Exploring Out-of-Market Fans In An NFL Fan Club

Peyton J. Stensland, University of Cincinnati
Zach Scola, University of New Hampshire
Brian S. Gordon, University of Kansas

Abstract

Sport fan motivations and points of attachment have been heavily investigated regarding the local fan. Yet, these important concepts have not been explored with out-of-market fans who are becoming increasingly important to sport league's revenues (Collins et al., 2016). To examine this type of fan, the authors utilized semi-structured interviews with attendees of an out-of-market NFL fan club. Coding the interviews revealed themes regarding motivations and points of attachment. The motivations were social interaction and escape, as members were motivated to attend the watch party to hang out with like-minded fans and to break up their daily routine. The primary points of attachment were community attachment and fan community attachment, as members felt this group was reminiscent of Pittsburgh and attached to the other members of the group. This study highlights the importance of out-of-market fan clubs and addresses ways sport teams can cater to the out-of-market fan.

Introduction

Understanding the sport fan has long been a point of interest in the sport management literature, and many scholars have focused their attention on local fans attending a sporting event (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999; Kwon & Trail, 2001; Wiid & Cant, 2015). Despite the desire to understand the sport fan, there has been minimal investigation into the segment of individuals, also known as 'out-of-market fans', who do not live in the primary market of their favorite team. With the increase in mobility in the United States (Giddens, 1990), and the technological advances being made, these passionate sports fans deserve attention as they illustrate how fandom and sport allegiances have the power to eclipse geographical bounds (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Because of the importance out-of-market fans have for professional sport leagues, the current study examined the setting of a Pittsburgh Steelers fan club from a large Midwestern city. This specific fan club was chosen because of its size (approximately 400 individuals on their 'mailing list') and consistent game attendance exhibited by members on a weekly basis. Additionally, the authors chose a fan club associated with the Pittsburgh Steelers because of the team's historical success, winning six Super Bowl championships. Through the examination of the selected Pittsburgh Steelers fan club, the authors were able to address the purpose of the study: to explain why individuals participate in the Steelers fan club and attend events on a weekly basis. More specifically, the authors used qualitative methods to explore what motivated these out-of-market fans as well as examined what points of attachment were prevalent among these individuals.

Further, for consistent use of terms, the authors have defined out-of-market fans as anyone who lives more than 100-miles away from their favorite team. This definition was adapted from Collins, Heere, Shapiro, Ridinger, and Wear's (2016) definition of displaced fans "people who moved away from the city they grew up in yet still support the team associated with that city" (p. 2). The difference in the current study is the fans associated with the fan club, do not need to consider Pittsburgh their hometown, therefore encapsulating a larger group of fan club members. Additionally, the 100-mile radius was chosen in both the current study and study by Collins et al. (2016) because it is further than the NFL's primary market standard of 75 miles (Weiner, 2013).

This study has a few areas of importance to consider. First, theoretically the results will extend the scant literature on out-of-market fans and attempt to understand what reasons these club members have for participating in the Steelers fan club. While recent studies have examined an individual's motivations to attend a sporting event (Gargone 2016; Keaton, Watanabe, & Gearhart, 2015; Wiid & Cant, 2015), an understanding of fans' engagement with a team outside the primary market is also important. Specifically, understanding how the motives and points of attachment for an individual interacting with a fan club compared to a fan attending a sporting event can be beneficial to practitioners and academics. Further, with the increased ability to stream and follow one's favorite team (Collins et al., 2016), it is important to discover why certain out-of-market fans choose to attend the fan club event on gameday instead of watch from the comfort of their own home.

Second, this study extends the construct of out-of-market fans, as past examinations have only considered displaced fans who considered their favorite team to represent their hometown (i.e. Collins et al., 2016; Kraszewski, 2008). Practically, understanding the out-of-market fan is important as United States residents frequently move, and professional leagues rely heavily on their television contracts (Collins et al., 2016). For instance, professional leagues have begun to reach out to their out-of-market fans with sport packages such as NBA League Pass, MLB TV, and NFL Sunday Ticket, which allow fans to watch games from any geographical location. Further, the Performance Communications Sports and Automotive Specialists (2016) describe how sport organizations are profiting because their fanbases have become more diverse and have started prioritizing both international and overlooked fans. Despite the initiatives that have been implemented by professional sport leagues to date, research on out-of-market fans is limited. Therefore, the authors selected the specified setting to explore the reasons out-of-market fans participate in NFL fan clubs.

Literature Review

Sport Fan Motivation

The motivation behind consuming sport, whether it be attending games, watching games, or purchasing merchandise has been examined in numerous settings (Tokuyama & Greenwell, 2011). There have been multiple sport fan motivation scales created as well, the two most frequently used are the Motivation Scale for Sport Fan Consumption (MSSC) (Trail & James, 2001) and the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) (Wann, 1995). Sloan (1989) was one of the first to examine sport fan motivation and found the achievement theory was likely a strong motivating agent for fans to attend games. Since then, additional motivations have been tested and found to be impactful on various types of sport fans.

