Assessing a Conceptual Framework with Sport Consumers’ Social Media Engagement and Subjective Well-Being: In the Context of Regulatory Engagement Theory

Bomin Paek, University of Northern Colorado
Alan Morse (Advisor), University of Northern Colorado

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As technology has advanced, various sport consumption patterns have emerged, such as those on social network services (SNS) (Funk, 2017). Sports organizations have adopted SNS to engage with sport fans and improve positive sports experiences. However, SNS have caused difficulties for sport entities in utilizing these resources (Tsiotsou, 2016) and exploring benefits they can obtain from these sites. To identify the development of engagement and positive service outcomes, adopting the Regulatory Engagement Theory (RET) is recommended (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). The RET approach mainly focuses on the ways consumers’ value and wellbeing are driven by engagement (Hepi, Foote, Finsterwalder, Carswell, & Baker, 2017). By implementing RET, sport managers can better understand ways to “reach” consumers and the roles of SNS. The purpose of this conceptual model is (1) to identify the positive outcomes of SNS engagement and (2) assess how SNS consumption can produce subjective wellbeing for sport fans.

Our conceptual framework includes three major components – SNS engagement, perceived value, and subjective wellbeing – and consists of three propositions. First, sport consumers’ SNS engagement will strengthen the degree of their perceived value. Higgins (2006) argues that the intensity of engagement influences value estimates. Through increased engagement, marketers can strengthen a consumer’s attraction to positive objects (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). Second, sports’ perceived value will strengthen the state of consumers’ subjective wellbeing. Perceived value holds great explanatory power in positive attitudinal properties, such as wellbeing. Also, the intensity of value produced through routine activities transfers into consumers’ wellbeing (Finsterwalder, Foote, Nicholas, Taylor, Hepi, Baker, & Dayal, 2017). Finally, sport consumers’ perceived value plays a mediating role between SNS engagement and subjective wellbeing. RET dictates that engagement strength will enhance wellbeing through the value intensity between a service provider and a consumer (Higgins & Scholer, 2009). The perceived value plays a mediating role between service factors and sporting event consumption (Byon, Zhang, & Baker, 2013).

By reflecting on technological changes such as SNS and positive psychological processes, this paper will dedicate a broad range of research to exploring the roles of SNS and identifying their particular needs and positive emotions. In sport literature, studies concerning consumers’ engagement has been primarily focused on attendance and licensed sport merchandise, but not on social media. Although past scholars have used social media engagement to examine why sport consumers engage in social media activities, relatively little attention has been paid to how such behaviors influence sport consumers’ minds. Thus, research on whether SNS engagement influences consumers’ positive psychological states has been lacking. Investigating the trajectory of SNS engagement based on the RET can fill this research gap in sport management literature. This approach will illuminate the overall engagement decision-making process. Furthermore, focusing on SNS engagement and perceived value can provide benefits for sport managers in (1) assessing which types of social media engagement they must focus on to improve SNS exchange, (2) understanding how much SNS marketing influences consumers’ psychological states, and (3) better evaluating how sport consumers interact with the sport team by using SNS.