Exploring the Sequential Processes of Spectators’ Emotional Experiences: The Comparison Between Real-Time and Anticipated Team Performance

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Given that emotional responses to sports games change dynamically in terms of variability and intensity (Chang, 2019), it is imperative to identify the processes of spectators’ emotional experiences. By exploring context-specific emotional responses, we attempt to elucidate the dynamic and sequential nature of spectators’ emotional responses.

Emotional responses to sports games unfold over time with a variety of emotions because spectators often confront ever-changing game content (Raney, 2006). In particular, game outcomes (i.e., winning vs. losing) determine spectators’ overall emotional state (Jang, Wan, & Ko, 2018); if a spectators’ favored team is currently winning (or losing), they tend to experience positive (negative) emotions. Nonetheless, spectators may experience oppositely valenced emotions (i.e., hope and fear) corresponding to their anticipation of outcome-changing events.

H1: Anticipated outcome-changing events induce spectators’ ambivalent emotions.
H1a: When spectators’ favored team is losing, but they anticipate outcome-changing events of their supporting team, they will experience anger and hope simultaneously.
H1b: When spectators’ favored team is winning, but they anticipate outcome-changing events of the opposing team, they will experience happiness and fear simultaneously.

If spectators anticipate continued scoring of the currently winning team, they may not experience oppositely valenced emotions. That is, if their supporting team is currently winning and anticipate continued scoring of their favored team, they will experience positively valenced emotions (i.e., happy and hope). Conversely, if their opposing team is currently winning and anticipate continued scoring of the opposing team, they will experience negatively valenced emotions (i.e., anger and fear).

H2: Anticipated continued scoring of the currently winning team strengthens the existing emotional state.
H2a: When spectators anticipate continued scoring of their favored team, they will experience happiness and hope.
H2b: When spectators anticipate continued scoring of the opposing team, they will experience anger and fear.

Method

In a laboratory setting, participants are randomly distributed to one of the four types of Major League Soccer game highlights for 10 minutes: 2 (outcome: victory vs. loss) × 2 (scoring: back-and-forth scoring vs. one-sided scoring). In the back-and-forth scoring game, the reversal occurs twice throughout the game that results in a final score of 3:2. For the one-sided scoring game, one team scores five goals in a row without any loss. While participants are watching the game, they were asked to indicate the level of four emotions (i.e., happiness, hope, anger, fear) in every 1 minute in the modified affect grid (Russell et al., 1989). After the highlights end, perceived meaningfulness (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) and overall emotional response were measured. ANCOVA and Post hoc comparisons of least-squares means using Tukey’s HSD will be utilized.

We are currently collecting the data by targeting 200 participants and will ensure that we present the results and implications at the conference. This study contributes to the literature by exploring the sequential and dynamic processes of spectators’ emotional experiences.