Scholars use many or all of the factors from the MSSC or SFMS when examining motivations and depending on the setting have found varying results. For example, James and Ross (2004) examined various nonrevenue college sports and found entertainment, skill, and drama to be the most impactful motivations. Whereas, another study examined all college sports at a university and found entertainment, eustress, and group affiliation to be the most impactful motivations of spectators (Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). In a study examining minor league baseball fans, it was discovered that only the social motivation construct influenced future intentions to return to games (Slavich, Rufer, & Greenhalgh, 2018). Extreme fan groups and watch parties tap into the social factor more than traditional media consumption of sporting events. Further, Trail, Robinson, Dick, and Gillentine (2003) separated spectators from fans and hypothesized that social interaction and escape would be significant motivation factors for both spectators and fans alike.

These motivations for sport fans can be multi-faceted. Woo, Trail, Kwon, and Anderson (2009) broke down sport fan motivations into vicarious achievement, spectator motives, and overarching motives as they distinguished highly identified fans and simple spectators. The scholars found the escape motivation was influential and resonated across both levels of fans, whereas the social interaction and vicarious achievement were more influential on the true fans of the team. Kim and Mao (2019) compared live sport attendance to mediated sport consumption motivations. They found that socialization and entertainment were two of the most prominent motivations across both groups. Identity cultivation was found to motivate fans who attended games more than those who consumed mediated sport (Kim & Mao, 2019). An intense fan club viewing group has the potential to bridge the gap within these two distinct groups and their motivations.

As indicated by the previous examples, the motivations to consume sport have been heavily examined by scholars, and this area of research has garnered much attention for its practical implications. In order to understand out-of-market fans, and specifically this Steelers fan club, it will be important to consider the motivations behind member's decisions to join the group as well as their rationales for continuing to participate. In addition to examining the motivations behind participating in this group, it is also important to understand which identifications or points of attachment are most influential for group members.

Points of Attachment

Throughout the sport management literature, many studies have focused on the level and types of attachment of sport spectators. The interrelated concepts ultimately influence an individual's emotional identification to sport. The emotional attachments seen throughout the literature, are explained by Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. The attachment theory suggested that an attachment is an emotional bond between an individual and a particular object (Bowlby, 1969). Specifically, attachment is defined as "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). The theoretical standpoint postulated the level of emotional attachment to an object can be predictive of a person's interaction with the object (Koo & Hardin, 2008). The interaction is consistent with identification. Within sport, this emotional identification is viewed as multidimensional, and scholars have recognized the possible existence of different points of attachment (Kwon, Trail & Anderson, 2005; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Woo et al., 2009).

Even though there is an overall consensus that multiple points of attachment exist, scholars have not pinpointed the points of attachment for sport fans. According to Spinda, Wann and Hardin (2016), "most scholars have employed either a six- or seven- factor point of attachment (POA) model" (p. 349). For example, Robinson and Trail (2005) used seven factors to describe how an individual could exhibit attachment: player, coach, community, university, level of sport, sport itself, and team. Other researchers have replaced the community factor with general sport fandom (Kim, Trail, & Magnusen, 2013), while some have added other factors such as conference attachment (Spinda et al., 2016) and fan community attachment (Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). As they specifically relate to the present study, community attachment and fan community attachment are further explored.

Community attachment

In the context of out-of-market fans, specifically displaced fans, the attachment to community is prominent. Collins et al. (2016) suggested the team identification of football fans are based on their desire to continue to feel connected to their hometown once they have moved away. In fact, the scholars found time or proximity did not impact team identification with an individual's "hometown" team, nor did living in another teams' market. Therefore, the current authors posit out-of-market fans will feel a strong connection to their "hometown" and show signs of a prominent community attachment.

Attachment to community is examined by asking if individuals are fans of a specific team because they represent their community as well as if having the team in the city enhances their community (Robinson & Trail, 2005). Much of the literature on points of attachment has examined local college football and basketball fans (Kwon et al., 2005; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Woo et al., 2009). It is noted, an issue is known to arise with using college fans to explore community attachment because students (who are primarily the subjects of these studies) are from all over and are often identified with the university more than the geographical location or local city community. In fact, Kwon, Anderson, and Trail (2003) deemed the community attachment irrelevant because of the setting being examined (a small college town) and its poor discriminant validity (as cited in Kwon et al., 2005). Despite the suggestion that community attachment is not relevant in certain contexts, the current authors believe it to be important when examining this Pittsburgh Steelers fan group, considering the out-of-market fans who classify Pittsburgh their hometown.

