
COLLECTIVE FAN IDENTIFICATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TEAM RELATED CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

AIM OF PAPER

This study aims to distinguish between individual, relational and collective levels of fan identification and analyze the relatedness of these different level identifications with sport consumers' behavior. Identification, as a frequently visited construct, has been evidenced as a strong predictor of fans' consumption behavior. However, many researchers operationalize the concept as a single construct or as a multi-dimensional psychographic scale on individual level. In contrast to this, collective level identification may improve our understanding of fandom's social impact by extending fan attachment concept to relational and collective dimensions. Better understanding of fandom's social impact will also contribute to prediction and management of different sport consumption outcomes (i.e. media viewership, game attendance, public viewing, fan community participation, social media activities, etc.). In this regard, a multidimensional scale to measure "Collective Fan Identification" will be constructed and will be examined according to its psychographic properties and nomological contribution to the sport consumption behavior literature.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Identification is an intensively investigated concept in fan behavior studies. Wann and Branscombe (1991) defined it as the psychological attachment to provide a sense of belonging to a larger social structure (team). Although there is a consensus to some degree on the definition, operationalization of the construct varies significantly. One of the most cited identification measures, Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann and Branscombe, 1991), is criticized for being a uni-dimensional measure in spite of the current identity theories in social psychology literature (Heere and James, 2007). By building on the conceptual propositions of Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), Heere and James (2007) developed a multidimensional "Team Identity Scale".

The team identity concept compasses not only the individuals' psychological connection with a group, but also the individuals' perceptions towards the group attributes in a broader social context. Another study on collective identity by Brewer and Gardner (1996) proposed to approach identification as a self-representation process. They distinguished between the personal, relational and collective levels of identity. Following their footsteps Cooper and Thatcher (2010) developed a framework to model the organizational identification and the underlying self-orientations and identification targets. In accordance with these propositions, this study will investigate fan identification on three different levels as individual, relational and collective identification to better comprehend the social and communal aspects of sports consumption.

METHODOLOGY

Identification studies in the literature are examined on the conceptual and operational basis, and scale items are generated, collected and evaluated according to the theoretical definitions of individual, relational, and collective identification. These items will be further analyzed in terms of their psychographic and nomological properties with a sample of fans from diverse soccer teams. Data will be analyzed with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to assess the reliability and validity of the scale. Nomological value of collective fan identification will be examined through structural models in which the dependent variables are utilized as fans' team related consumptions. All the data and the results will be completed before EASM conference.

RESULTS and IMPLICATIONS

Results of the study are expected to enable both scholars and practitioners to differentiate between individualistic and collectivist patterns of sport consumers. Both parties may benefit to comprehend the highly fragmented nature of sports audiences by distinguishing between different levels of fan identification (i.e. individual, relational, collective, etc.). Integration of diverse income sources such as gate revenues and media right agreements (both traditional and digital) can be structured more efficiently by segmenting the sport consumers on the basis of different level fan identifications. Besides, findings may help sport managers to find better ways of engaging fans with the team community and increasing loyalty by comprehending the social aspect of fandom.

References

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