering an increasingly high demand for mediated sports, it is necessary for sport marketers to understand mediated sports consumers’ behavior as well as predict mediated consumption decisions.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to examine what motivational dimensions lead to mediated sports consumption; and (2) to develop and validate a motivational scale for mediated sports consumption. While a variety
of types of mediated sports consumption has become increasingly global, there is an overall lack of research in the context of mediated sports consumption. Therefore, developing a motivation scale of mediated consumption will make an important contribution to better understand spectator behavior within the context of the mediated sports realm. A conceptual framework is first formulated through a comprehensive review of the literature. Next, a taxonomy of mediated sports consumption is explored through a qualitative research and free thought-listing survey. Following the development of a framework, the Scale of Mediated Sports Consumption (SMSC) will be developed. We anticipate that this study will contribute to the academic discussion of mediated sports consumption by broadening the scope by which we see sports spectators, by going beyond live sports spectating and opening the door for sport marketing into the growing area of mediated sports consumption.

To ensure content validity of the SMSC, the items of the scale will be based on the following three sources: (a) qualitative research through interviews, (b) free-thought listing survey, and (c) the literature review. Kim and Mao (2016) have reported preliminary results of a qualitative study. They found that multi-games access, multi-tasking, low cost, recordability/ownership, sociability, programming/storytelling, convenience, emotional hedge, fanship, socialization, entertainment, and team support were the motives for mediated sports consumers. To ensure an adequate sampling of the construct domain, a free-thought listing survey and further literature review will be conducted. Free-thought listing survey is often used in marketing studies for establishing consumer brand association (e.g., Chen, 2001; Ross et al., 2006). The preliminary scale will be then submitted to an expert panel for content validity check, followed by a pilot study. Based on the results of pilot study, we will further refine the scale. For the main study, we will test the scale with a sample of mediated sports consumers. Various aspects of construct validity, including discriminant validity, convergent validity, and nomological validity will be considered. The implication for sports managers will also be discussed.