Fan community attachment

There has been an influx of research which has examined the connection individuals make to other fans called the fan community attachment (Yoshida, Gordon, et al., 2015; Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015). Fan community attachment is defined as an individual fan's connection with other fans (Yoshida, Gordon, et al., 2015), and the scholars contested this horizontal connection to the team must be examined to the same extent as the vertical connections (team, player, coach, etc.). Yoshida, Gordon, et al. (2015) conducted a study which found fan community attachment as the only significant predictor of repeat attendance among Japanese professional football league fans. The concept of a fan community has evolved from past research on brand communities, which can be viewed as the connections between a consumer and the brand as well as the connection between consumers and other consumers (Katz & Heere, 2015).

Because fan community attachment has been shown to be a significant predictor in repeat attendance, it is certainly important to consider when evaluating out-of-market fans.

Although out-of-market fans are unable to attend games because of geographical constraints, they have the potential to be impacted by a fan community attachment, via a group like the Steelers fan club, which is the focus of the study. A similar phenomenon Collins et al. (2016) considered with displaced fans was a "virtual fan community", where fans are able to maintain connection with other fans through an online platform. Although the current study does not examine a virtual fan community, it is expected that participating in groups like the Steelers fan club can create a similar type of fan community attachment for these out-of-market fans. Because the sports bar which hosts this Steelers fan club creates a private watch party, the Steelers fans in the area may have originally attended and joined the club because of their initial connection to the team. Based on the atmosphere of the sports bar during games, some influence of fan community attachment has the potential to emerge which impacts continued participation.

It is extremely valuable to explore what points of attachment distant fans have towards their favorite teams, and further, explore how their points of attachment change overtime. Additionally, it is important to understand how points of attachment differ between out-of-market fans and local fans. As out-of-market fans are vital to teams and their respective organizations, practitioners should be conscious of how they market towards these distant fans.

Out-of-Market Fans

Despite the heavy examination and understanding of motivation and points of attachment surrounding local sport fans, there has been scant literature which has addressed these concepts with out-of-market fans. Increases in technology and media have allowed out-of-market fans to be more prevalent (Collins et al., 2016). Scholars have called fans who support their team from afar "satellite supporters" (Kerr, 2008; 2009). Much of the similar literature to date has been on displaced fans, which are specifically fans who at one point lived in the city of their favorite team and moved away (Collins et al., 2016). While past research on displaced fans is important, it disregards fans who follow teams who represent a city they have never lived.

Kraszewski (2008) explored a football bar in Texas that supported an out-of-market team. He found the team represented an attachment to home for some fans, and as well as a communal setting with likeminded fans which enhanced their overall fan experience. Football bars, such as the one described above, allowed fans to feel like they are back home as they watch their favorite team with other out-of-market fans (Kraszewski, 2008). Other scholars have suggested out-of-market fans can reap similar benefits and feel the same way as local fans temporarily when they watch their favorite team in the vicinity of likeminded fans (Wann, 2006; Wann, Polk, & Franz, 2011). Connecting with other fans of one's favorite team is important to the fan experience, and fan clubs, like the Steelers club explored in this study, can make it possible for out-of-market fans.

Although little is understood about the out-of-market fan, their importance to leagues has been examined. Mills, Salaga and Tainsky (2016) discovered that out-of-market fans are important for NBA teams, as they make up a more than trivial portion of their attendees. Another interesting aspect of out-of-market fans was how the local teams' success had an overall impact on the

local fan's interest on out-of-market NFL games (Tainsky, Xue, Salaga, & Mills, 2014). Out-of-market fans play a crucial role not only in television ratings but even game attendance.

Through the examination of these out-of-market fans, one study found hockey fans chose to identify with a non-local team because they wanted to be distinct from the sport fans in their area (Andrigiw & Hyatt, 2009). They searched for ways to connect with likeminded fans through different media sources. Sveinson and Hoeber (2016) examined female sport fans specifically and discovered out-of-market fans felt marginalized because the local fans did not feel their fandom was justified as they did not fit with the norm. Additionally, these scholars suggested local female fans would not feel this way, as they were not looked at as outcast sport fans. In both instances of becoming a fan for distinction and feeling marginalized as an out-of-market fan, a fan club could be instrumental in improving these out-of-market fans' experiences.

Much of the research regarding out-of-market fans has examined how they impact league revenues and viewership. Beyond the work on football bars and the communal experience they create (Kraszewski, 2008), minimal is known about the makeup of an out-of-market fan. Therefore, it is important for sport marketers to understand the behaviors of this segment of fans. Specifically, the current study explored out-of-market fans motivations and points of attachment to participate in this Steelers fan club.

