Behavioral Concepts in Sport Consumer Decision Making: A Systematic Review

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Understanding what leads individuals to consume the product of sport is central to the study of sport management. Studies on sport attendance benefit from a diverse and substantial body of scholarship (e.g., Funk & James, 2006; Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995), which is threaded together by researchers’ shared interests in better understanding the extent to which variety of factors (e.g., motives, identification levels, relationship quality) influence sport consumers’ spectating choice and decision. Though studies on sport consumer behavior benefits from the extensive body of work, sport consumption behavior research is largely based on rational choice model (Kim, 2018). This normative model of consumer, which describes what people should do, is often inconsistent with the actual consumer choices. Extensive judgement and decision-making research has shown that sole reliance on the normative theory leads the researcher to make systematic and predictable errors in describing and predicting actual consumer choices (Thaler, 2015). Behavioral economics applies psychological insight into human behavior to explain the systematic differences. Sport is filled with examples of gaps between the normative model and the descriptive models (Humphreys, 2015) and seems well suited for the adoption of behavioral theory to sport management research. There have been some economics studies on a few behavioral ideas (e.g., Hot Hand). However, there is a general lack of research on various behavioral concepts. Particularly, there is very limited research applying behavioral theories on sport consumption decision-making and behavior. Thus, the purpose of this study is to conduct a systematic review on behavioral theories explaining sport consumption decision-making and behavior, by offering an exhaustive summary of current literature, identifying previous research limitations, and discussing beneficial opportunities for future sport management research.

Our systematic review identifies examples and topics of behavioral concepts explaining sport consumer decision-making; researchers can use the findings to help make sense of actual sport fan behaviors, design future studies, and offer modifications for the way in which sport business practices are conducted.

1. Systematic bias in predicting the probability of winning. Fans tend to systematically overestimate the probability of their team winning and consequently overestimate the utility of future consumption experience.
2. Illusion of control. Fans treat chance events (e.g., win) as controllable outcomes and believe their effort and concentration will influence the outcomes of sporting events.
3. Imagination. Both counterfactual and prefactual thinking can influence the valence of fan emotions after the game.
4. Loss aversion. The negative consequences of losing are larger than gains of winning a game. Overall, following sport is likely to causes fan more unhappiness than happiness.
5. Hedonic Framing. Fan’s value function appears to follow hedonic function, which segregate gains, integrate losses, integrate smaller losses with larger gains, and segregate small gains from larger losses.
6. Present bias. Fans have tendencies to discount the future payoffs that are further away from the present and fans are optimistic about future gain.