Avid Fan’s Impact on Casual Fans

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Avid Fan's Impact on Casual Fans

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, here is the paper's first paragraph: The lifeline of the sporting industry is the fans that attend the games, purchase merchandise, consume media, and passionately follow their favorite team or sport. Sport organizations do whatever they can to attract fans to their games and entice them to buy more tickets, merchandise, concessions and consume more of their team through social media, visits to the team website, and following the team. A critical area for these sport franchises to examine is why fans attend sporting events and what makes them a loyal fan of a certain team. Does the arena or stadium influence whether a fan attends a game? Does the team's performance impact the fan's decision? Do fans attend the game for pure entertainment because they have no attachment to the team? There are many reasons why a fan attends a game but another aspect to look at that has not been investigated thoroughly is what makes fans return to games. Sporting events have a high cost for the consumer because the fan needs to spend money on gas, parking, tickets, food, merchandise and the sporting event costs time in the fan's day. When a fan attends a game, why would they make the monetary and time commitment that is necessary for a sporting event? There are many possible answers to this question but one valid answer is differentiated because of the lack of knowledge on the subject. For this reason, my research question is: how does fan avidity impact the return of another fan?

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Avid Fan’s Impact on Casual Fans

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Sport Management Department

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Introduction

The lifeline of the sporting industry is the fans that attend the games, purchase merchandise, consume media, and passionately follow their favorite team or sport. Sport organizations do whatever they can to attract fans to their games and entice them to buy more tickets, merchandise, concessions and consume more of their team through social media, visits to the team website, and following the team. A critical area for these sport franchises to examine is why fans attend sporting events and what makes them a loyal fan of a certain team. Does the arena or stadium influence whether a fan attends a game? Does the team’s performance impact the fan’s decision? Do fans attend the game for pure entertainment because they have no attachment to the team? There are many reasons why a fan attends a game but another aspect to look at that has not been investigated thoroughly is what makes fans return to games. Sporting events have a high cost for the consumer because the fan needs to spend money on gas, parking, tickets, food, merchandise and the sporting event costs time in the fan’s day. When a fan attends a game, why would they make the monetary and time commitment that is necessary for a sporting event? There are many possible answers to this question but one valid answer is differentiated because of the lack of knowledge on the subject. For this reason, my research question is: how does fan avidity impact the return of another fan?

If a sport franchise knew the answer to this question, they could tailor the game, team, or experience to maximize the return of fans. A franchise could use this to target first-time consumers and change their game presentation to make it an electric, enthusiastic atmosphere that would be inviting and contagious to fans which would make them become more invested in the team. If the answer to this question was known, students and future professionals in the sport industry could form new marketing or financial techniques in order to be successful in the future
and influence the direction of a sport franchise. The academic world knowing this information could change how students learn about the industry and how the fans as a group are a powerful tool in generating and maintaining support for the team and organization.

**Literature Review**

**Measuring Fan Avidity**

Many researchers focus on how avid a fan is or how a fan exhibits their “fandom” at a sporting event for their favorite team. To the researchers, fan avidity is defined as “the level of interest, involvement, passion, loyalty, and loyalty a fan exhibits” (DeSarbo, 2009). Using this definition for fan avidity, DeSarbo creates a spatial model that distinguishes varying levels of fan avidity. The most basic dimension of fan avidity is trying out for a sports team. This requires participation in sport but the level of spectating an event is not included in the first dimension. The second dimension is passively listening to a game, watching a game, following a game online without committing any monetary funds to the organization or having any emotional attachment with a specific team. The next level of avidity includes fans that purchase memorabilia, tickets, apparel, and enrolling in fan clubs for a specific team which shows a passion and attachment with a team. The highest level of fan avidity in this study looks at fans that purchase season tickets, attends home and away games, and attends post-game parties. This highest level of fan avidity focuses on the social aspect of sports and belonging to a group that all share a common passion in a specific team.

