Impact of Team Identification on Sport Consumer’s Psychological Well-being: Focusing on Social Isolation and Sense of Belonging

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As the COVID-19 pandemic has been prolonged, many social problems such as psychological health issues (insecurity and depression) have emerged as well. Especially, social isolation has become one critical social issue threatening the psychological well-being of people and has led many people to feel depressed (Corona Blue) or even become irritable (Corona Red). Researchers have consistently found the positive impacts of sport consumption on the consumers’ subjective well-being (i.e., Jang et al., 2018; Kim & James, 2019). Therefore, this study is to test the positive impacts of sport consumption on consumers’ psychological well-being, especially the perceived social isolation, during the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe. Specifically, we will investigate how sport can alleviate perceived social isolation by testing the relationships among team identification, social isolation, and sense of belonging. In particular, this study will consider a sense of belonging as a mediator between identification and social isolation, and gender as a moderator between identification and sense of belonging. According to Wann and others (2003), team identification effectively decreases negative emotions such as loneliness, isolation, depression, and alienation. Thus, this study posits that team identification decreased perceived social isolation. Besides, a social connection has been found to mediate the impact of team identification on social well-being (Wann et al., 2011). Team identification has also been known to have a positive impact on a sense of belonging (Wann & Hackathom, 2017). Hoffman and colleagues (2002) found that a sense of belonging can effectively decrease perceived isolation. Moreover, past studies on gender differences have found that females tend to value a sense of belonging more importantly than males (Koch & Wann, 2016; Koch & Wann, 2017). Therefore, we consider gender as a moderator between the relationship between identification and a sense of belonging. Accordingly, we propose: H1: Team identification will have a positive impact on a sense of belonging. H2: Sense of belonging will have a negative impact on perceived social isolation. H3: Team identification will have a negative impact on perceived social isolation. H4: Sense of belonging will mediate the impact of team identification on social isolation. H5: Gender will moderate the impact of team identification on a sense of belonging. Data will be collected by using an online survey (n = 400 professional sport consumers). Participants will answer questions on team identification (Wann & Branscomb, 1993), a sense of belonging (Liu et al., 2020), perceived social isolation (Bergweger & Morley, 2020). The data will be analyzed by conducting descriptive analysis, reliability test, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. The findings of this study are expected to bring up effective solutions to perceived social isolation by pinpointing the importance of team identification for sport consumers’ psychological well-being during this global pandemic. Most importantly, the present study is expected to provide significant implications on how sport consumption can be a beneficial psychological-aid during this global pandemic and unexpected pandemic situations in the future.