

Review Article

The Relationship between Sport Consumer Motives and Team Identification in Division I College Football

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Abstract - As the attendance at college football games has continuously decreased over the past years, it has become important for college athletics marketers to understand what brings people to attend games. One of the factors that are frequently discussed in the literature in relation to game attendance is team identification. That is, those with high levels of team identification are more likely to attend games. Then, what factors contribute to team identification? In this study, the impact of spectator motives (vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, escape, knowledge, social interaction, and physical skill) on team identification was examined in the setting of Division I college football in the United States. The data were collected from 1154 Division I football attendees using a paper-pencil self-administered survey method. The results revealed that seven motives all together explained 50.8% of the variance in team identification. When looking into individual motives, the motives of vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction showed a significant association with team identification. The findings of the study suggest valuable guides to college athletics marketers by providing information on what types of promotional strategies they need to develop to increase the attendees' team identification.

Keywords - Motives, team identification, vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, social interaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Spectating sport is one of the popular leisure activities in the United States. As attending a sporting event has become more popular, the amount of money spent on this activity and the number of people who attend a sporting event have been increasing steadily over the years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), it was estimated that 20.7 billion dollars were spent on spectator sports in 2009. This is approximately a 78.4% increase from 2000 and a 1% increase from the previous year. In addition, it was estimated that 4.9 million people attended college football events in 2010, which was 2.8% more than the previous year and a 27.2% increase compared with the attendance in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). However, recent evidence shows that national college football attendance has been decreasing in the past few years. According to NCAA (2019), college football attendance

has decreased by over 4.7% in the years between 2016 and 2018. The attendance of the Division I football program itself has decreased by 4.5% over the past 4 years (NCAA, 2019). Therefore, it has become more important for college athletics marketers to acknowledge what factors influence game attendance and come up with strategies that will bring the spectators to the seats.

A. Team Identification

One of the factors that play an important role in game attendance is team identification (Peden, Upright, Hey, & Jordan, 2015). The concept of team identification drives by social identity theory. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), one's identity consists of personal identity and social identity. While personal identity is formed based on an individual's distinctive characteristics and interests, social identity is composed of one's belongingness to particular groups, which can range from demographic related groups (such as, gender and ethnicity) to membership to an organization (such as religion and work) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). That is, if someone belongs to a group (i.e., having an association with an organization), he/she feels "a oneness with or belongingness to the organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p.104). In this sense, being a fan of a team enables a person to feel a sense of belonging to the team, providing a distinctive social identity to the individual.

Over the decades, researchers have suggested that one's level of team identification is a strong predictor for sport consumption behavior, such as purchasing game tickets and team merchandise and attending games (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002; Kim, Rogol, & Lee, 2019). According to Rocha and Fleury (2017), strong team identification is significantly associated with many positive attitudes and behaviors consumers show to the team they are identified with. Similarly, researchers have long argued that people with a high level of team identification exhibit different consumption behavior compared to those with a low or medium level of identification (Fink et al., 2002, Murrell & Dietz, 1992). Particularly, previous research supports the relationship between team identification and game attendance (Fink et



al., 2002; Kim & Trail, 2010; Leon & Lionel, 2012; Peden et al., 2015; Rocha & Fleury, 2017). For example, Kim and Trail (2010) found that people with strong team identification are motivated to attend games, whereas Leon and Lionel (2012) discovered that one's level of team identification was a significant predictor for game attendance at a professional hockey game.

B. Motives

Due to the significant role team identification plays in-game attendance, it is crucial to identify factors that impact team identification. One of the commonly discussed factors in the past literature is motives which explain why people attend sporting events. In fact, many researchers have suggested that the motives for attending sporting events are closely associated with team identification (Fink et al., 2002; Kim & Trail, 2010; Trail & James, 2001).

In an attempt to understand why people attend sporting events, several researchers suggested that Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory could be well used in explaining fan motivations (e.g., McDonald et al., 2002; Sack, Singh, & DiPaolo, 2009). According to Maslow, motivation is one class of determinants of human behavior, and individuals' behavior is determined based on their needs which include physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The center of the theory is that human needs are hierarchically organized. In other words, once an individual's basic needs, such as physiological needs (e.g., hunger or sleepy), are satisfied, the person seeks a higher level of needs, such as self-esteem or self-actualization. This theory suggests that motivations also differ in magnitude and kind. That is, one particular need may be more salient than another. In addition, a person can have multiple motivations at a time because one's motivation is biologically, culturally, or situationally changing (Maslow, 1970).