In another study examining the avidity of soccer fans in England looked at three themes, the first being the acquisition of core knowledge, the second being the allocation of resources, and the last theme is the routinization of everyday life (Dixon, 2011). The first theme asks fans
how they became a fan which reveals that many of the fans participated in the sport or acquired the passion or knowledge from family members (Dixon, 2011). In the second theme, avid fans owned their favorite team’s apparel or merchandise and regularly dedicated time and money to spectate their favorite team. In the third theme, the researcher looked at how fans create a routine that involves their favorite sport team in nearly every aspect of their lives. When that routine is broken, the fans experience emotional upheaval as indicated in Dixon’s research, ‘The first time I wasn’t at the match on a Saturday afternoon when I should have been …the overriding emotion was fuckin’ hell; I felt lost. I just felt anxious. I know it sounds stupid but that’s what I felt’ (291). Similar to DeSarbo (2009), Dixon finds that the most avid fans are ones that incorporate their passion for their team into their everyday lives.

The previous researchers looked at how fan avidity is measured and how the most avid fans incorporate that into their daily lives. Another researcher looked at how fan avidity can increase ones social status among their peers. End and Dietz-Uhler (2004), examined sports fandom as a predictor of social status in a college atmosphere. The group of sports fans is comprised of many individuals but in this study, it was found that participating in sport or being a sport fan added to a person’s popularity. End and Dietz-Uhler found that being a sport fan was ranked as the third most important factor in popularity for a male, compared to the seventh ranked determinant for females. End and Dietz-Uhler provide a compelling argument of why people would become sports fan or become more vested in sports because sports have infiltrated nearly every facet of society. Although this study reveals an explanation of why fans become avid fans, a weakness of this study is the lack of defining what a “sport fan” is and what behaviors are seen in a sport fan.
Motives for Fan Attendance

Measuring fan avidity is one aspect in examining fans in general; the other important factor to consider is what brought fans to the sporting event in the first place. The dominant theory looking at this factor is Wann’s study (2008), which says that there are eight distinct motivational factors that influence a fan’s desire to attend a sporting event. These factors consist of entertainment, group affiliation, family ties, escape, eustress, aesthetics, economics, and self-esteem. The entertainment motivator states that people attend a sporting event because the event is perceived as an enjoyable pastime. The eustress factor examines the positive stress that comes from attending a sporting event. People have “a desire to gain excitement and stimulation through sport” (Wann, Grieve & Zapalac, 2008). In the escape factor, the fan escapes from his or her life by attending a sporting event and being involved in the fandom. Financials are also involved in the motivation in attending if a person has a wager on the outcome of the game which Wann calls the economic factor. The group affiliation factor is the need of an individual to be with friends and sport fans like to consume the sport as a group. Similar to the group affiliation factor, the family factor states that sports act as a time for the family to spend time together. Finally, the aesthetic motive is seen in fans of single-person sports such as ice skating because those fans enjoy the beauty of the sport and not the competitiveness of sports.

Wann’s eight motivational factors are a widely accepted theory, but many different factors also can affect a fan attending a game. One of these factors is how the fan feels towards a player or the team. In one study, American fans are more motivated if they have an emotional attachment to a team (Kwon & Trail, 2001). When fans have strong emotional attachment to a team, they are more motivated to attend games more frequently compared to an attachment to an individual athlete because that athlete may not play every game (Kwon, 2001). In another study
examining how organizations build fan interest in different stages. These stages start with need recognition which is the fan realizing they need to have entertainment in their lives. The second stage is tension reduction which is attending a game and being relaxed and reducing stress, similar to Wann’s eustress. In the third stage, drive-state, the fan begins to have a drive or motivation to attend a game. The want stage is when the need for entertainment becomes a want in the minds of the fan and the final stage is goal-directed behavior which is when the organization can influence the consuming behavior of the fans (Funk, Filo, Beaton & Pritchard, 2009).

When fans are interested in a specific sport, the level of sport does not affect motives for spectators (Robinson, Trail & Kwon, 2004). In this study, golf spectators were examined and it was found that gender and levels of sport did not have an effect on the motives for fans. Also, this study states that fans show attachments to certain players because of vicarious achievement that they feel through a certain player. This is similar to having an emotional attachment with a specific sports team (Robinson, 2004).

