

탐색적 논문

The Path of Choosing a Favorite Sports Team: Fan Motives on Relational and Behavioral Outcomes

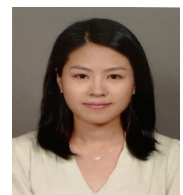
Abstract

Professional sports teams always want to get deep insights into the nature of their fans and develop positive and concrete relationships with them. This understanding determines specific communication methods and types of messages in the social media era. This research seeks to understand gender differences in the motives for being a fan of NFL teams, identify how motives positively lead to relationship outcomes (commitment and satisfaction) and investigate how commitment and satisfaction positively affect sharing of team-related information with others. An online survey was used, and 673 National Football League (NFL) fans' responses were analyzed. The findings of this study show the motives for people to become sports fans and how gender differences play a role in these motives. In addition, the findings confirm the motives that influence one's commitment and satisfaction to their favorite teams and their willingness to share information about the games and sports teams with others. The study provides theoretical and practical implications for public relations and communication practitioners based on the findings and literature review.

keywords: Sports fans, Motives, Relational outcomes, Behavioral outcomes, Gender



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Introduction

The National Football League (NFL) is the most popular professional sports league in America. According to recent data provided by the NFL (AP Press, 2021), approximately 96.4 million Americans watched the Super Bowl game on TV in 2021. However, that viewership was the lowest since 2006. Beyond decreased viewership on traditional media platforms, there have been more changes in the patterns of sports consumption over time, including an increasing number of female sports fans and their attendance at sporting events (Tainsky & Xu, 2016).

To understand the dynamics of sports fans, it is important to identify critical motivations for becoming a fan. Within the literature, social interaction, team success, and the aesthetic value of team-related designs are several factors that are part of these motives (Aiken & Koch, 2009; Kim et al., 2013). There is also a growing body of literature exploring gender differences in motivation because of recent rises in female audiences. Several studies have pointed out that not only do sports fans' motives differ by gender, but so may their level of commitment and willingness to share information with others (Ridinger & Funk, 2006; Wann, 1995).

Considering that the characteristics of sports fans are multifaceted, it is crucial to explore the

motives for becoming a sports fan and the impact of these motives on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The current study seeks to identify gender differences, motives, and how those factors influence fans' relationships with their favorite teams. Sports leagues and involved parties strive to understand people's motives for becoming fans of particular teams from marketing and business perspectives. Knowing these motives will help the sports teams market themselves better to their current fans and help them identify prospective ones.

Therefore, the purposes of this research are (a) to explore gender differences in the motives for being a fan of NFL teams; (b) to identify how motives lead to relationship dimensions, commitment, and satisfaction; and (c) to investigate whether commitment and satisfaction positively affect the level of sharing of team-related information with others. The study discusses the key characteristics of sports fans tied explicitly to the NFL. The paper discusses people's motives for becoming sports fans and how gender differences play a role in these motives. Finally, the paper develops a conceptual framework to explain how these motives influence one's relationship with their favorite team and their willingness to share information about the team and its games with others.

Sports Fans and the NFL

Sports fans can be understood as groups of people who have multiple layers of characteristics. They might be seen as similar groups of customers or spectators of sports teams, but they are not always the same groups of people as sports fans. A sports fan is defined as “an individual [who is] interested in and follows a sport, team, and/or athlete” (Wann et al., 2001, p. 3). Contrasting the definition of sports fans with those of spectators, viewers, and consumers, Wann et al. pointed out that spectators and fans should not be confused because some fans rarely watch games in person. In contrast, some spectators do not identify themselves with a favorite sports team or player.

Meanwhile, Giulianotti (2002) created a taxonomy of spectator identities based on two criteria: hot-cool and traditional-consumer. For example, a “flaneur,” which means stroller or loungeur in French, refers to a cool consumer of sports content who has little solidarity with others. Compared to flaneurs, supporters, and followers, fans are considered “hot” because they strongly identify with a team. Fans’ strong identification with their favorite teams and players can easily lead them to consume team-related products, from tangible items such as t-shirts to media content such as news articles regarding the team. Fans also express their involvement

with and attachment to favorite teams and players by showing their emotions and feelings about team actions on and off the field. For example, they call players by their first names and have nicknames for the team. Compared to supporters, followers, and flaneurs, fans also have solid social solidarity with each other (Giulianotti, 2002).

To suggest another way to understand sports fans’ characteristics, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) defined the difference between fanship and fandom in terms of the direction of a fan’s connection: personal connection to a sports team is fanship, while connection to other fans of the team is fandom. Based on that definition, Reysen and Branscombe suggested using the concepts of fanship and team identification interchangeably. By contrast, fandom is favoritism toward others in the in-group (those with the same favorite team). Wann et al. (2006) explained that the existence of team followers is an essential aspect for highly identified fans in contrast to less-identified fans.