Previous literature demonstrated that Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs theory is an appropriate base for explaining sport fan motives, although not all five general needs may be applicable to them. According to Sack et al. (2009), affiliation, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs are suitable for fan motives. For example, people attend a sporting event to satisfy a group affiliation. Also, people may attend a game to feel vicarious achievement which enhances their self-esteem. The need for self-actualization can be met when people appreciate the game itself as a source of personal enrichment. McDonald et al. (2002) also categorized different sport motivation constructs into Maslow's needs hierarchy. The researchers classified risk-taking, stress reduction, and aggression as physiological needs, and affiliation and self-esteem as social needs for spectators. In addition, risk-taking, stress reduction, self-esteem, competition, achievement, skill mastery, and aesthetics belong to self-esteem needs, whereas aesthetics, value development, and self-actualization were identified as self-actualization need for spectators.

Sports fan behavior is also well explained by other theories. Sloan (1989) discussed several motivational theories, such as salubrious effect theories, stress and stimulation theories, catharsis and aggression theories, entertainment theories, and achievement-seeking theories in terms of sport fan motives. Although these theories were originally used for explaining sport participation motivation, Sloan stated that they could be well applied to sports spectatorship. Sloan (1989) also indicated that the motivations might vary depending on the situation and type of sport. These theories have led to numerous proposed motives relative to spectators and their behavioral patterns in sport-specific situations.

Salubrious effect theories suggest that involvement in sport is motivated by pleasure and increased physical and mental well-being (Sloan, 1989). According to these theories, people watch sporting events because it contributes to their well-being by helping them restore their energy by providing an escape from their work and daily life. Stress and stimulation theories indicate that when levels of risk, stress, and arousal fall below desired levels, organisms will seek opportunities to increase arousal intensity, and people can reach these desired levels of stress and arousal by watching sports because it provides vicarious stresses and experiences. Catharsis and aggression theories suggest that being a spectator of aggressive acts will either result in a reduction of aggression levels or increased levels of aggression. The underlying assumption of these theories is that people have aggressiveness in their nature that needs to be relieved periodically. Entertainment theories indicate that attractions to the sport are based on the aesthetic and moral representations derived from the meaning of the sporting events. Achievement-seeking theories indicate that individuals fulfill their need for achievement through athletic competition. The notion is that by associating themselves with a successful entity, people feel the success of the entity as their own (Sloan, 1989).

Deriving from Sloan's (1989) viewpoint on motivational theories in relation to sports fan behavior, Trail et al. (2000) identified several motives that could be applied to spectator sports consumption. These motives include Vicarious Achievement, Acquisition of Knowledge, Aesthetics, Drama/ Eustress, Escape, Physical skill, Social interaction, and Family. In fact, many researchers had used these motives when they examined spectator motives for various types of sport (e.g., Fink & Parker, 2009; Gencer, Kiremitich, & Boyacioglu, 2011; James, Fujimoto, Ross, & Matsuoka, 2009; James & Ross, 2002; Kwon & Armstrong, 2004; Kwon & Trail, 2001; Robinson et al., 2005; Won & Kitamura, 2007; Woo, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009).

Vicarious Achievement. According to Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (1993), sport is considered as an achievement-oriented activity. Vicarious achievement can come from both participating in sport and spectating sport. In fact, researchers suggested that some of the main motivations

and consequences are similar for sports participants and sports spectators since spectators participate in sporting events vicariously (Sloan, 1989; Zillman, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1979). Vicarious achievement takes the form of “basking in the reflected glory” of their teams and/or athletes (Wann, Schrader, & Adamson, 1998). People have the desire to maintain positive self-esteem, and sport spectating provides this opportunity to people by associating themselves with successful teams or athletes. That is when their team wins, people feel achievement and accomplishment as they have won (McDonald et al., 2002; Wann, 1995; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999).

