Origin of Fan Identity

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Abstract.

The purpose of this research is to identify the origin of fans' identity while analyzing levels of commitment to teams. In order to measure fan commitment, the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) (Wann, 1993) was used. Additional questions were added to the survey instrument to measure demographics and factors most crucial for identifying the origin of team commitment. After IRB approval and informed consent, surveys with missing or skipped questions were removed resulting in a sample of more than three hundred (n=346). Initial results indicate sport fan identity is a multifaceted process involving differing motivations and origins. The factors of family, regional location and uniform color scheme appear important to many fans. Recommendations are provided to sport and physical activity practitioners.

1. Introduction

It is interesting to see sports teams that have success but don't have many fans. This is more common at the collegiate level then at the professional level of sports. Humans are very complex and understanding motives can be difficult. Understanding the initial motive to be a fan of a team is a topic where there is little research. The purpose of this research is to see what the most common origin of a fan's identity to a team and then compare this information to their level of commitment to that team using the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS). Wann suggests there are eight motives related to fan identity. These eight motives can be broken up into two categories: intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivations include escape from everyday life, economic factors, self-esteem, group affiliation, and family motivations. Intrinsic motivations include eustress, entertainment, and aesthetic qualities. When these eight motivations are compared to the Sport

Spectator Identification Scale, "highly identified fans reported a particularly strong inclination for intrinsic motivation" (Wann, Ensor, & Bilyeu, 2001). Highly identified fans are determined by the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann, 1993). Essentially highly identified fans can be "super fans" and are less likely to decrease their association with the team or denounce their loyalty than are moderately or less identified persons (Wann, Branscombe, 1990). By understanding the concrete motives of the origin of fan identity, marketers can tailor their tactics towards those motives. There is a lot of research already completed that will benefit from knowing the origin of fan identity. To identify the origin of fan identity we have chosen factors that include location, family relation, past attendance, color scheme, star players and coaches, philosophy and tradition, and success of team.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

Participants:

Respondents for this sample were Wichita State University undergraduate students (full-time or part-time). We decided to sample a non-sport related/ general education class to ensure the variety of backgrounds, ideas, and majors of the student's responses and two sport management classes.

Measurement:

The first section of the questionnaire we decided to use the SSIS (sports spectator identification scale) from Wann & Branscombe (1993) because it is an accurate scale in determining sport fans' allegiance to a team. The respondents answered 6 questions and each question scored using a Likert-scale format ranging from 1 to 8. The overall scale is from 7 to 48. Higher numbers represented greater amounts of allegiance to the individual team.

The second section of the questionnaire we created 7 questions based on different origins of fan identity. Each question was scored base on; strongly

disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree (1, 2, 3, & 4 respectively in coding scale). The higher the number, the stronger the origin of the respondents' fan identity.

Procedure:

Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the surveys were distributed to all the present students in multiple courses, non-sport and sport related, which constituted the purposive sample. The questionnaires distributed to the respondents included, demographic questions (such as class, age, and sex), personal opinion questions (such as favorite sport, favorite team, and the number of years as a fan), the SSIS and questions about how the fans originally selected their favorite teams.

Table 1:

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Males	151	43.6%
Females	195	56.4%
Classifications		
Freshmen	29	8.4%
Sophomore	107	30.9%
Junior	136	39.3%
Senior	74	21.4%
Race		
White	260	75.1%
Black	28	8.1%
Asian	13	3.8%
Native American	3	0.9%
Latino	31	9.0%
Other	11	3.2%

Statistical Analysis:

The first section of the questionnaire was the SSIS which examines the level of fan commitment to an individual team. The t-test results show there was a statistically significant difference between sport management students and non sport management students (37.70 vs. 26.74, t=-7.22, *df*= 344, p<.001). This means that sport management students have a higher level of fan commitment then non sport management students.

The second section of the questionnaire asked questions about the origin of the participants' identity with an individual team. There was a statistically significant difference between sport management students and non sport management students in regards to the origin factor of color scheme (3.41 vs. 2.78, t=-4.09, *df*= 343, p<.001). This means that sport management students strongly agreed that color scheme was a factor in initially determining their fan identity. Moreover, there was a statistically significant difference between sport

management students and non sport management students in regards to the origin factor of team philosophy (2.14 vs. 2.47, t=2.02, *df*= 344, p<.05). This means that sport management students did not see team philosophy as a factor in initially determining their fan identity.

Figure 2
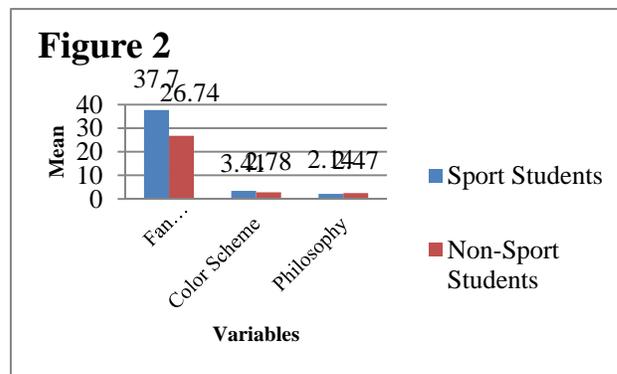
5. Conclusions

Testing the origin of fan identity is important to see if it adequately applies to the relationship between the fan and their favorite sports team. According to the results we can conclude that sport management students have a high level of commitment to their favorite sports team. We can also conclude that a teams color scheme and philosophy are significant factors in initially determining a fans identity with an individual sports team.

Wann reported that fans with a high level of commitment to a team are intrinsically motivated. Aesthetic qualities such as color scheme are an intrinsic motivation which correlates with the outcome from our questionnaire. The more highly identified sport management students identified color scheme as a factor in their initial decision to support an individual team.

6. Acknowledgements