As many may think, attendance is largely based on team performance, if fans feel an emotional attachment. In the outcome of this study, it was found that “successful team performance and game outcomes lead to consumer satisfaction” (Beccarini & Ferrand, 2006). Although successful team performance may increase attendance, if a team is experiencing an unprecedented winning streak or have an exciting player, a new type of fan could emerge which would be a local fan that is only a fan for a certain amount of time, the time of the exciting player or win (Konstantinos, Georgakarakou, Mylonakis & Arsenos, 2012).
Motives for attending a sporting event will also be affected by the gender of the spectator and how they perceive themselves as sports fans. Females consider themselves sports fans at a slightly less percentage than male fans but the level of fandom varies greatly (Dietz-Uhler & Harrick, 2000). Although females identify as sports fans, female fans typically do not participate in sport discussion and they watch fewer sports on television compared to their male counterparts. In regards to attending sporting events, females typically attend for the social aspect, the group affiliation factor (Wann, 2008; Dietz-Uhler, 2000), while males attend sporting events to gain knowledge. Within the female sports fans, there are also separate groups of female fans that attend sporting event for different reasons. One of these groups are tomboy fans are females that adopt the male fan behavior and attire. Tomboy fans will wear worn down jeans and wear baseball caps, while eating hot dogs and drinking beer at the ballpark. The second classification of female fans is females that remove themselves from the event which usually leads to the third classification of the female fans, the accessory fan. In this case, the female accepts that she is an accessory and will take part in the apparel for the reason that her boyfriend or husband has an attachment to the team (Borer, 2009).

Throughout sports, fans are grouped together but there are many different groups of fans that have varying levels of fandom. Reysen and Branscombe’s (2010) study revealed that non-sport fans and fans have little difference. The primary difference between the groups is fans consider themselves fanship to be personal and when a person admits to belonging to a group indicates they have more involvement and attachment to the sport or team. Another study looked at the attraction of fans and the satisfaction of fans comes from the perceived enjoyment of involved fans (Tyler, 2013). Tyler discusses how many fans satisfaction is not affected by the
performance of the team but rather it is affected by the fandom from fans that have a strong emotional attachment with the team.

**Team Identification**

Identifying with a team leads to a strong emotional attachment with a team which will lead to increased fandom. Fans can identify with a team for many reasons, both intrinsically and extrinsically. When fans identify with a team for extrinsic reasons, liking a team because of success, the fans will lose that identification when the team performs poorly (Wann, Ensor & Bilyeu, 2001). In this study, the researchers found that highly involved fans, or highly identified fans, like a team for intrinsic reasons, how the team plays the game, which leads to a better chance of the fan remaining highly identified even when the team performs poorly.

Team identification can also prove to be valuable to the sport organization because they will be able to rely on highly identified fans to remain loyal despite poor performance. Sutton, McDonald, Mime, and Cimperman (1997), state that one of the reasons that will raise team identification within fans is creating group affiliation within the fans. Sutton states that sports act as a way for fans to belong to a group which will increase team identification. When this happens, sensitivity of price and performance are lowered which will increase revenue, despite record (Sutton, McDonald, Mime & Cimperman, 1997).

Group affiliation is a primary reason for high team identification because belonging to a group can increase a person’s well-being. Wann, Theodorakis, Nassis & Luellen (2012), found that with local teams, fans are more likely to have social connections that will increase the feeling of group belongingness. This is similar to Wann and Weaver’s (2009) study that says that fans that highly identify with a distant team do not enjoy the feeling of belongingness compared
to a fan of a local team. This is because of the ability to feel social connections with fellow fans while attending a game. Although fans have a group of belongingness when attending a game, it does not indicate that fans trust other that admit to being in the same group of fans (Wann & Weaver, 2009).

Highly identified fans also typically display aggressive behavior. Branscombe and Wann (1992) looked at fan aggression and found that group-level identification, categorization processes, physiological arousal, and self-esteem cause fan aggression. When fans feel they belong to a group with similar passion, they feel the liberty to defend their group. When fans get violent in defense of the team they have an attachment to they feel as if it is justified and can act as a reinforcing factor (Branscombe & Wann, 1992).