The above section on sport fan motivation, points of attachment for sport fans, and related literature on out-of-market fandom, guided the authors in the creation of their theoretical framework as well as their methodological procedures. Through the theoretical framework, key concepts, and the setting of the current study, the authors derived the following general research question: Why do Steelers fans participate in this fan club and what aspects of the club do they attach to most?

Methods

Due to the limited empirical literature on out-of-market fans, a qualitative research design was implemented in this examination. Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with members of a specific Pittsburgh Steelers fan club located in a Midwestern city. Additionally, observations of this fan club were conducted in order to gather general information about this specific group of out-of-market fans. Both these methods were deemed appropriate in order to identify common trends among these out-of-market fans.

Research Setting

The Steelers fan club is based in a large Midwestern City, which is located over 500 miles away from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The group was officially established in 1993 and has approximately 100 paid members each year, as well as 400 who subscribe to their "mailing list," in order to receive a weekly in-season email. The group has a president and nine other committee members who handle the organizational aspects of the group, such as membership costs and venue selection. The group has been at their current sports bar location (Midwestern City) for three years and has bounced around at 11 different locations since the formation of the club. In addition to their paid membership and mailing list, the fan club runs a Facebook page with approximately 700 followers (both members and non-members of the club), who are

Steelers fans and live in the area. Further, this Steelers fan club has an official fan club website that details their club history and agenda for upcoming game days.

Participants

The current sample consisted of twelve individuals who regularly attended the Steelers fan club on game days. The individuals were also considered current members of the fan club, as they had paid dues to obtain official fan club member status. Seven men and five women were chosen for the semi-structured interviews, and their length of membership ranged from a minimum of one year to a maximum of twenty-six years. Specific demographic information for the individual club members, including their pseudonyms, are listed in Table 1.

Because the authors were attempting to understand the culture of this specific fan group, a purposeful sample was utilized where participants were chosen due to their activity within the club (Tongo, 2007). According to Creswell (2012), purposeful 'qualitative' sampling occurs when "researchers select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon" (p. 206). During the

Table 1
Participant's Backgrounds

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	First year of membership	Length of Interview	Do they consider Pittsburgh their Hometown?
Mike	Male	1995	21:47	No
Sarah	Female	2016	17:32	No
Darren	Male	1994	32:09	Yes
Nina	Female	2000	10:08	Yes
Chris	Male	1991	12:54	Yes
Daniel	Male	2000	19:43	Yes
Dominique	Female	2008	12:11	No
Tara	Female	**	19:05	Yes
Jeremiah	Male	1996	19:22	No
Fallon	Female	2007	14:01	Yes
Aaron	Male	1993	11:34	Yes
Jared	Male	1996	16:02	No

'** Not paid member currently

initial round of participant selection, Author One attended game days and identified two board members of the fan club who were willing to participate in a short interview about their experiences with this specific fan club and their fandom in general. After the first round of interviews were completed, the board members recommended other individuals for an interview because of their knowledge, history, or length of time with the club. By purposefully selecting individuals for the study, the authors were able to develop a detailed understanding of the Steelers fan club through the rich information obtained in the interviews (Creswell, 2012).

Procedures

Initially, the authors used observations to gather general information about this specific group of out-of-market fans. In order to conduct these observations, Author One attended two game days at the club's bar, for a total of 12 hours and observed the behaviors and interactions of the 50 to 70 group members in attendance. Acting as an observer as participant, Author One identified what the culture of this fan group entailed, which assisted in building rapport and developing

questions for semi-structured interviews. According to Gold (1958), an observer as participant has only minimal involvement in the social setting and makes more formal observations by meeting with many members and creating general conversation to learn about the group. Author One was able to participate in the Steeler's fan club's activities as well as maintain the role of a researcher. Because of the role of observer as participant, Author One found it difficult to take notes while participating in the fan club activities. However, after each observation Author One was able to reflect on the experience and write down the observations from the fan club event.

After observations were conducted, the authors' analyzed the data using 'a priori' themes from the literature (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011), and an interview guide (Appendix A) was created. The interview guide consisted of predetermined open-ended questions followed by additional prompts that were used depending on the participant's answers (Petty, Thompson, & Stew, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were specifically chosen because of the flexibility allowed during data collection. During this approach, a researcher has the ability to alter the structure of the interview, change the sequence of questions, and probe for more information using follow-up prompts (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data collection concluded after the authors deemed data saturation had been obtained. According to Gratton and Jones (2004), data saturation occurs when a researcher is unable to find new emerging themes through additional interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, Author One initially conducted the interviews and observations, and Author Two transcribed all of the interviews verbatim from audio recordings. The specific roles by the authors helped ensure consistency in transcripts by having a transcriber who is "familiar with the transcription protocol, the research topic and terminology, and the vernacular used by interviewees" (McLellan, MacQueens, & Neidig, 2003, p. 72). After the transcriptions were complete, both authors independently coded the interviews and observations. During this process, the authors utilized open coding strategies when analyzing the data, which entailed "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96).

