Benefits of Team Identification for Social Well-Being of Middle-Aged and Older Adults

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Understanding what enhances consumer well-being is important for service organizations (Chan & Mogilner, 2017). Sport scholars addressed this inquiry by investigating the relationship between spectators’ identification with a competitive team and social well-being (e.g., Inoue et al., 2015; Wann, 2006). However, despite the aging trend of sport fans (Lombardo & Broughton, 2017), we know little about how team identification is connected with social well-being among middle-aged and older adults.

The current research investigated how middle-aged and older adults’ identification with their favorite team is associated with social life satisfaction, a key indicator of social well-being (Eckersley, 2000). Drawing from the social identity approach (SIA) to health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009) and theory of socioemotional selectivity (Carstensen, 2006), we hypothesized that the association between team identification and social life satisfaction would be established by perceived social support from other fans of a favorite team and the team’s perceived on-field performance. We also expected these relationships to be moderated by age groups (middle-aged vs. older adults).

An online panel service was used to collect data from residents (35 years or older) of U.S. metro areas where at least one major professional team or NCAA Power 5 conference school was based. The sample consisted of 960 U.S residents, including 197 middle-aged (35-64 years) and 763 older adults (65 years or above). All study constructs were measured with multi-item scales, whose reliability and validity were established based on the results of a confirmatory factor analysis.

The hypothesized structural model fit the data well: χ²/df = 2.22, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .04, SRMR = .04. Specifically, the indirect effects of team identification on social life satisfaction via perceived social support (β = .10, p < .01) and perceived on-field performance (β = .03, p < .01) were positive and significant. Regarding the moderating effects of age groups, the first interaction variable, Age Groups × Perceived Social Support, yielded a nonsignificant coefficient (B = .08, p = .29). In contrast, the second interaction variable, Age Groups × Perceived On-field Performance, had a significant negative association with social life satisfaction (B = -.12, p = .02), suggesting that the relation between perceived on-field performance and social life satisfaction is weaker for older adults than for middle-aged adults.

Our findings support the theoretical efficacy of the SIA to health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009) by revealing that perceived social support and on-field team performance connect team identification with social life satisfaction for middle-aged and older adults. These results provide insights into the psychosocial benefits of groups (team and its fans) with which spectators identify (Wann, 2006), adding to sport consumer research that has explored factors affecting spectator well-being beyond objective success measures (Jang et al., 2017, 2018). The moderating effect of age categories further highlights the importance of considering ages when examining the self-presentation needs of sport spectators (Trail et al., 2012). Practically, the evidence from this study points to different tactics sport organizations can employ to enhance spectators’ well-being.