**Behavior of Fans**

As stated previously, highly identified fans typically display forms of aggression towards the opposing team or fans of the opposing team. Whether verbal or physical aggression, many fans enjoy the fan aggression because it acts as an enforcing agent with the crowd. Rookwood and Pearson (2010) state that fan aggression adds to the experience of less identified fans of a team and add to their support for the team. In this study, less identified fans were asked about fan aggression and they responded that the aggression was justified because the violence was provoked by the opposing team’s fans, police, or restrictions placed on fans (Rookwood, 2010). Another study looking at verbal aggression and derogatory behaviors revealed that when fans displayed these behaviors for intrinsic reasons they performed these behaviors more often but also had a higher well-being and social identity, while fans that practiced these behaviors under peer pressure had lower social identity and well-being (Amiot, Sansfacon & Louis, 2013).
Although fans view aggression as enforcing, many fans do not participate in verbal or physical aggression. In Donahue and Wann’s (2009) study, it was found that dysfunctional fans, fans that regularly complained about team, officials, or stadium amenities, were the most likely to verbally abuse the opposing team’s fans. Highly identified fans were also more disapproving of physical aggression but accepted verbal aggression (Donahue & Wann, 2009).

Fans with strong emotional attachment to teams will also display psychological attachments to a team that appears in CORFing and BIRGing. Basking in Reflected Glory is displayed when the team performs well and the fans typically refer to themselves as “we” and “us” while Cutting off Reflected Failure is displayed when the team performs poorly and the fans distances themselves from the team (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloane, 1976). This study shows how fans use sport teams as a way to raise their self-esteem and when they feel they are in a group their self-esteem and well-being are increased. In an extension of Cialdini’s research, Bernache-Assollant and Chantal (2011) reveal that fans also COFF, Cutting off Future Failure. In this research, fans will hold out hope if they are emotionally attached to a poorly performing team as a defense mechanism. Fans that have a strong emotional attachment do not want to abandon their team; instead they will COFF to defend themselves and their team from criticisms.

The atmosphere of the stadium and the fans that create that atmosphere also play a large role in fans being highly identified. The stadium is the home for many teams and what many fans defend along with the team. In Charleston’s (2008) study, the size of the stadium did not affect fans but fans wanted the stadium to be full. When seats are empty, fans feel that there is not enough support for the team and they do not feel the feeling of belongingness. When the stadium is full, no matter what size, fans feel that they are part of a large group with a common goal and
passion (Charleston, 2008). In another study examining the home stadium, it was found that the biggest factor that brought fans back to the stadium was the sensorscape of the stadium (Seunghwan, Hyun Jae, Won Jae & Chris, 2012). The sensorscape is made up of the physical attractiveness of the stadium, the smell and taste of food, and the sightlines from the seats where fans are sitting. It was also found that the “home-field advantage” is more prevalent in the major leagues of sports because fans are more highly identified with a major league team rather than a minor league team where they attend for family entertainment (Seunghwan et. al, 2012).

**Other Forms of Fandom**

Fan avidity can lead to increased revenue from tickets and a sense of home (Charleston, 2008), but it can also bring in extra revenue from merchandise. Sport merchandise is rarely bought for functional purposes but it is instead bought for the communication and symbolic purposes (Apostopoulou, Papadimitriou, Synowka & Clark, 2012). Highly identified fans want to communicate their passion for a team and they also want to show their membership into a group to non-members and members of the same group. Having highly identified teams can also mean more revenue and community relations for the team because it has been found that cause-related marketing campaigns are more successful when they are associated with a sports team because those highly identified fans will purchase nearly anything with their team’s logo on it (Lee & Ferreira, 2011).

Another form of fandom is that of consumption of sport outside of attending a game. Media consumption and consumption of products marketed through sports can also show one’s fandom for a team. Trail, Anderson and Fink (2000) identified factors that influence future consumption that consist of level of identification, expectancies, confirmation of expectancies,
ad self-esteem responses. Many of these factors rely on the performance of the team but the level of identification can be changed by the organization. By making a fan highly identified, an organization can increase the media consumption of that fan. If the team is performing well and in a playoff hunt, that fan, and all fans, will consume more sport through media. If the team is performing poorly most fans will not consume sport through media but the highly identified fans will be more likely to consume sport through websites, TV, and radio (Trail, Anderson & Fink, 2000).

Methodology

Research Tradition

This study will survey participants that have linked themselves to a professional indoor lacrosse team via Facebook. The survey that was distributed through Facebook used qualitative research focusing on the participants’ feelings, emotions, and reactions to highly-identified fans. For this reason, this study is focused around the interpretivist approach because participants have answered the survey questions based on experiences that they have encountered and the feelings and reactions that they had at the time they were seated next to an avid fan.