In addition, both theory-driven and data driven coding were used. Theory-driven coding occurs where groupings were based on a priori themes and research which were discussed in the literature review (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Elo & Kynagas, 2008). Specifically, the theory-driven coding was essential for the analysis of the interviews because the authors served as two independent coders. By creating 'a priori' codes, the authors were able to maintain stability of the data analysis protocol (Wu, Thompson, Aroian, McQuaid, & Deatrick, 2016). Data-driven coding occurs when the results were examined as raw data (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Elo & Kynagas, 2008). The authors used triangulation in the form of observations, interview data, and multiple coders to incorporate various ways of interpreting the raw data (Wu et al., 2016). The authors also used member checking for two participants because the authors wanted to check the accuracy of the statements made (Creswell, 2012). Further, during the coding process, the authors utilized a constant comparative method to note the similarity or dissimilarity between

categories and themes. By using the constant comparative method, the authors were able to discuss which categories should be deleted or expanded upon (Creswell, 2012).

Table 2
Qualitative Raw Interview Data Coding Example

Raw Data	Preliminary Codes	Final Code
I don't really have any family here in [Midwestern City], so they have kind of become this other family. You know we talk about life; we go to each other's weddings, funerals…. I mean it is about the Steelers, but it has become so much bigger than that.	Camaraderie Big family Part of something bigger	Motivating Factor: Social Interaction
It gets me out of the house, and clears my mind, you might say. I go to another world, is what I am trying to say. And I don't have to worry about the BS going on in my life. You know, go have fun.	Forget about problems Gets them out of the house Outlet from life	Motivating Factor: Escape
It kind of gives you a sense of home. A lot of it is the football itself though. I grew up in a small steel mill town where football was predominate. Football just kind of reigned in that part of the country, and the Steelers will always be just a piece of home.	Sense of home Vicarious experience Homesick for Pittsburgh	Attachment: Community
I would just go out [to the fan club] and be with people. They have the same thing in their blood that I have.	Like-minded fans Club provides commonality Only Steelers' fans	Attachment: Fan Community

Evaluative standards for qualitative inquiry developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used in this study. Specifically, triangulation techniques were implemented by the authors in order to satisfy the criteria of credibility. Triangulation is defined as "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). The authors satisfied the credibility criterion through observations, interviews, and multiple coders. Next, in order to ensure transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the researchers provide sufficient contextual information about the setting. The authors were able to gain substantial in-depth information regarding the Steelers fan club setting because of the observations conducted. Additionally, the authors specifically asked the club members about the venue and game-day experience, which provided a thick description of the social environment of the club. The third criterion mentioned by Lincoln and Guba, is dependability, which refers to the "stability of findings over time" (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). The authors documented all aspects of the study, which allowed for cross-referencing of the data during the coding process. The technique ensured dependability because the research process was documented in a logical and traceable manner (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Finally, confirmability was established because credibility, transferability, and dependability were all achieved (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The subsequent section contains verbatim participant responses, as well as summarized and paraphrased results by the authors. The participants were given pseudonyms for the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity.

Findings and Discussion

The following section will detail the prevalent themes resulting from the coding by the authors, as well as discuss how these themes align and compare to past sport management literature and the context of the Steelers fan club examined. The authors discovered two overarching themes: motivations to join and participate and prominent attachment of members.

Motivations to Join and Participate

Through the observation and interviews the authors were able to find two main motivational themes that encouraged members to join and participate. The two most prominent motivations that appeared in this study were focused around social interactions and escape.

Social interaction

Similar to many studies on sport fan behaviors such as attendance and tailgating, social interaction was a key motivating factor of club members. Author One noted at the sports bar when club members would come in for the game they would immediately congregate with other members and it appeared that everyone was extremely friendly with each other, including many members shaking hands or hugging other members as they entered. Based on these observations, the authors believed motivational factors exist for club members to attend because they enjoyed socializing with other club members, this was consistently found in the interviews as club members explained how important the camaraderie or family bond were to the club. Chris detailed how enjoying the game with other fans simply improved the experience of watching a game: "We get to celebrate together and talk and have conversations about this and that related to the Steelers, eat and drink, and just enjoy". Daniel explained how the people made the experience great:

> It is because there are so many good people there. You know all the gang, you know you are going to see [Aaron] there. You are going to see some people you have not seen in a while. You know, it's fun.

It was obvious that fans were motivated by the social interaction that occurred through the fan club. The social interaction seemed to go even deeper than just camaraderie though, it appeared members considered the club to be an important aspect of their life.