Acquisition of Knowledge. According to Fink et al. (2002), acquisition of knowledge is defined as “The need to learn about team or players through interaction and media consumption” (p. 198). Researchers suggested that this is one of the motives for consuming spectating sports because spectators attempt to transfer knowledge obtained through spectating sports (McDonald et al., 2002). Past research demonstrated that the need for the acquisition of knowledge is influenced by the level of identification. That is, fans with a higher level of identification have more knowledge of statistics, history, rules, and strategies than those with a low level of identification (Lever, 1983; McPherson, 1995). In addition, Wann and Branscombe (1995) argued that fans tend to search for their team-related information, such as players and history.

Aesthetics and Physical Skills. In terms of aesthetics/physical skills motives, researchers indicate that some people are motivated by the beauty of athletic performance (Wann et al., 1999). According to Smith (1988), people may be motivated by “excellence, beauty, and creativity in an athlete’s performance” (p.58). Although it is common to associate aesthetics with artistic sport such as figure skating and gymnastics, it is often said that other sport also has aesthetic values that come from well-performed skills (McDonald et al., 2002; Wann et al., 2008; Sargent, Zillmann, & Weaver, 1998). Although Madrigal and Howard (1999) argue that aesthetics and physical skills belong to the same dimension due to their high correlation, other researchers (e.g., Trail & James, 1999; Trail et al., 2000; Wann, 1995) claim that these two constructs are distinct, therefore they need to be tested separately. According to Trail et al. (2000), individuals can still appreciate their favorite team/athletes’ physical skills when the performance is unsuccessful.

Drama/ Eustress. Eustress refers to a positive stress or stimulation that energizes individuals. In spectating sport, fans are often motivated by eustress because sporting events generate anxiety and excitement, which is drama (Wann et al., 1999). This drama comes from the nature of sport whose game outcome is always uncertain (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; Kim et al., 2009; Trail et al., 2000, Shamir & Ruskin, 1984; Sloan, 1989; Wann, 1995). Researchers claim that spectating experience is enjoyable because it stimulates the senses they seek

(Zuckerman, 1979); therefore, eustress/drama becomes one of the important spectating motives.

Escape. Trail et al. (2000) defined escape as “a diversion from work and everyday activity” (p. 401). According to Smith (1988), sport provides an opportunity for people to escape from their “humdrum daily routines” (p. 58). In addition, sport spectating enables people to forget about their dissatisfied and/or stressful times while consuming sport (Wann et al., 2008). Many researchers showed that escape is an important motive for sport spectators (e.g., Gantz, & Wenner, 1991; Madrigal & Howard, 1999; Shamir & Ruskin, 1984; Sloan, 1989; Smith, 1988; Trail et al., 2000; Trail & James, 1999; Wann, 1995).

Social Interaction. Social interaction motive refers to “the need to interact and socialize with others of like interests to achieve feelings that one is part of a group” (Fink et al., 2002). For many people who attend sporting events, social interaction is an important motive because they attend the games with family members, friends, and business associates to spend time with them (McDonald et al., 2002). Also, it includes interacting with other spectators to enhance human relationships (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009). Much research demonstrated that social interaction is one of the most salient motives for spectating sports (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003; Wann et al., 2008). Understanding the motive of social interaction is crucial because sporting events provide an opportunity to bring disparate peoples together in communal experience (Kutcher, 1983; Melnick, 1983; Wann et al., 1999) or a sense of community (Klein, 1991).

Following the findings from the previous literature and theoretical framework on the relationship between motives and team identification, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the impact of different motives (i.e., vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, escape, knowledge, social interaction, and physical skill) on team identification among Division I college football attendees in the United States.

II. METHODS

A. Participants

The participants for this study were spectators attending Division I level college football games in the United States. A total of 1154 college football attendees completed the questionnaire at the football games in several universities located in different regions of the United States. Of the respondents, 609 (52.8%) were males, and 542 (47%) were females. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (n=913, 79.1%) followed by Hispanic (n=91, 7.9%), African American (n=68, 5.9%), and Asian (n=42, 3.6%). 88.6% (n=1022) of the respondents reported themselves as single, while 8.7% (n=100) reported themselves as married. The average age of the participants was 22.94 years old.