Conceptual Framework

Highly identified fans are often misrepresented as “harmful and damaging” and shunned by non-hoolifans (Rookwood & Pearson, 2010). This study’s aim is to show that highly identified, avid fans are placed with a false stereotype and to display that highly identified fans are not foolish hooligans but interested fans of the sport and the team. In this study, a highly identified fan was defined as any fan that recognizes they have an emotional attachment to a team and publically displays this attachment to this team by starting or participating in chants
and cheers, wearing jerseys or painting their faces/bodies, cheering for specific players and or coaches, and having conversations with other fans about the team. The less identified fans were identified by the lack of memorabilia or merchandise they purchased, their general interest level in the game or sport, and the lack of participation in chants and cheers. The study measured how the less identified fans reacted to the highly identified fans and how this reaction influences their likelihood to return to another game in the near future. This was measured using qualitative research based on the participant’s feelings and emotions.

**Theoretical Framework**

Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory was used to interpret the data collected. Collins defines rituals as a “mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality; which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership” (Collins, 7, 2004). My study used this theory to analyze the results because many components of the theory are prevalent in spectating sports which will be used to see if “outsiders” wish to become part of the group. When people spectate a sporting event, there is a “group” that as an emotional attachment to the team (highly identified) that create logos, symbols, cheers, a culture to the team which they will defend from outsiders or rival teams. Less identified fans of the same team, upon seeing this loyalty and emotional attachment, wish to be a part of the larger group because of the sense of belongingness.

**Design**

The study was a cross-sectional study that collected data by asking participants to think back to an experience when they were seated next to an avid fan. The data consisted of primary
data that was made up of both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data was coded for the analysis of qualitative data.

**Procedure**

Participants that liked the Rochester Knighthawks (NLL) on Facebook were asked to participate in the survey and sent a link to the survey electronically. The survey collected quantitative data using agree/disagree questions and a Lickert scale. The sample is comprised of fans that have liked the Rochester Knighthawks on Facebook. These fans were chosen because it is a random sample that is comprised of both highly-identified fans and low-identified fans. The sample size is 36 participants. The survey was tested using a pilot test of 10 people to gauge the effectiveness of the questions and changes were made. A total of 6,692 individuals have liked the Knighthawks on Facebook. Using these individuals, every 24th person was sent the survey, given a short introduction, and asked to take it. A total of 262 participants were given a link to the survey with 41 responses for a response rate of 15.6%. Although 41 participants responded to the survey, 5 participants did not answer any questions which bring the sample size down to 36. To analyze the data, the use of SPSS was used to generate a regression to determine the predictability of the less identified fans attending another game because of the highly identified fans, the general emotions felt towards avid fans, and whether being seated next to an avid fan created a needing to belong in the less identified fans.

**Results**

The sample size of the study was 41 respondents but 5 surveys were thrown out because no questions were answered. No demographic questions were asked on the survey regarding age or gender. Out of the 36 participants that answered questions on the survey, one participant only
answered 4 questions but the survey was still used in the data because of the already small sample size and the questions that were answered were used for statistical tests. Many of the questions in the data have 35 responses while four of the questions have 36 responses. The sample size of 36 participants were found to be general sport fans that enjoyed sports and were a fan of the Rochester Knighthawks a mean over 4.00 on a scale of 1-5 (Very low- Very high). Most participants in the survey enjoyed sports and admitted to being a fan of the Rochester Knighthawks. Although fans of the Knighthawks, most participants did not follow social media or in-person news about the team with a mean of 3.31 and 2.74 respectively on a scale of 1.5, but bought team apparel and attended home games often with means of 3.60 and 3.53(1-5 scale). Out of the 36 participants, 83% (30 participants) stated that they have been seated next to an avid fan at any sporting event.

