Chapter 9
Growth in Sport Media and the Rise of New Sport Fandom

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ABSTRACT

Most aspects of life in contemporary societies permeate and are reciprocally influenced by the media. Sports are no exception. Each has influenced and depended on the other for its popularity and commercial success. Sports fans are individuals interested in and following sports through their psychological connections with teams or athletes. Nowadays, sports fans can watch different kinds of sport games or follow their favorite teams and athletes via various media platforms. Modern technology has substantially transformed the ways sports are consumed and has even created new platforms, such as esports. This chapter highlights modern sport fandom by starting from an overview of its growth with mainstream media and disentangling the currently intertwined dynamics of emerging trends. In particular, the authors discuss modern sport fandom by shedding light on the similarities and differences, underlining what causes, channels, and sustains individuals to consume sports, examining the consequences and results of fandom and highlighting contemporary research and developmental trends.

INTRODUCTION

Sports fans are people who have strong emotional attachments to their favorite team, athlete, and/or sport. They are loyal, enthusiastic, and spend a considerable amount of their time and money consuming the team product. Whether buying tickets to games, purchasing a jersey of their favorite player, or gathering with friends and family to watch the game on TV, sport fans are fanatical about their obsession with sport. Consuming sport has become a large part of American culture over recent decades. This is mostly due in part to the increase in globalization and technology, allowing individuals to watch and follow sports from anywhere in the world. As sport fandom has increased, so has money generated from sponsorships, apparel sales, and television contracts. This has led to a big boom in the sport industry, cementing its place as a key pillar of American society (Mastromartino, Chou, & Zhang, 2018).

There are various ways in which a sports fan can develop an identity, and the process is known as a socialization process, where the specific factors that influence one's identity as a fan are referred to as socialization agents (Wann & James, 2019). Research has shown that identity as a fan can lead to more consumption of team related products (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997) and to a lifelong allegiance to the team (Funk & James, 2006). While there are various factors that contribute to the socialization of fandom, such as sport participation, competitive sport experience, peers, school, community, and media (Funk & James, 2001; Johnson, Chou, Mastromartino, & Zhang, 2020; McPherson, 1976; Wann, Tucker, & Schrader, 1996), specific initiatives developed by teams such as participation clinics, developing individual relationships, and the stadium experience have been found to be influential in the socialization of some fans (Mastromartino, Wann, & Zhang, 2019).

Beyond developing an attachment to a particular team, athlete, or sport, fans also form a community and develop attachments to other fans with the same point of interest. Having a connection to other sport fans can lead to an increase in personal well-being and self-esteem (Wann, 2006; Wann, Waddill, Polk, & Weaver, 2011). In addition to the personal benefits of being a member of a sport fan community, there are often behavioral outcomes such as increased game attendance, merchandise sales, positive word of mouth, and the motivation to go out and recruit new fans for the team (Mastromartino, Zhang, Hollenbeck, Suggs, & Connaughton, 2019; Yoshida, Gordon, James, & Heere, 2015; Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015). The most prominent way in which sports fans engage in their fandom is by attending games in person or watching via televised programs. Moreover, there are many reasons why fans watch games. Wann (1995) identified eight factors of motivation for fans who consume games: stress (feeling of excitement), benefits to self-esteem, diversion from everyday life, entertainment, aesthetics, economic value (gambling), need for affiliation, and family needs. While fan motivations remain prevalent, the way sports fans consume games have changed over the years.

Development of new technologies have led spectator sport to become an omni-channel customer experience. New stadiums, such as the SunTrust Park in Atlanta, Levi's Stadium in San Francisco, and AT&T Stadium in Arlington are identified among a new wave of smart stadiums where the fan experience is enhanced by using technology such as smart phones or tablets while attending (Mastromartino et al., 2018). Increasingly, sport organizations are encouraging fans to bring smart devices to enhance their fan experience to purchase tickets, order food directly to their seats, or engage in a second screen experience, where supplemental activities and information are directed to the fan's phone while they are watching the game live. The ease and convenience of watching games at home on large screens in high definition has made it easy for sport fans to stay home to watch games instead of buying tickets and attending in person. Sports are now available through various Internet streaming services. For example,

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