As the media environment has changed, the sports industry should adjust its understanding of the changing characteristics of target audiences and the definition of a sports fan. For example, sportswriters have pointed out a considerable change in how the younger generation enjoy NFL games: They prefer to watch short highlights rather than full live games (Bleier, 2021). On the other

hand, American professional sports have been expanding their business to the global market. International fans of the NFL purchase season passes to watch the games on mobile devices, even though they cannot physically go to the games in person. Therefore, we can easily imagine many people considering themselves as big fans of the NFL on the other side of the globe. A recent study by Reifurth et al. (2019) found that distance between nonlocal fans and their favorite teams was not negatively related to team identification.

Based on this understanding of sports fans, we can narrow the understanding down to more specific questions. For example, why do sports fans become fans of a specific NFL team? Does the gender of an individual NFL fan affect the level of their relationship with their favorite team? In addition, do gender differences affect the reasons for being a fan of a particular NFL team? Answering these questions can help scholars and sports teams' public relations practitioners to understand the nature of their fans and implement the findings in their strategic communications with fans.

Motives for Being a Fan

Understanding why a person is a fan of a particular team is essential for public relations

practitioners in professional sports teams to identify what types of messages would work in conversations with specific fans. A person chooses a particular team as their favorite for various reasons. Wann et al. (2001) identified fans' parents, athletes' talent and characteristics, geographic reasons, and friends and peers as the most common reasons for initially identifying with a team. To be more specific, individuals' desire to belong to communities and groups is one of the biggest reasons for choosing a favorite team. Other scholars have pointed out that socialization motives or preferences are among the most critical factors influencing team identification, even though they have explained them with different names. In that regard, Kim et al. (2013) suggested that factors affecting the intention to attend games are as various as vicarious achievement, aesthetics, drama (eustress), escape, knowledge, social interaction, physical skill, and added values. However, only achievement and aesthetics were effective in predicting attendance intention as well as team identification. In addition, Fink et al. (2002) found that social interaction was one of the motives for attendance intention moderated by team identification.

Similarly, Aiken and Koch (2009) suggested that team success such as winning percentage and the perceived talent of critical players are essential factors for team preference, as well as geographic

association, social affiliation, and the tradition of the team (history, tradition, and nostalgia). Team characteristics, media popularity (Keaton et al., 2014), and the recent performances of the favorite team against its rival (Havard et al., 2013) were also discussed as potential motives for becoming sports fans.

Regarding gender differences in fan motives, Wann (1995) found that men scored higher than women in diverse motivations for being sports fans (eustress, self-esteem, escape, entertainment, aesthetics, group affiliation, and family). In particular, he suggested and examined the measurement of a motivation scale (Sports Fan Motivation Scale); in a series of studies, he found that women showed higher scores of family motivation, while men showed higher scores in the remaining motivations.

Relationships Between Sports Fans and Favorite Teams

In the context of sports communication, sports organizations should treat their key publics (in other words, their fans) as relational partners. Sports fans are unique audiences with characteristics and behaviors different from those of general customers and supporters. Sports fans devote themselves to their favorite teams. Thus, we need to think of

sports fans as identifying with specific organizations.

Sports teams want to know who their fans are, what characteristics they have, and how they can use these characteristics in marketing strategies. Besides practical attention, scholars in sports communication seek to know how sports fans become involved and form relationships with teams and sports in many ways. Still, few have tried to define precisely who a sports fan is.

The concept of organization–public relationships (OPR) relates to the transition of thought about (key) publics in public relations. Firstly, the public shares their interests with specific organizations. They are different from mass audiences and consumers in that they share their interests and concerns with organizations. Secondly, in relationship management, key publics are active, interactive, and equal participants in communication with organizations, especially in this era of new communication technologies (Gronstedt, 1997; Kelleher, 2009; Sweetser, 2010). Due to social media, key publics are sensitively and immediately aware of the issues surrounding organizations with which they are involved. Yang (2007) pointed out that relationship management had to identify which active publics engaged in dynamic communication behaviors and effective communication strategies.

Considering that relationships are an essential concept of public relations, many scholars have stressed the importance of relationships in public

relations studies (Brunner, 2008). Therefore, many scholars used various definitions of relationships in the early days of relationship studies (Broom et al., 1997). Broom et al. (1997) defined OPR as linkages between organizations and publics to provide interdependent needs based on reviewing the literature in various fields such as interpersonal communication, psychotherapy, inter-organizational relationships, and systems theory. They noted that relationships offer mutual adaptation and contingent responses in dynamic ways due to the exchanges between two parties (Broom et al., 1997). Similarly, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) defined OPR as “the state that exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity” (p. 62). In studies of OPR, relationships consist of interactive communicative actions between organizations and key publics.

OPR studies have explored how outcomes of OPR are applied in various areas in public relations. As a result, scholars have developed various OPR dimensions (e.g., Ferguson, 1984; Grunig et al., 1992; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 2001b; Jo, 2006; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Meanwhile, Hon and Grunig (1999) suggested that relationship dimensions included control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction, exchange relationships, and communal relationships. These dimensions were

most often used in later studies in public relations. *Control mutuality* is defined as “the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). Control mutuality is involved in the process of any decision-making. It affects the extent to which each party’s voice can be heard in the outcome. *Satisfaction* is “the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20). Huang (2001b) explained that satisfaction contains affection and emotion, while trust and control mutuality encompass cognitive functions. *Trust* is “one party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 19). Hon and Grunig suggested integrity, dependability, and competence as subcomponents of trust. *Commitment* is “the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20).

