Can't Avoid The Bad Calls? Impact of Post-Match Interview Message Type on the Emotional Fluctuation

Jinwoo Ahn, University of Florida
Joon Sung Lee (Advisor), University of Florida

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Unfortunately, a bad call is a ubiquitous and unavoidable phenomenon in the context of sport (Balmer et al., 2007). However, the literature has yet investigated the impact of the bad call on fans’ emotional fluctuation during the game. Thus, by employing the excitation transfer theory (ETT; Zillman, 1973), this study investigates how negative emotion (intensity) triggered by a bad call affects sport spectators’ emotional fluctuation at the end of the losing game due to the bad call. Moreover, we also test the impact of post-match interview message type (i.e., process- vs. outcome-focused) on the emotional fluctuation.

According to the ETT, people tend to misattribute their emotions from a previous event to the immediate environment and an excitation does not instantly disappear but lingers while affecting the level of emotion triggered by following situations (Dutton & Aron, 1974). Thus, we posit that arousal (i.e., negative intensity) evoked by a bad call during a sport match can be boosted by a negative end result of the game such as loss. Moreover, people tend to justify their intensified feelings by blaming others (Golden, 2018). Thus, we posit that a post-game interview message with outcome-focused message while strongly blaming the missed call could relieve the fan’s stress or intensity.

Lastly, we consider fan identification (ID) as a moderator in this context because the literature found that high ID sport fans are more sensitive to game results (Wann et al., 1999). Thus, we hypothesized that:

H1: Highly identified fans will experience a higher level of intensity after watching a losing game because of a bad call compared to lowly identified fans.

H2: Outcome-focused interview blaming the bad call will have a better-alleviating impact on post-match intensity among highly identified fans compared to lowly identified fans.

For a 2 (Team ID: high vs. low) x 2 (Bad call: with vs. without) x 2 (Message type: outcome- vs. process-focused) mixed (between- and within-subjects) experimental design, the preliminary data (n = 54) was collected from a university from Southeastern region (high ID group) and Mturk (low ID group). After watching the last two minutes from the university based on a random assignment, the participants reported their current arousal, intensity, hedonic, and vitality levels before and after watching the video. Furthermore, the participants were either randomly assigned to fictitious process-focused or outcome-focused interview scenarios and asked to answer their emotions again.

The high ID fans’ intensity increased more in the bad calls game (M = 1.91 to M = 4.28; p < .01) compared to the lowly identified fans (M = 2.70 to M = 3.50; p < .05): H1 supported. Also, the intensity decreased among highly identified fans in the outcome-focused interview condition (M = 4.60 to M= 3.82; p < .05) compared to the lowly identified fans (M = 4.00 to M= 4.75; p = .169): H2 supported. There was no significant difference in process-focused interview conditions between the two groups. Implications of this study will be further discussed during the conference after collecting main data.