The phrase "extended-family" is appropriate for how the participants in the study felt about the Steelers fan club, and it was documented well throughout the interviews. Dominique described how the club connected at a deeper level than just camaraderie and celebration with other fans:

> The people there I have known as long as I have been here and some of them are my oldest friends. I don't really have any family here in [Midwestern City], so they have kind of become this other family. You know we talk about life; we go to each other's weddings, funerals. We chip in if someone needs help with hospital bills. I mean it is

about the Steelers, but it has become so much bigger than that. It really is, you know, another family and I miss them whenever we are in the off-season. I would say that is as much, if not more important to me than just getting together and watching the games.

The idea that this fan club was more than just fans who got together to watch games together was very apparent, and Nina demonstrated this as she called the club "a big family on Sundays" and explained how "you get to know people and their families and it is a great experience." In general, the participants described how the connections they made with other members and the interaction with the group was the best aspect of the club and why they kept coming back, but the observation was made by outsiders as well. According to Daniel, when his brother in-law joined him one Sunday he called the club 'a little band of brothers', and his brother in-law loved the atmosphere and how everyone interacted. The club being motivated by social interaction aligns well with what has been found past sport management literature and explains the context of this type of fan club.

Both the SFMS and the MSSC measure consist of a social interaction type factor in their measurements (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Wann et al. (2008) studied fans of numerous collegiate sports and found group affiliation to be one of the most influential motivating factors for attendance. Additionally, in one study that compared spectators to fans, it was discovered that social interaction was one of the most significant motivational factors that influenced both groups (Trail et al., 2003). Social interaction, often called group affiliation, has been found as a strong influencer not only in sport fan attendance literature but also in studies on tailgating.

The past literature on the motivational factors behind tailgating have found social interaction to be prominent. Specifically, James, Breezeel, and Ross (2001) found one of the aspects of tailgating that individuals most enjoyed was spending time with their friends. Another study found social interaction to be one of the main underlying motivations for continued tailgating, and they broke it down to camaraderie and competition (Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenbeck, 2009). The word that most broadly described why fans participated in the Steelers fan club was camaraderie because the individuals in this study loved the ability to interact with other Steelers fans at the club's bar each game. The finding aligns well with the motivations for similar sporting contexts of game attendance and tailgating. Social interaction as the most prevalent motivation for involvement in the Steelers fan club is supported by past literature. Additionally, the other most salient theme, escape, was not surprising based on past sport management literature.

Escape

The club members interviewed in the study were also motivated by their desire to escape their daily routine and watching games with the club was seen as a great venue to step away from any issues they had going on in their lives. Dominique described this well when asked if the club was important to her:

It is absolutely important to me. I would say to the point that if some reason it just stops, or I had to move away, I would be heartbroken because it is kind of like, no matter what else is going on in your life with work or personal stuff, once a week you can go and walk in and just get hugged and greeted and high fived. Even if the team loses and we are all

> pissed and yelling at the TV and cussing, you are there with a bunch of other people who are exactly like you.

The participants felt that each Steelers game day, they could go to the club's bar and just break up their weekly routine, and their attendance was motivated by these feelings. Darren discussed how once he stepped into the club, he was able to forget about all the problems in his life. Jared went into great detail about how escape is important to his attendance:

> It gets me out of the house, and clears my mind, you might say. I go to another world, is what I am trying to say. And I don't have to worry about the BS going on in my life. You know, go have fun.

The club members described attending the bar as a way to get away from any problems they had in their life, and they described watching a game with the fan club as "another world." Although it was not as prevalent as the social interaction motivation, escape was a very apparent motivation for participating in this Steelers fan club, specifically attending the bar on game days. Escape being influential makes sense as there are only 16-20 days (depending on playoffs) during an entire year where the Steelers play a football game, therefore attending the club on a game day is a special treat that does not happen for a majority of the year.

Similarly, to social interaction, both the MSSC and SFMS include escape as one of their factors (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2000, p. 162) stated that escape is felt by fans because "sport spectating serves as a diversion from work and the humdrum activity of everyday life". The club members appeared to be extremely motivated to attend because it was an event that changed up their typical day-to-day schedule. Escape was an important factor for club members as a whole, which aligns with a study by James and Ridinger (2002), who found escape to be the second most influential motivational factor for both men and women.

In regard to tailgating, escape was also looked at and discovered as one of the primary motivations for people to begin tailgating (James et al., 2001) and as a primary benefit of participating in tailgating overall (Drenten et al., 2009). Sporting events often serve as an escape from one's regular life schedule, and the Steelers fan club did not prove different. Club members found attending the club as a way to enhance the overall escape that watching sport offers.