**Highly Identified Fans Impact**

The raw data of the survey was run through a linear regression between the emotions felt by the participants when they sit next to an avid fan as the independent variable and the likelihood of them returning because of the enthusiastic fans. The results of the regression test were an R value of .264 and an alpha value of .126 which suggests that there is a relationship between being enthused when sitting next to avid fans and those fans being a reason why one would return to another game. Through my research, a highly-identified fan does not directly impact the return of another, less-identified fan to another home game. Other factors such as family and alcohol specials were also influential factors in a fan’s decision to return. The factor that caused fans to return was the participant’s family wanting to attend another home game with a mean over 4.00 on a scale of 1-5. The least influential factor was the team’s performance with a mean of 3.17 on a scale of 1-5. Surprisingly, a discount on tickets and the
team performance were the least influential factors, means of 3.57 and 3.17 on a scale of 1-5, on the fan’s decision to return to another home game but enthusiastic fans were influential.

Factors Influencing Fan’s Return

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<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Member of the Group

In the survey, the results showed there was a vast majority of the participants wishing to be a part of the group of highly-identified, enthusiastic fans with 78% of the responses (28) saying they want to be a member of that group. For this hypothesis, a correlation was used between the desire to be a member of the group and the avid fan making another fan more
enthusiastic at the game which resulted in a correlation coefficient of .732. These results suggest that fans that are influenced positively, being more enthusiastic, by avid fans wish to be a member of the group that identify themselves with the home team.

**Emotions Towards Highly-Identified Fans**

For the hypothesis of the emotions felt by the participants towards the avid fans a chi-test was run between having been seated next to an avid fan and the emotions felt while being seated next to the avid fan which resulted in 36 responses to these two questions. The chi-square test resulted in an expected count of 2.5 for fans that had been seated next to an avid fan and those who stated they felt happiness when seated next to an avid fan. The actual count for this cross tabulation was 2. The analysis reported an expected count of 23.3 for fans that had been seated next to an avid fan and stated they felt enthusiasm with an actual count of 23 which is a small difference and suggests there is a relationship between being seated next to an avid fan and feeling happiness or enthusiasm. Although suggesting a positive relationship, the Pearson-Chi Square test reported a value of 1.629 and an alpha of .653 suggesting that there is a high probability of these results being by chance.

A vast majority of fans (78%) that have been seated next to an avid fan before reported that they were enthused when sitting next to avid fans compared to only 5 fans stating they felt angry or annoyed. When asked to describe the experience the participants have had with highly identified fans, most fans responded favorably and admitted that it caused them to cheer more or they enjoyed being around the highly-identified fans which supports Rookwood and Pearson’s claim that fans support their hooligans. Rookwood and Pearson stated that causal fan enjoy hooligans because of the reputation they give to the team and the group of fans. Although not a
part of the hooligan group, these fans support their hooligans because of the reputation of a successful, supportive fan base that has passion for their team.

**Fan’s Emotions when Seated next to Avid Fan**

This table shows that many more fans enjoy being around and seated next to avid fans when attending Rochester Knighthawks games. In the highest response, 20 people agreed with an avid fan making them want to be louder. In the lowest response, only 1 participant stated that they strongly agreed with feeling angry or annoyed when seated next to an avid fan.

Although the survey used quantitative data, one question required qualitative data when the participants were asked to describe and define a fan that exhibits behavior resembling a highly-identified fan. A majority of responses define an avid fan as wearing team apparel and jerseys and having knowledge about the team and the players. Nearly all participants referred to fans as “A person who stays up to date on (at minimum) major team news, owns and wears/displays team apparel/merchandise and attends or watches games regularly.” Another common theme in these responses was being passionate and loud for the team despite the team’s performance by stating avid fans is “passionate,” “a true fan,” “leading chants, always standing
for the team, defending their team,” “always supports when the team is winning and when the
team is losing.” These definitions from the participants show the general positive attitude
towards avid fans.

**Discussion**

This data has given evidence that supports Rookwood and Pearson’s (2010) hypothesis
that fans enjoy their fans, whether they wish to be a part of the group or not. The reputation that
the avid fan base gives to the team and the rest of the fan base is supported by the casual fans
because they wish to be known as a supportive, passionate fan base. Fans enjoy being part of
something successful and if the team is not performing, fans will support something they can
control. This is seen in team performance being the least influential factor in the return of fans to
another home game while family and enthusiastic fans were the highest factors.