As discussed earlier, OPR dimensions have been used to identify effects on various outcomes, such as attitudes toward organizations and behaviors including purchasing related products and advocating for organizations. Studies in OPR show how key publics perceive their relationships with organizations with given dimensions of relationships. Since there are various relationships between specific organizations

and their key publics, scholars and practitioners in sports public relations could focus more on specific relationships between sports fans and their favorite teams rather than general relationship dimensions.

1. Identified Fans' Commitment and Satisfaction

Ki and Hon (2007) believed that there are two kinds of commitment: continuance and affective. Continuance commitment is commitment to performing specific actions, and affective commitment is an emotional and psychological commitment that attaches the public to organizations (Ki & Hon, 2007). For example, as a sports fan learns more about the team, players, and other fans, they feel an emotional attachment to the team and its other fans. Learning more about the team might also lead to more behaviors related to that knowledge, such as discussing the team with others.

In relationship management, satisfaction is considered a relational dimension that includes aspects of affection and emotion (Jo, 2006). Ki and Hon (2007) noted that "satisfaction is typically calculated by the extent to which the benefits of the relationship exceed the expectations that both parties have, and a satisfying relationship produces more benefits than costs" (p. 422). Therefore, the relationship expectation and satisfaction will be

calculated based on this evaluation when a sports fan evaluates the team itself. At the same time, the results of satisfaction will be reflected in the evaluation. This cycle of self-evaluation and satisfaction affects the total degree of team identification and relationships.

2. Influences of Motives on Relationship Outcomes

Various motives might influence the degree of sports fans' relationship outcomes. Scholars have observed how motives influence relationship outcomes. Specifically, commitment and satisfaction can be affected by the degree of various motives and ultimately influence behavioral intentions. Paek et al. (2020) confirmed the notion that sports fan motivations, especially emotional motivation, affect relationship outcomes and behavioral intentions, including sports consumption, in their study with a professional volleyball league. Also, Lee et al. (2019) found that fanship of a specific sport might lead to positive attitudes towards the sporting event. In addition, Kim et al. (2013) found meaningful connections between motives and commitment as a part of the relationship dimension. To be more specific, they defined various relationships based on certain connections between motives and commitment. For example, emotional relationships come from the link between hedonic motives and

affective commitment, a self-interest relationship is created by the link between psychological connection and continuance commitment, and a social influence relationship is based on the link between the motives of social influence and normative commitment (Kim et al., 2013). Robinson and Trail (2005) also added that the gender of sports fans had a small effect on motives and points of attachment.

3. Sports Fans' Sharing of Information With Others

The notion of one's willingness to share information about a sporting event before and after the game is an essential aspect of understanding the characteristics of sports fans. The intent to share information is an excellent indicator of high involvement and satisfaction with the product or service (Mangold et al., 1999; Murray, 1991; Richins, 1983, as cited in Bush et al., 2005). For instance, Chang et al. (2018) found that team identification affects Word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions, even though emotions after games moderate the effect. Sharing information with others, in turn, plays a vital role in evaluating the success of a communication campaign from a public relations perspective.

A study looking into word-of-mouth recommendations on sports-watching behavior from a gender

difference perspective showed several factors that affect whether or not someone carries out the recommended behavior (Asada & Ko, 2019). Among the significant factors, the recommender's trustworthiness was vital for females to watch recommended games, whereas message delivery was an essential predictor of WOM behavior. The authors explained this tendency by using the concept of reciprocity among females. They believed that females are more prone to carry out a behavior when it is recommended by a trustworthy individual such as a family member. Several studies support the idea that females are highly influenced by family members when making decisions on media consumption and sports viewing (and attending games) compared to males (Ridinger & Funk, 2006). The importance of females' relationships with their peers in the decision-making process has been observed in many settings apart from WOM (Bush et al., 2005).

Gender Differences in Sports Fans

The historical changes have shown in the topic of gender difference in various sports communication areas. Recently, scholars have focused on the emotional consequences of different communication styles among male and female fans, as they have

observed different sports media consumption and game attendance. For example, scholars in sports communication have paid more attention to game attendance (Fink et al., 2002; Lough & Kim, 2004, as cited in Bush et al., 2005; Swanson et al., 2003). The difference in participating in sporting events is in line with media consumption of the sporting event in the household setting. The difference, however, is the consideration of the traditional role of females. For example, a study by Gantz and Wenner (1991) argued that the viewing patterns of females and males were different due to the prevalent social norms at the time, such as that females tend to watch sports games on TV while multitasking on household chores. The opposite was also true: Males were fully engaged and committed to the viewing.