Overall, social interaction and escape were the two most prevalent motivations for joining this fan club and continued participation. As detailed above, the finding is not surprising based on the past sport attendance and tailgating literature, as well as regarding the context of the fan club. The authors begun with motivation because they are the most constructive antecedent to participation. Another important factor which appeared to work as an antecedent was the points of attachment members felt with the club.

Prominent attachments of members

Two different forms of attachment were consistently mentioned among most of the club members: community attachment and fan community attachment. The community was consistently indicated as the primary attachment point for out-of-market fans who considered

Pittsburgh their hometown (displaced fans in past literature). The second attachment point, fan community, was prominent across all fan club members. The two types of attachment: community and fan community, ultimately indicated what connects the individuals to the Pittsburgh Steelers and specifically the Pittsburgh Steelers fan club.

Community attachment

In accordance with past research on local fans, the current study found that attachment to the community was a factor in the continuation of identification with the Steelers and attendance with the fan club. Community attachment, also described as geographical attachment, was a prevalent response among club members who considered the Steelers their "hometown" team. The individuals, commonly referred to as displaced fans, provided statements specifically directed toward their attachment to the Pittsburgh area. Darren described the following in relation to the connection to the Steelers fan club:

> You know to me it is like, a vicarious experience of when you are in Pittsburgh, or when I was in Pittsburgh. You have your Steelers stuff on, the game on, and you just feel like you're in Heinz field. It is no different than being back in Pittsburgh.

The response by Darren shows how the fan club serves as a connection to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The vicarious relationship that is described above, allows fans to express their commitment to the team while portraying similar forms of identification one would experience in Pittsburgh.

Not only does the fan club represent an attachment to the city of Pittsburgh, many club members described the feeling of being closely attached to home. Fallon reiterated this concept by saying:

> It kind of gives you a sense of home. A lot of it is the football itself though. I grew up in a small steel mill town where football was predominate. Football just kind of reigned in that part of the country, and the Steelers will always be just a piece of home.

The representative statement listed above is not just the viewpoint of one individual club member, but rather all of the club members who considered Pittsburgh home. Nina said the following representative statement:

> [The club] gives me an outlet for not being so homesick, for not being able to be in Pittsburgh and watching the games. For example, this past weekend, I sat next to a guy and just started talking. The first thing you ask is, 'are you from Pittsburgh'? Then you find out they are, and then you get to share all the things that you miss about Pittsburgh from being away. The food, the city, it is just a great place.

The connection to Pittsburgh creates a common bond among individuals who actively participate in the Steelers fan club. The Steelers community that the fan club represents allows members to feel a symbolic connection to home that ultimately can provide individuals with a sense of belonging (Anderson & Stone, 1981).

Scholars who have examined local fans have found that one of the main factors that aided fandom in beginning was considering the team representative of one's hometown (Kolbe and James, 2000). Which could explain why this fan group appeared to attach attendance to this fan club to their feelings of the Pittsburgh community. Wann, Tucker, and Schrader (1996) found that geographical reasons encouraged a lot of fans to follow their favorite teams, and importantly noted that moving from the geographic area led to fans no longer following the team. With current technology it is much easier to follow one's favorite team once they have moved away (Collins et al., 2016) and these fan club members demonstrated that this club acts as the catalyst for fans to continue to feel that community attachment.

Fan community attachment

Similar to those responses from displaced fans on community attachment, individuals who are classified as distant fans described an attachment to the fan community. The intrinsic connection that like-minded individuals feel toward one another, was expressed thoroughly throughout the findings of the current study. When describing the similarities each member of the club shares with each other, Chris stated, "I would just go out [to the fan club] and be with people. They have the same thing in their blood that I have." Dominique mimicked this statement:

> You know I have always said, I can sit at home and watch the games in my pajamas and yell at the TV. But why not do it with 100+ other people who are feeling the same way you do. We all want that sense of belonging with fans like us.

The specific Steelers fan club provides an interactive environment that fosters social interaction among like-minded fans. Fallon discussed how the fan group felt like more than just watching your favorite team: "But when we go to [the sports bar] and everybody is watching the same team and cheering for the same thing it, I mean, it really does, make you feel like you are a part of something." The club was certainly important to these club members and the fan community attachment was a large part of that.

Mike described how the club added a community to his life that he felt was missing: "There was something missing, and I never really had a social network where I could talk about my passion." The response reiterates the strong connection that is experienced by fans with similar interests and backgrounds. The fan community attachment was shown to be a strong motivation for individuals to attend the club on game days compared to staying at home alone. The results are similar to those of Yoshida, Gordon et al. (2015), who found fan community attachment as the only significant predictor for repeat attendance.