B. Measurement

The data were collected using a self-administered measurement scale. The motives were measured using the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) developed by Trail and James (2001). The original scale included family as a motive. However, the current study excluded the motive of the family as the previous studies had suggested that family is not a motive showing low reliability with the other motives (Robinson & Trail, 2005). The total number of items used to measure the motives was 21: vicarious achievement (3 items), aesthetics (3 items), drama (3 items), escape (3 items), knowledge (3 items), social interaction (3 items), and physical skill (3 items). Team identification was measured by 4-item Team Identification Index developed by Trail, Fink, and Anderson (2003). Good construct reliability, internal consistency, and discriminant validity of these scales have been reported in the previous research. Each item in the scales was measured using a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). Demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status were also included in the questionnaire.

C. Data Collection Procedure

Several volunteers were recruited and trained to help with the data collection. Those volunteers distributed and collected the survey questionnaire at the gates of multiple football games. The purpose of the study and the participants' rights were explained when distributing the questionnaire. In addition, informed consent, which included information about the research, and other important information regarding research ethics, was given to the participants at the beginning of the questionnaire.

D. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics were analyzed first to have an understanding of the characteristics of the study participants. Then, Cronbach's alpha for each scale was calculated to examine the internal consistency of each scale. In addition, the discriminant validity of the scales was calculated by computing the correlations between the constructs. Upon establishing the reliability and validity of the scales, composite mean scores on each scale, mean, standard deviations were calculated. Lastly, the contribution of different motives on team identification was analyzed using multiple regression.

III. RESULTS

A. Measurement Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of each scale was established by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients. According to Nunnally and Berstein (1994), an alpha coefficient of .70 or greater indicates a strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha for all the scales included in this study exceeded the recommended value of .70. Alpha coefficients for vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, escape, knowledge, social interaction, and physical skill

motives were .91, .90, .87, .87, .91, .90, and .89 respectively. In addition, the alpha coefficient for team identification was .98. In terms of discriminant validity, correlations among the research constructs were calculated. Any correlation greater than .85 indicates a lack of discriminant validity between the constructs (Kline, 2005). As demonstrated in Table 1, none of the correlations exceeded the recommended value of .85, confirming the establishment of discriminant validity among the constructs. The mean, standard deviation of each scale, and correlation coefficients between the research constructs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables

	M	SD	TI	VA	AE	DR	ES	KN	SI	PS
TI	4.77	2.36	1.00	.367*	.183*	.001	.297*	.336*	.350*	.345*
				*	*		*	*	*	*
V	3.41	1.68		1.00	.575*	.116*	.458*	.544*	.336*	.413*
A					*	*	*	*	*	*
A	4.21	1.52			1.00	.296*	.424*	.534*	.355*	.626*
E						*	*	*	*	*
D	5.50	1.32				1.00	.396*	.317*	.414*	.465*
R							*	*	*	*
ES	4.96	1.45					1.00	.538*	.525*	.518*
								*	*	*
K	4.39	1.61						1.00	.452*	.545*
N									*	*
SI	5.29	1.31							1.00	.548*
										*
PS	3.81	1.34								1.00

Note. TI = Team Identification, VA = Vicarious Achievement, AE = Aesthetics, DR = Drama, ES = Escape, KN = Knowledge, SI = Social Interaction, PS = Physical Skill

B. Multiple Regression

Prior to running simultaneous multiple regression to investigate the relationship between different spectator motives and team identification, the assumptions of regression analysis were checked. Regarding the sample size, Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) suggest that 15 to 20 participants for each independent variable included in the study are required for the analysis. The number of participants for this study was 1154, which greatly exceeded the recommended sample size. The normality of the data was also checked using skewness and kurtosis. The results displayed that none of the variables violated the assumption of univariate normality. In addition, the Durbin-Watson value, tolerance, and variance inflation factor showed that multicollinearity was absent between the independent variables. Therefore, the overall results indicated that the dataset was good for further analysis.