Gender's relationship with team identification and its consequences have been popular topics in sports communication. Interestingly, the findings on gender differences in team identification are mixed. For example, evidence from Mehus and Kolastad's (2011) study showed that men identify themselves with their favorite team more strongly than women. Moreover, when their team wins, men show a higher degree of BIRGing ("basking in reflected glory") than women (Dhurup, 2012), though there does not seem to be a difference in CORFing ("cutting off reflected failure"). However,

Spinda (2011) had the opposite result. In contrast, a study by Ware and Kowalski (2012) demonstrated no significant difference between male and female sports fans when they were highly involved.

As female sports spectatorship increases, scholars' interest in gender studies in sports communication has changed from different sports consumption to various motives for becoming a fan and dynamic differences in team-related behaviors between males and females. To be more specific, the last few years have witnessed an increase of studies on motives suggesting that males are most influenced by their peers, whereas females are more influenced by their family members (Gantz & Lawrence, 1991; Wann et al., 2006). Wann (1995) suggested that men focused on self-esteem more than women, while Ridinger and Funk (2006) found that female fans showed higher team involvement, for such reasons as university pride, affordability, supporting sports, and socialization, compared to male fans.

In addition, viewing habits contribute to the degree of engagement with and involvement in games. More specifically, females have shown a higher level of motivation to consume NFL games when the experiences were shared with family and friends (Clark et al., 2009). The same study also found that males tend to value the competitiveness of sports more highly than females as part of the enjoyable experiences when watching an NFL

game. The findings suggest that gender differences were present in the motivation to consume sport-related media and the programming elements of broadcasting sports games. Similar results support the notion that gender differences should be explored in conjunction with motives from various perspectives, including marketing and advertising, because they provide insights into fanship (Ganz & Lewis, 2021).

Research Questions

Based on the literature, the current study proposes the following research questions. Given that the literature has mixed findings on gender's effect on several of the motives, the current study proposes research questions based on the several motives mentioned above in conjunction with gender's effect (RQ1). In addition, we assume possible relationships between motives for being a fan of a specific team and the relationship dimensions perceived by the fan (RQ2 and 2-1). Finally, previous studies have shown that there are still mixed results on gender differences in the influence of relationship outcomes on information sharing behavior. Therefore, the current study poses RQ3 and 3-1.

- RQ1: Are there gender differences in the motives for being a fan of an NFL team (locality, family

members, friends, performance, logos, and specific players)?

- RQ2: Do the motives for being a fan of an NFL team affect the OPR outcomes of (a) satisfaction and (b) commitment?
- RQ2-1: Are there gender differences in the influences of motives on OPR outcomes?
- RQ3: Do OPR outcomes (a) satisfaction and (b) commitment affect the degree of sharing information?
- RQ3-1: Are there gender differences in influences of OPR outcomes (a) satisfaction and (b) commitment to sharing information?

Methods

1. Survey Procedure and Sampling

Since the current study attempts to identify the correlations among dimensions of team identification and OPR, we conducted an online survey on Mechanical Turk (M-Turk), an online survey system administered by Amazon.com. M-Turk has become a popular way to collect data (Steelman et al., 2014), and many studies in communication collected data using it. For example, Li (2016) pointed out that M-Turk is widely used for behavioral research in the study of psychological empowerment on social media. Xu and Wu (2015) indicated that a

growing number of social science studies had confirmed the validity of studies that used M-Turk in their study about crisis management using Twitter. In the process of recruiting participants in the M-Turk system, instructions about the survey were provided.

Fans of NFL were recruited to participate in the survey. Football is the most popular professional sport in the United States (Rovell, 2014), so the NFL is a proper context in which to examine the relationships between general sports fans' team identification and OPR outcomes. One of the essential topics in team identification studies is a fan's identification and relationship with a specific team. However, the current study aimed to explore the relationships between variables that had not been thoroughly examined yet. Therefore, rather than one specific relational situation surrounding one team and its fans, generalized relational situations between a specific fan and their favorite team would give more robust results.

A pre-test was conducted to identify technical and methodological errors of the research in advance. The results of the pre-test confirmed there was no methodological error in the 54 collected samples. The preliminary test was conducted using the same procedure as the pre-test, and a total of 702 respondents answered. Six hundred seventy-three samples were used for analysis after eliminating

irrelevant surveys, such as those who did not agree to participate and those who answered "no" to whether they were fans of any team.

In terms of gender, there were more male respondents ($n = 412$, 61.2%) than female respondents ($n = 261$, 38.8%). The mean age of respondents was 35.47 years ($SD = 10.910$), with people in their 20s being the predominant age group ($n = 267$, 39.7%), followed by people in their 30s ($n = 211$, 31.4%). In terms of household income, more than 40% of respondents made \$35,000 to \$74,999 per year (\$35,000–49,999 $n = 137$, 20.4%; \$50,000–74,999 $n = 145$, 21.5%). Finally, respondents were asked how far their favorite teams played from their residence; 34.8% of respondents ($n = 234$) answered less than 100 miles away, and 44.4% of them ($n = 298$) answered 101 to 1,000 miles, while 20.8% answered more than 1,001 miles.

