

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAN'S INTEREST AND MEDIA COVERAGE: THROUGH CLASSIFICATION OF THE MLB RIVALRY TYPES

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Abstract

Introduction

Competition is evident throughout all levels of sport. Particularly, the level of competitiveness is often regarded as the perceived value in consumers mind. It is through competition that rivalries are formed. These rivalries may have originated from factors such as the geographic location of the teams, league conferences and divisions, and competitive history. Moreover, sport rivalries are unique to the teams, players, fans, and cities involved. The competitive relationship amongst sport rivals creates a bond between fans. Rivalry fans not only consume sports in various manners and various levels, but they are becoming a prime target for sport marketers and sponsors. Rivalries exist in other industries as well. Rivalries relative to sport, however, have the ability to bring in direct monetary profits for both teams due to the ability to charge price premiums for tickets and the increased media coverage given to rivalries.

Literature Review

Sports rivalries are built by skilled athletes and coaches who compete, season after season, in high-pressure games, creating vivid traditions that flourish with the passing years. Koo and Hardin(2008) stated that there is an emotional attachment to team rivalries, thus marketers should take advantage of this and promote the idea of rivalry in every sport. Additionally, Luellen and Wann(2010) stated that rival salience is particularly valuable for sport marketers to use in an effort to increase levels of fan identification. Moreover, print media has been highly appreciative of the unique value of sports. Many sports fans purchase and read newspapers for the variety and in-depth coverage given to sport(Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). According to Coakley(2009), 25% of the content in major newspapers are devoted to sport. As

such, it is important to understand the types of sport rivalries prevalent in the media as well as those among sport fans.

Aim of Paper

Although sport rivalries are an important part of the sport product, to date there has been no prior research investigating the relationship between sport rivalries and media coverage. The purpose of this study was to 1) categorize a rivalry typology, 2) investigate which rivalry types are more attractive to fans, 3) determine whether sport consumer s rivalry tastes are reflected in print media.

Methodology

An online survey was conducted by students who were enrolled in sport management courses at a large Midwestern University in the United States, and Facebook users(i.e., social media website users) registered on the fan pages of all 30 Major League Baseball(MLB) teams. It was the most effective way for data recruiting and survey administrations. The sample (n=102) consists of 70.6% males and 29.4% females. Based on the survey data, the rivalry types were classified (see Table 1). The current study also investigated how the rivalry types influence the sports consumption behaviors. Additionally, a content analysis was performed to investigate print media preferences given to MLB rivalry types. Newspaper(33.9%) was the third most used media for fans to get news about their favorite team. The scope of the content analysis utilized MLB articles found in the USA Today, a nationwide daily newspaper with significant amount of sport coverage, from April to July 2010 (i.e., the first half of the regular season). Since an inter-coder reliability coefficient of 95% was found, results were considered acceptable for this study.

Results/Discussion

MLB rivalry types were classified by common categorical criteria. Respondents considered same division/league(35.6%) as the most important criteria, followed by geographic adjacency(26.7%), and history between teams(15.3%). Interestingly, the data analysis revealed fans were significantly willing to spend more money for the rivalry ticket based on their preference ordering ($F(1,86)=65.31, p<.05, \eta^2=.43$). For instance, mean score of the spending for the division/league rival game was \$70, while subjects were willing to pay only \$58 for the games with two geographically adjacent teams, and \$27 for the game of the historic rivalry.

The content analysis results showed a total of 250 MLB articles were found among 1,569 articles in the sports section. Among the total MLB articles, only nine(3.6%) were related to rivalries, of which five(55.5%) were division/league rivalries, two(22.2%) were historic rivalries, and two(22.2%) were geographical rivalries.

The results of this study provide a better understanding of the type of rivalries considered prevalent among MLB fans and the amount of media coverage devoted to each. Certain types of preferred fan rivalries could be applied to the strategic marketing initiatives of sport organizations. Since the scope of this study is limited to MLB rivalries, future studies should attempt to investigate other professional leagues in order to classify rivalry types inclusive of all sports.

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