A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Sport Spectators' Patience

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Sport spectators are provided with a variety of services while watching sports. Many studies have attempted to explain and uncover the factors that affect spectator behavior. Understanding concept or theories that influence sport spectator behavior aids sport marketers in the successful delivery of services. Furthermore, when spectators have a good experience at the facility and are satisfied with the services provided, they are more inclined to attend repeatedly. Service satisfaction has been shown to encourage spectator's attendance as well as revisit intentions (Theodorakis, Koustelios, Robinson & Barals, 2009). The service process model provides some insight as to how the self-perceived awareness about the quality of the spectator experience influences service satisfaction (Bittner & Hubbert, 1994). More specifically, within the service process model, the process of service delivery (PSD) outlines important factors related to the performance of a service (Gronroos, 1984). According to the PSD, service satisfaction is dependent on duration of the service, work area appearance, employee appearance, empathy, assurance, employee effort, reliability, and customer participation. It is important to understand each of these factors to maximize spectator satisfaction and, more importantly, to minimize dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction occurs when the service performance is less than the customer's expectation. Dissatisfaction can lead to emotional responses such as annoyance or anger, but most spectators remain patient and control such negative emotions. Then, what is it that makes a spectator patient?

Consumer patience can be affected by many situational factors. According to Metcalf & Mischel (1999), “patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate trouble or delay without getting angry or upset.” Patience is especially focused on the management of a consumer’s internal state. Limited research has investigated the factors that influence consumer patience in a sports spectating context, even though an understanding of the processes behind patience and self-control can potentially produce positive developmental outcomes (Pincoffs, 1986). One set of processes known to be important in understanding patience is the exertion of willpower and desire (Hayashi, Ko, Strafella, & Dagher, 2013; MacDonald, Cohen, Stenger, & Carter, 2000). The ability to maintain self-control is not only influenced by environmental factors, but also by the relative strength of two opposing forces, desire and willpower (Stephen & George, 1991). The desire and willpower framework makes it clear that there are two distinct forms that self-control attempt can take: desire-based and willpower based. Although past research has suggested that desires, impulses, and urges may play an important role in the execution of self-control (Schmeiche & Cindy, 2010), the plethora of studies have focused mainly on willpower. This may be due to desires being characterized as dynamic and changing over time. Moreover, past studies on self-control do not conceptualize and summarize the two factors of desire and willpower in patience process. Therefore, the current study will focus on conceptualizing the two sub-factors of self-control, which are desire and willpower.

Much of the literature has recognized that individuals have some ability to control their own desire. In our framework, we outline three desire-based self-control tactics which are: (1) avoidance, (2) distraction, and (3) substitution. These three tactics have been known to reduce desires by undoing reference-point shifts. Based on the previous research, Grégoire et al. (2009) define avoidance as the direction of behavior away from negative event. For example, distancing strategies are a form of avoidance (Rook & Hoch, 1985) in which consumers walk away before they feel an impulse to purchase a product that they desire, but do not need. Distraction is one of the most effective means of delaying undesired emotional states. For instance, while directing attention to the delayed-goal object will most likely increase the frustration felt while waiting for their goals to manifest, distraction, on the other hand, reduces the annoyance and arousal that accompanies the typical waiting period (Stephen & George, 1991). Substitution involves offering oneself a small but immediate reward for successfully resisting a larger impulse. Substitution is to provide acceptable urgent satisfaction to endure the deprivation associated with waiting, perhaps simultaneously distracting oneself from the original desired objective. Impatience may occur when the reward is not readily available (Klesges et al., 1989).
The second factor influencing self-control is willpower. The idea of overcoming desires is opposed to the rational choice perspective, which assumes that people try to satisfy, rather than to overcome, desires. Willpower can be seen as “the effort of the farsighted self to constrain the behavior of the myopic self” (Ainsle, 1985). Sjoberg and Johnson (1978) said, “to have a strong will means being able to stick to an initial well-balanced decision under various forms of pressure”. In this framework, we outline three willpower based self-control tactics which are: (1) precommitment, (2) higher authority, and (3) regret and guilt. Precommitment can be understood as any physical, cognitive or behavioral device through which people constrain themselves or alter the incentives for future behavior. Appealing to a higher authority involves invoking higher-order principles such as religious doctrines, peer groups, or the desired self. In such cases, even trivial violations can be treated as significant transgressions against the individual’s beliefs. Lastly, research in the field of decision making under uncertain situations has acknowledged that people tend to avoid actions that they anticipate regretting in the future (Bell, 1982). Continuing this line of thought, it is natural to assume that consumers may also anticipate future guilt and shame. In other words, the possibility of feeling guilt may cause an individual to activate willpower while fear simultaneously reduces immediate desires. This guilt induced willpower and fear induced desire-reduction may be one of the most effective methods of enacting self-control.

Upon review of literature, understanding the mechanisms behind the service process satisfaction and spectator patience framework can provide valuable insights for sport management practitioners. The current study has conceptualized the manifestation of patience as a process through which the factors of service delivery (employee appearance, duration of service, employee effort, etc.) influence dissatisfaction, and in turn such dissatisfaction is regulated through desire-based and/or willpower-based strategies of self-control. This framework has several unique implications. By conceptualizing a framework in which the concept of desire and willpower are included, we can recognize that self-control is not only dependent on environmental factors, but also an individual’s ability to enact desire-based, willpower-based strategies, or combination strategies.

As for practical applications, by taking into consideration willpower and desire, sport managers can better identify aspects that induce patience when spectators encounter dissatisfying services. Furthermore, depending on the characteristics of the service that caused the dissatisfaction, strategies to induce customer patience can be identified and categorized, enabling sport managers to create situation-based strategies and retain customers.