In addition, the respondents were asked how long they had been fans of their favorite NFL teams, and the mean duration of being a fan was 18.20 years ($SD = 12.27$). The respondents included fans of every NFL team (32 teams), with the Dallas Cowboys as the most frequently named favorite team ($n = 62$, 9.3%), followed by the Pittsburgh Steelers ($n = 41$, 6.1%), Green Bay Packers ($n = 40$, 6.0%), and New England Patriots ($n = 39$, 5.8%). The three least popular teams were the Tampa Bay Buccaneers ($n = 6$, .9%), Tennessee

Titans ($n = 8$, 1.2%), and St. Louis Rams ($n = 8$, 1.2%).

2. Measures

Before being presented with the statements on team identification and OPR, respondents were asked whether they were fans of sports and specifically the NFL, which NFL team was their favorite team, how long they had been fans, and demographic questions.

The questionnaire asked about *the degree of motives for being a fan of an NFL team*. Based on the review of the literature on motives for and causes of team identification (for example, Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2001), six items were presented to examine the degrees of six motives for being fans of their favorite teams: the team is the local team in my community ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 2.47$), my family members are fans of the team ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 2.06$), my friends are fans of the team ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.89$), the team's performance is better than other teams' ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.72$), I like the team's logos and other symbols ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.40$), and I like specific players ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.40$). Items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Assessment items from Ki and Brown (2013) and Huang (2001a), which were modified and

shortened from Hon and Grunig (1999), were used to measure *satisfaction and commitment in OPR*. Only two OPR outcomes, satisfaction and commitment, were used due to their relevance to the relationships with other variables in this study. Scholars have used a part of the outcomes in their studies: For example, Pressgrove and McKeever (2016) and O'Neil (2008) used trust, commitment, and satisfaction in nonprofit organization studies.

In addition, participants were asked about their perception of their relationship with their favorite team. The scale included eight items that were categorized into four dimensions of satisfaction and commitment. All items were measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The statements to measure satisfaction were "Generally speaking, organization members meet our needs," "Generally speaking, our relationship with the organization has problems," "In general, we are satisfied with the relationship with the organization," and "Our relationship with the organization is good." In addition, the statements to measure commitment were "I do not wish to continue a relationship with the organization," "I believe that it is worthwhile to try to maintain the relationship with the organization," "I wish to keep a long-lasting relationship with the organization," and "I wish I had never entered into the relationship with the organization." The inter-item reliability of

satisfaction (4 items, Cronbach's alpha = .74, $M = 4.91$, $SD = 3.788$) and commitment (4 items, Cronbach's alpha = .76, $M = 5.66$, $SD = 4.064$) were also acceptable.

Unlike other measurements that used multiple items in this study, a single item was used to measure *the degree of sharing of information related to the favorite team*. A study by Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) showed that there is no difference between using a single item and multiple items for measuring the intention to share information. Given the number of questions being asked by the participants in this study with no evident benefit of using multiple items, we opted in using a single item. Participants were asked to respond to the statement "I enjoy discussing my favorite team with others" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; $M = 4.21$, $SD = .76$).

Results

1. Motives and Gender Differences

The first research question asked if there was a gender difference in the motives for being a fan of an NFL team (locality, family members, friends, performance, logos, and specific players). A series

of independent samples t-tests was conducted to compare the degree of influence of six motives to be a fan of a specific NFL team on male fans and female fans. Among the six motives for fanship of a certain team, the players motive was the highest motive on average among male participants. In contrast, the logo motive was the highest motive on average for female participants. In particular, male participants ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 2.443$, $N = 412$) showed higher motivation based on locality than female participants ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 2.506$, $N = 261$). However, the difference was not significant ($t(671) = 1.661$, $p > .05$, two-tailed). Second, the family factor was more motivating to female participants ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 2.072$) than to male participants ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 2.053$). Again, the difference was not significant ($t(671) = -.989$, $p > .05$, two-tailed).

In terms of friends affecting the choice of which team to support, female participants ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.936$) scored higher on average than male participants ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.866$), although the difference was not significant ($t(671) = -.579$, $p > .05$, two-tailed). However, there was a significant difference between male and female participants in the performance motive ($t(671) = -1.991$, $p < .05$, two-tailed): Female participants ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.664$) showed higher weight on the performance motive than male participants ($M =$

4.30, $SD = 1.744$) did. Also, the motive of teams' logos was stronger for female participants ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.305$) than for male participants ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.452$). The difference was significant ($t(671) = -1.969$, $p < .05$, two-tailed). Finally, the motive to choose a team based on certain players showed no difference between male and female participants ($t(671) = 1.297$, $p > .05$, two-tailed), even though male participants showed a higher average than female participants (male $M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.347$; female $M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.473$). <Table 1> shows the results of simple independent t-tests for the first research question.

2. Direct Effects of Motives on Satisfaction and Commitment, With Gender Differences

This study proposed research questions on whether six motives affected relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction and commitment (RQ2) and gender differences in each path (RQ3). A series of multiple-regression analyses were employed to answer these questions. <Table 2> shows that locality, family, friends, performance, logos, and players motives had different influences on two relationship outcomes, satisfaction and commitment.