Then, simultaneous multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the impact of different spectator motives on team identification. Team identification was regressed on seven spectator motives. The result for the overall model showed that the model was highly significant at $p < .001$ level with $F = 62.907$. It was demonstrated that seven spectator motives included in this

study all together explained 50.8% of the total variance ($R^2 = .527$, adjusted $R^2 = .508$) in team identification among spectators at Division I football games in the United States. Regarding the individual motive, motives of vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction had a significant impact on team identification ($p < .001$). However, the motives of knowledge, physical skill, and escape did not significantly contribute to team identification. The result of simultaneous multiple regression analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Simultaneous Regression Analysis of Team Identification on Spectator Motives (N = 1154)

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p
Vicarious Achievement	.348	.048	.248	7.317	.000
Aesthetics	-.360	.057	-.232	-6.351	.000
Drama	-.428	.053	-.240	-8.014	.000
Escape	.084	.055	.052	1.527	.127
Knowledge	.176	.051	.120	3.462	.001
Social Interaction	.370	.059	.206	6.324	.000
Physical Skill	.516	.067	.293	7.681	.006

Note: $R^2 = .527$; Adjusted $R^2 = .508$; $F = 62.907$, $p < .001$; Standard error = .314

IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of seven different motives on team identification in the setting of Division I college football in the United States. The findings suggested that the seven motives together explained a significant amount of variance in team identification, and the motives of vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction were significant predictors for an individual's level of team identification. In addition, it was revealed that the motives of escape, knowledge, and physical skill did not significantly predict team identification among Division I college football attendees included in this study.

The findings of the current study are consistent with the previous literature. For example, of the eight motives included in the study, Fink et al. (2003) demonstrated that vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction were the significant predictors for team identification among college basketball spectators in the United States. This study, though conducted in a different sport setting, replicated the previous findings suggesting vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction significantly impacting team identification. The link between the motive of vicarious achievement and team identification can be explained by the fact that people tend to emphasize their association with successful others to increase their self-esteem (Sloan, 1989). In addition, as many people develop strong team identification due to teams' style of play, the close association between aesthetics and team identification may come naturally (Fink et al., 2003). Also, similar to the previous findings, the uncertainty of game outcome (i.e., drama) contributed significantly to team identification (Kim et al., 2009).

Lastly, the link between social interaction and team identification can be explained by the fact that sport offers a unique opportunity to act collectively with the other fans. This further fosters the concept of 'we' among the fans, which can increase the level of team identification (Woo et al., 2008).

The results have both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical standpoint, this study confirms the findings from the previous research in a different sport setting. Previous research demonstrated that different spectator motives are significantly linked to team identification in college basketball; particularly, vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction have the most significant impact (Fink, et al., 2003). This study not only verified the established relationship between motives and team identification but also showed that the study findings are consistent in a setting of college football. From a practical standpoint, the findings from the current study can assist the marketing directors in Division I sport athletic department. The athletic department can take the results of this study and develop specific marketing strategies. That is, as the findings of this study showed that vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama, and social interaction are the important predictors of team identification, teams can develop promotional strategies that can meet the needs of people who attend the games for those particular reasons to increase their levels of team identification.

The current study has several limitations. First of all, a convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit the participants for this study. Therefore, it is possible that the sample of this study does not represent the entire college football attendees at Division I level, raising the issue of generalizability. Secondly, this study included seven motives suggested by Trail and James (2001). However, understanding motives is such a complex process. It is possible that there are other motives that were not included in this study that may have a significant impact on team identification. Furthermore, the current study used self-reported measures when measuring variables included in the study, which means the accuracy of the data depends on the willingness of the participants to give accurate information.

Addressing the limitations mentioned above, future studies should replicate the current study using a random sampling technique. By using random sampling, the sampling bias can be kept as minimal, and the outcomes of the study can be generalized into the research population. In addition, many recent studies suggest that there are more types of spectator motives besides the ones included in this study. Future researchers should investigate if these newer categories of spectator motives can better explain the variance in team identification. Furthermore, although team identification is closely related to different types of motives and further leads to game attendance, the motives may have a direct impact on attendance without going through team identification. Therefore, the direct influence of different types of motives on attendance and/or intention to attend the game should be investigated.

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