This study has been centered on Collins’ Interaction Ritual Theory (2004) and if this
theory could be applied to the sport industry because of the factors that exist in fans that are also
present in the theory. The theory states that when individuals are together in a small space with a
common focus and passion a group will form that will create symbols, logos, and barriers to
outsiders and they will defend their passion from outsiders. From this evidence, it is seen that the
Interaction Ritual Theory can be applied to sports because of the need to belong that fans stated
as having. In the survey, 78% of fans wished to be a member of the group that they perceived to
be avid fans which support the needing to belong in the casual fans. It was also shown that the
casual fans are impacted by the highly-identified fans in a positive way making more avid fans
because of the cheering and yelling that is increased in casual fans when they see avid fans
exhibit this behavior.
This study has shown to be useful to support the hypothesis that casual sport fans enjoy highly-identified fans and that many of them wish to be an avid fan and some participant’s exhibit avid fan behavior while attending games. After analyzing the results, sport managers can further utilize their existing avid fans that attend every home game to create more fans that identify with the team. It has been shown in this study that fans perceive highly-identified fans to support the team despite performance on the field which would allow sport organizations to raise ticket prices slightly and not see a drastic change in attendance because of the passion of fans for the team. Overall, this study has shown the importance of fans and creating a highly-identified fan base because of the inelastic nature that avid fans exhibit. Avid fans will attend home games despite ticket prices or team performance because of the passion they have for the team and game. If a sport organization can create a large avid fan base, a sport organization can be guaranteed to be successful financially despite the team performance.

Although this study was successful in supporting existing theories and proving the importance of avid fans, the participants were asked to respond based on recollection of a time when they sat next to an avid fan. This could create some errors in recollection that could have skewed the data. In future research, a study would need to survey participants while they were seated next to an avid fan in order for true data to be collected. This would allow the researcher to eliminate error based on recollection. This data was also was based on a small sample size with only one team which limits the reach of the results to the entire sport industry. Further research would be needed to replicate these results with bigger samples and across a larger spectrum of sports and regions. This would allow researchers to make more general statements that would canvas the entire sport industry and sport fans. The claims in this study are proven only by a small sample size which limits its credibility and cannot be applied to many other
sports. The research would also need to be based in many other regions in order to cover all American or international sport fans. Many of the participants in this study stated they were interested in the Rochester Knighthawks and in sports in general which could skew the data because many of participants could identify as an avid fan of the Rochester Knighthawks already. In future research, participants would ideally be casual fans that do not exhibit avid fan behavior and do not perceive themselves as avid fans. In order to better understand the emotions and feelings towards avid fans by casual or non-sport fans, participants would need to identify themselves as non-sport fans or casual fans. This could change the data because sport fans could have a different view of those being similar to them compared to non-sport fans which view sports and fandom differently.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fans are the basis of sport organizations that add reputation to the team and support the team financially. Avid fans create an inelastic demand for the team based on their unwavering passion for the team. Sport managers should always consider this importance when dealing with fans and look for every opportunity to create or grow a larger avid fan base.
References


**Appendix**

**Appendix A**

Consent Form

Research Title: Impact of Highly Identified Fans on Less Identified Fans or Non-Fans

Researcher: Cory Law Email: cj05110@sjfc.edu

Professor: Dr. Katharine Burakowski Email: kburakowski@sjfc.edu

Institution: St. John Fisher College

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that highly identified fans have on less identified fans or non-fans and the likelihood of these non-fans on returning to another sporting event. By taking this survey, you are asked to answer these questions honestly and your responses will be valuable in examining the relationship between fans at sporting events. This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

The information that you provide will provide sport organizations on the impact of fans and how to use fans as a tool to attract other fans to attend a sporting event. Fans are an undervalued asset to a sport organization and this research will reveal the importance of fans on the success and growth of sport. Names will not be used in this survey and you, as a participant, will remain anonymous. If you would like to know the results of this research, you may provide
your e-mail address and the results will be provided to you. Your e-mail will not be used for any other purpose.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take this survey or to withdraw from taking this survey at any time. Your decision will be respected and understood. By completing the survey, you give me permission to use your responses in my research and in my study. Your name will not be presented with the results. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this survey, you may contact me or my professor. After reading the information on this study, your role in this study, and having a chance to ask any questions, I invite you to answer the questions on the survey honestly and thank you for your participation in this study.