<Table 1> Independent Samples t-Test of Motives for Being a Fan by Gender

	Male (N=412)		Female (N=261)		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Locality	4.32	2.443	4.00	2.506	1.661	.097
Family	4.91	2.053	5.07	2.072	-.989	.323
Friends	4.68	1.866	4.77	1.936	-.579	.563
Performance	4.30	1.744	4.56	1.664	-1.991*	.049
Logos	5.38	1.452	5.59	1.305	-1.969*	.049
Players	5.43	1.347	5.29	1.473	1.297	.159

<Table 2> Regression Coefficients—Motives' Influence on Satisfaction and Commitment

	Satisfaction			Commitment		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Locality	-.072	-.096	-.067	-.039	-.038	-.049
Family	.114*	.103*	.134*	.110*	.111*	.099
Friends	.069	.145*	-.033	.009	.033	-.014
Performance	.307***	.246***	.422***	-.030	-.098	.093
Logos	.086*	.069	.107	.153***	.107	.231**
Players	.159***	.180**	.108	.237***	.263***	.172**
Adjusted R^2	.219	.190	.292	.115	.103	.153
F	32.443***	17.038***	18.832***	15.524***	8.900***	8.806***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

More specifically, the regression analyses indicated that locality was statistically insignificant, which means that the factor of the local team of an NFL fan does not affect their perception of satisfaction and commitment toward the team among both male and female fans. The performance, players, and family motives were positively significant variables for satisfaction among the other five motives. The performance motive ($B = .307, p < .001$) had the largest significant effect on satisfaction, followed by the players motive ($B = .159, p < .001$) and the family motive ($B = .114, p < .05$). On the other hand, the players, logos, and family motives were positively effective factors on commitment, and the players motive ($B = .237, p < .001$) had the largest effect size for commitment compared to the logos motive ($B = .153, p < .001$) and the family motive ($B = .110, p < .05$).

In terms of gender differences in the paths from motive variables and relationship outcome variables, there were some statistically significant differences. For example, the friends motive positively affected satisfaction among male fans ($B = .145, p < .05$), while it was statistically insignificant among females. Also, the players motive was an effective variable to predict satisfaction among male fans ($B = .180, p < .01$), whereas it was not effective on female fans. Variables that were statistically significant and had large effect sizes among male participants

were the performance ($B = .246, p < .001$), players ($B = .180, p < .01$), friends ($B = .145, p < .01$), and family ($B = .103, p < .01$) motives in order, while the ones among female participants were the performance ($B = .422, p < .001$) and family ($B = .134, p < .01$) motives only.

Moreover, the logo motive was a statistically insignificant variable for commitment among male fans, while it positively affected female fans' satisfaction ($B = .231, p < .01$). The family motive also had different results between the gender groups: It was influential in the male group ($B = .111, p < .01$), but not in the female group. Variables that were statistically significant and had a large effect size among male participants were the players ($B = .263, p < .001$) and family motives. In contrast, the counterparts for female participants were logos and players ($B = .172, p < .01$).

These findings reveal that NFL fans who perceived a specific team's recent performance as an essential factor to choose it as their favorite were more likely to perceive satisfaction between themselves and their favorite teams. As a reason for being a fan of a specific team, the team's performance was more important for male fans when they perceived satisfaction in their relationship with the team than for female fans. In addition, the friends motive for being a fan of a specific team influenced male fans to feel more satisfaction

〈Table 3〉 Regression Coefficients—Influence of Satisfaction and Commitment on Information Sharing

	Information sharing		
	Total	Male	Female
Satisfaction	.133**	.150**	.109
Commitment	.288***	.293***	.276***
Adjusted R^2	.139	.150	.118
F	55.456***	37.222***	18.349***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

in their relationships with the team than female fans. On the other hand, NFL fans were most committed to their favorite teams when they had to like certain players to be a fan of the team. However, female fans were affected by the logos motive to commit to the team, while male fans were affected by the family motive to commit to the team.

3. Direct Effects of Satisfaction and Commitment on Sharing Information, With Gender Differences

The research questions asked whether satisfaction and commitment affected the sharing of information related to the team (RQ3) and whether there were gender differences in each path (RQ3-1). A series of multiple-regression analyses were employed to answer these questions. 〈Table 3〉 shows that satisfaction and commitment had different degrees of influence on the sharing of team-related information.

Satisfaction ($B = .133$) and commitment ($B =$

.288) were both positively significant variables for predicting information sharing in general. In addition, there were gender differences in the paths from satisfaction and commitment to information sharing. The commitment variable positively predicted information sharing in both gender groups, although the effect sizes were different between genders (male $B = .293$; female $B = .276$). In addition, the satisfaction variable was effective in predicting sharing information in the group of male participants ($B = .150$), but it was statistically insignificant for female participants.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

1. Revisiting Fan Motives

The results of this study's analyses suggest that there is a need to revisit the categorization of fanship motives. The previous studies provide

various reasons for being a fan of a sport or team, and scholars have suggested various ways to break down these motives into categories. The current study sought to find what motives are crucial to understanding NFL fans in the current media environment. The findings suggest that some motives were not as influential as they were thought to be in previous research. For example, the result from the current study shows that the locality motive was less meaningful to why NFL fans choose a team as their favorite. Note that this study employed an online survey, and the participants were NFL fans of different teams from across the nation. Under the current sports media environment, locality is not a factor for sports fans to commit themselves to a team. In other words, a sports fan can choose any team to support, regardless of the limitation of physical distance.