Scholars have shown that social interaction is vital in the association between fan community attachment and on attendance (Yoshida, Gordon et al., 2015; Yoshida, Heere, et al., 2015). The connections to other club members was vital to repeat attendance at the club and suggests this fan club has formed a type of brand community with the connections between consumers (Katz & Heere, 2015). Similarly, to the literature on tailgating, not only were fans motivated to attend because of their desire for social interaction, but they appeared to attach to the community they interacted with in addition to the team itself (Drenten et al., 2009; James et al., 2001).

The fan club provided out-of-market Steelers fans a venue to engage with likeminded fans. Those fans who were from Pittsburgh attached to the feeling of the Pittsburgh community the club represented, as well as the fan community itself. The two attachment points are vital in the understanding of what factors of the Steelers fan club ultimately bring fans together week in and week out. The study was an exploration into understanding the out-of-market sport fan, through the lens of an out-of-market fan club individuals. Understanding the primary motivations and points of attachment for these group members is an initial step in understanding the makeup of out-of-market sport fans.

Implications

Out-of-market fans represent a demographic of sport fans that has not received much academic attention and provides a gap in the literature. The current findings illustrated out-of-market fans who participated in this Steelers fan club were motivated and attached to similar aspects of sport spectatorship that local fans feel. The results supported the suggestion of Collins et al. (2016), that teams could bolster their out-of-market fans' team identity by connecting with and supporting fan clubs. As social interaction and escape were the most prevalent motivations, teams should find ways to partner with these groups and enhance those aspects. Leagues should consider partnering with and providing merchandise to these fan groups, especially those with a great deal of members. As it is known that out-of-market fans are important for television deals (Collins et al., 2016) as well as attendance (Mills et al., 2016), creating more venues for these fans to connect with likeminded fans could create more lifelong fans who invest additional money into the organization. An example which has occurred on the international stage are FIFA's Fan Fests, which "allow people to recreate a stadium-like atmosphere in city centres" for fans unable to travel to the sporting event (Performance Communications, 2016, p. 9).

Even though these out-of-market fans are limited in attending football games in Pittsburgh, the current findings suggest these fans exhibit other avenues of commitment to the organization besides physical attendance at games. Understanding out-of-market fans is of vital importance for sport marketers. The fact this group was motivated by the social interaction and escape and attached to the feeling of the Pittsburgh community and fan community, should guide sport marketers. Marketers should target large cities and create additional environments that connect their out-of-market fans to their hometown and create an atmosphere that allows fans to congregate with other likeminded fans and experience the same benefits of local fans (Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2011).

While they were specifically looking at displaced fans who would consider Pittsburgh their hometown team, Collins et al. (2016) found connecting with their hometown was the best way for these fans to keep their team identification strong. In this study, the authors found that fans enjoyed watching games with likeminded individuals and connected with not only their hometown but other fans. It is quite possible that teams partnering with these fan clubs could make participation more beneficial for members, and in doing so, they could be increasing their out-of-market fans' identification with the team. It would be beneficial for teams because scholars have found that more highly identified fans attend more games and put forth more effort towards their teams (Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Wann, Keenan, & Page, 2009; Wann & Weaver, 2009). Beginning to understand the out-of-market fan should be beneficial for sport

marketers as people continue to move and teams will want to find effective ways to keep their fans loyal.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study is not without limitations. First, as the methodological approach occurred in one specific setting, the authors cannot completely generalize the results. Despite the lack of generalization, the authors believe the study should be influential on future research regarding out-of-market fans. Additionally, regarding the team selection of this club, various fan bases could yield different results due to unique aspects of each team. The Steelers have a storied history, and if scholars were to examine a less prominent sport team, varied responses could emerge. As with any qualitative study, the setting in question must be considered and kept in mind while extending the line of research on out-of-market fans. Also, as the study decided to examine a fan club, the authors were getting information from the most committed fans and not those out-of-market fans who have fallen off and no longer participate in the club. However, these results are not much different from research conducted with those who attend games but needs to be addressed as a limitation.

Further, the current research should only be a first step in the understanding of out-of-market fans. There are many directions for future research regarding out-of-market fans. While we know a great deal about sport fandom from the local fan perspective, we have a minimal understanding of the out-of-market fan. Future research should examine different sport fan groups qualitatively, such as out-of-market college football watch parties, to see if there are unique results or if they confirm the findings from this study. Additionally, it will be beneficial to examine the more casual out-of-market fan to address what is keeping fans from attending a group like the Steeler's fan club and highlight what makes them different from the out-of-market fans who attend these fan clubs.

As the study utilized qualitative methods, it would be beneficial to examine out-of-market fans through a quantitative lens as well. Using quantitative measures, scholars would be able to compare and contrast local fans to out-of-market fans. Further, quantitative measures would be helpful in comparing out-of-market fans who are at different levels of identification. As the study worked with active members of a fan group, they are likely highly identified, but implementing quantitative measures would allow scholars to see what differences exist between out-of-market fans regarding their level of identification.

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