Effects of Attribution Type, Rumination and Distraction on Sport Fan’s Anger

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Sport fans can get angry with their favorite team and players for various reasons (e.g. JR Smith, Cleveland). It is intuitive to understand the fans anger has negative impact on the fan’s support for the team and consumption behaviors. Despite the significant consequence of the fans anger, sport management literature relatively mum on managing fan’s anger. Some studies in sport settings have focused on anger of athletes influencing their performances. However, little is known about anger of fans within the spectator sport context. Why do the fans get angry under what circumstances/in what situation? And how can sport organizations alleviate sport fan’s anger and negative emotions? To answer these questions, this study explores the concepts of ‘rumination’ and ‘distraction’ to explain the underlying mechanism of anger in sport contexts.

In terms of causal attributions, the fans experiencing the negative circumstances react in different ways depending on attribution type (Internal vs External). Internal attribution people recall past negative memories more than those of external attribution in negative situation (Pyszczynski et al., 1989). Rumination can be defined as a type of involuntary response focusing on their negative problems (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). Therefore, internal attributions of fans experiencing team’s loss will be positively related to provocation-focused rumination (H1-a) and self-focused rumination (H1-b), but will be negatively related to distraction (H1-c). Provocation-focused rumination heightens the accessibility of aggressive actions, whereas self-focused rumination increases the accessibility of psychological arousal (Pedersen et al., 2011). Ciesla and Roberts (2007) examined that the presence of rumination would increase the effect of negative cognition on negative state and in turn increase the effect of the negative state on a cognitive content. This implies that provocation-focused rumination (H2-a) and self-focused rumination (H2-b) have a positive influence on fan’s anger, but distraction (H2-c) has a negative influence on fan’s anger. Lastly, we predicted that fan’s anger increases negative word-of-mouth intentions (H3).

A total of 306 sets of the online survey were collected from sport fans with negative experience of watching sporting matches. The fit of the measurement model was acceptable through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), x2/df =1.60, TLI=.98, CFI=.98, RMSEA=.04, and also structural equation model (SEM) yielded an acceptable fit (x2/df =2.11, TLI=.95, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.06). The results suggested that all were found to be significant. Fan’s internal attribution toward team defeat activates both provocation-focused rumination (β=.55) and self-focused rumination (β=.19), and in turn, decreases distraction (β=.47), which supported H1-a, H1-b and H1-c. Provocation-focused rumination (β=.64) and self-focused rumination (β=.13) both had positive relationships with anger, and distraction (β=.21) was negatively related to anger. The empirical result supported the hypotheses (H2-a, H2-b, H2-c). In addition, the positive relationship between fan’s anger (β=.59) and negative word-of-mouth intention was identified (H3).

This study contributed to our understanding about the sport fan’s anger by explaining the processing mechanisms through attribution, rumination and distraction. Therefore, these findings implied that sport organizations need to focus on their fan’s attribution, rumination and distraction to manage their fan’s anger.