In addition, previous studies have tended to focus on self-esteem or identification. Instead, the current study focused on the possibility that social interaction factors might have importance. Family members or friends are critical reasons NFL fans accept a team as their favorite. This finding shows that NFL teams should consider the interpersonal relationships of their fans as significant aspects when they create fan communication plans. Besides relational factors, the recent performance of the team is a critical factor in an individual's choice

of it as their favorite. Based on the findings of this study, motives can be categorized into three groups: relational, performance-centered, and logo-considered.

2. Motives on Commitment and Satisfaction and Further Behavioral Intentions

This study also confirms findings from previous studies (Kim et al., 2013; Paek et al., 2020; Robinson & Trail, 2005). In particular, various reasons for being a fan of a specific team affect relational outcomes such as commitment and satisfaction. The positive relationships between them affect fans' future behaviors related to the team. The findings explain that commitment to a team or satisfaction from the relationship with the team can be boosted by various motives. Individual fans have different motives that bring their interest to a team and initiate their relationship with it. This connection might be significant to scholars in sports public relations and practitioners in the field.

Practical Implications

1. Marketing Strategies Based on Motives

First of all, the findings from this study can provide public relations practitioners with what types of motives influence sports fans' perceived

commitment to and satisfaction with their favorite teams. For example, the locality motive is less important than other motives. This finding can be explained by many NFL fans becoming fans for reasons other than locality. Locality is losing its former status because there are multiple media platforms on which to consume NFL games and team-related content. This fact does not mean that NFL teams should cease communication strategies targeting local community members; however, this finding suggests that teams should create various social media messages targeting both local community members and nationwide or worldwide fans.

Regarding gender differences, sports organizations can develop different strategies and tactics that consider gender differences when they make plans to market to new fans. The current study suggests a gender difference in which motives affect satisfaction with and commitment to a team. The motive of the team's recent performance can attract female sports fans to the team but is a less important factor for male fans, somewhat conflicting with previous studies (Clark et al., 2009). The findings from the current study show that female fans give more weight to performance value when they choose a team to root for than their male counterparts. Therefore, there is a possibility that news of a good performance by an NFL team attracts new female fans rather than male fans to

the team. This aspect can be utilized by social media specialists working for professional sports teams when they create media content for various media platforms targeting segmented audiences.

Another interesting finding in this study is that the logo motive worked more for female fans than for male fans. That means there is a possibility that mass or social media messages should actively utilize the team's logo to appeal to new women fans rather than male fans. In particular, when NFL teams create and distribute messages on their controlled media and social media, express and appropriate use of team logos can be very important to attract new female fans. The current study also implies that relational factors are more important fan motives for the male group than for the female group. The result is also contradictory to the previous studies on gender differences in sports communication, which suggested that family and friends affected females' motivation to consume NFL games (Clark et al., 2009).

In conclusion, an NFL team needs to understand the scope of motives when attempting to target its crucial audience. Several studies, including this one, have shown that motives make a difference in sports fans' attitudes and behavioral outcomes. A team's performance might be considered an essential factor for being a fan. However, other motives are equally important, if not more so.

2. Marketing Segmentation for Different Motives on Relational and Behavioral Outcomes by Gender

The findings from this study imply that sports organizations should employ different communicational styles toward male and female fans in their relational strategies. However, “collegiate marketers and managers might want to design their marketing communications to emphasize the relationships among motives and points of attachment rather than trying to segment their fan and spectator base by gender or by type of sport” (Robinson & Trail, 2005, p. 58). PR practitioners should be cautious about approaching a plan based solely on gender.

The current study demonstrated that the performance and family motives affect fans’ perception of satisfaction with their relationship with the team in both male and female groups. On the other hand, the players motive is only considered necessary to the perception of satisfaction by male fans, while female fans were not affected by the players motive in their perception of satisfaction in their relationship with the team. Meanwhile, the relational motive (friends) is an essential factor for male fans in their perception of satisfaction with their relationship with the team. In contrast, female fans were not affected by the friends motive in their satisfaction with their relationship with the

team.

In addition, the player motive affects fans of both genders’ commitment to their relationships with their favorite teams, although male fans showed a higher degree of this path than female fans. On the other hand, the logos motive affects the perception of commitment in the relationship with the favorite team in the group of male fans only. Finally, family motivation did not matter for female fans in their perception of commitment to relationships with their favorite teams. This finding conflicts with those of previous studies (Gantz & Lawrence, 1991; Wann et al., 2006). Instead, male fans’ satisfaction with their relationship with their team affects their behavior to share team-related information with others, unlike their female counterparts.

To summarize these findings, different motives ensure the commitment and satisfaction of males and females. Public relations practitioners should conduct frequent fan surveys to investigate their motives to be fans of the team and make communications plans based on different motives. As we looked at in the introduction section, professional sports currently face a complex situation: they can expect to broaden their market because of digital media, but at the same time, they can lose their fans to other media content. Public relations practitioners for professional sports teams, including those in the NFL, need to consider the findings of this study.

Limitations

First, the current study used a single-item question to measure how participants shared team-related information with others. This study examined a fan's self-recalled behavior instead of their future behavioral intentions, so we only conducted this one question. However, many studies in public relations use the concept of intentions interchangeably with existing behavior. Even though previous studies such as Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) found that a concrete single item measure has the predictive validity enough compared to multi-item measures, it might be a better method to use multi-item measurements for WOM intentions, which are already examined from previous studies.

The other limitation of the study is motivation. The current study found that there the motive of locality had no significant effect on satisfaction or commitment. To explain this finding, we need to know the more specific condition of locality. There are possibilities of different meanings of non-locality. A fan might have moved far away from their hometown, or a fan might initially become a fan of a team regardless of distance. This issue should be explained in the questionnaire in future research, or the measurement should be separated into two questions.

Conclusion

Although this study is exploratory, the findings shed some light on gender differences in the primary motives of sports fans specific to NFL teams. Some findings were contradictory to the previous literature, while others were aligned with it. This suggests that sports fans and their dynamics are not static. As a result, PR and marketing practitioners need to monitor the changes, and they should have very sophisticated communication strategies to accommodate various types of sports fans. In addition, sports teams should take note of gender differences when segmenting fans into smaller groups to market to each group better. The critical lesson is that men and women become passionate fans for different reasons.

Literature and the findings from this study support the notion that defining sports fans into specific groups based on their key characteristics is not as simple as it seems. There might be several other reasons not discussed in the literature or in this study for becoming a sports fan. The motivations and their impact on individuals' loyalty to and satisfaction with their favorite teams are not one-dimensional. As more people become technology savvy and rely heavily on digital devices, sporting events are becoming more accessible across nations and globally. Therefore, marketing and PR practitioners

must reflect the growing trend of such change when developing communication campaigns. The current study proposed several research questions instead of hypotheses due to mixed findings in the literature and the lack of gender-based studies on the topic. Even though it was a reasonable decision to perform exploratory research, future studies can employ the suggested research model with hypotheses based on the results of this study. A future study considering additional factors not discussed in the current study might provide a more vivid structure.

It is also worth investigating if exploring fans of sports outside the NFL would provide other

behavioral outcomes. Considering that many of the factors in the current study can be influenced by societal and individual values such as peers and family, it would be interesting to see if other non-Western cultures exhibit similar patterns among sports fans. Lastly, the current study only included traditional genders, males and females, as possible options on the survey questionnaire. As the definition of gender has become more diverse and society has been more accepting of non-traditional genders, future studies might benefit more by broadening the gender differences to a more diverse group.

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국문초록

응원 팀 선택의 과정과 결과: 스포츠 팬의 응원팀 선택 동기에 따른 관계적, 행동적 결과

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프로 스포츠 팀들은 그들의 팬들의 특성이 무엇인지 그리고 어떻게 하면 그 팬들과 긍정적이고 공고한 관계를 지속할 수 있는 지에 대해서 끊임없이 통찰한다. 이러한 통찰은 특히 소셜미디어를 비롯한 매체의 다양성이 보장된 이 시대에 프로 스포츠 팀들이 어떤 구체적인 메시지를 만들어 팬들과 소통하는 지를 결정하는 중요한 요인이 된다. 본 연구는 스포츠 팬이 특정한 미식축구리그 (NFL) 팀의 팬이 되기로 결정하는 데 어떤 동기들이 있는지, 개인의 동기에는 성별이 영향을 미치는지, 이러한 동기들이 관계적 결과변인 (헌신과 만족도)와 행동적 결과변인 (팀에 대한 소식을 다른 사람과 공유하는 행동)에 어떤 영향을 미치는 지에 대해 조사했다. 온라인 설문을 통해 총 673명의 NFL 팬들의 응답을 모았고, 분석에 사용했다. 본 연구의 분석 결과는 가족, 친구, 팀 성과, 특정 선수, 팀 로고 등의 다양한 동기가 특정 팀의 팬이 되기로 결정하는 이유가 되며, 성별이 그 양상에 영향을 준다는 것을 확인했다. 또한 이러한 동기들은 스포츠 팬들의 팀과의 관계성에 영향을 주는데, 특히 성과 동기는 만족도에, 특정 선수 동기는 헌신에 높은 영향력을 보였다. 마지막으로, 이들 관계적 결과변인들은 응원하는 팀의 소식을 다른 사람과 나누려는 행동적 결과에 영향을 주는 것으로 확인되었다.

주제어: 스포츠 팬, 응원 팀 선택 동기, 관계적 결과, 행동적 결과, 성별