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Examining Differences among Primary and Secondary Rivals: Are Fan Perceptions, Behavioral, and Consumption Intentions Influenced by Degree of Rivalry?

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated how the relevance of a rival influences perceptions and behavioral intentions toward the rival and favorite team. In particular, fans of intercollegiate athletics reported their (1) perceptions of a rival team, (2) willingness to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression toward rival participants and fans, and (3) likelihood to consume their favorite team when playing either a primary and secondary rival team. Results indicated that fans were less likely to support their primary rival when playing another team than when their secondary rival was playing another team, believed fans of the primary rival team behaved more poorly than fans of the secondary rival, and experience more satisfaction when their favorite team defeated the primary rival than the secondary rival. Additionally, fans were more willing to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression toward participants and fans of the primary rival than the secondary rival, and were more likely to wear favorite team merchandise and read about the favorite team when they played a primary rival compared to a secondary rival. Discussion focuses on implications and applications for marketing practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

The rivalry phenomenon influences sport fans in many ways, including their consumption habits (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017; Havard, Shapiro et al., 2016; Kimble and Cooper, 1992), physiological reactions to watching live games (Hillman et al., 2004), and how they behave towards sponsors (Bee and Dalakas, 2015; Dalakas and Levin, 2005; Davies et al., 2006). As more teams and athletics departments in college athletics change conferences and leverage relationships with new and multiple rivals, it is important to compare fans' perceptions and reactions to the numerous teams. In other words, do fans feel differently about a primary rival in comparison to a secondary rival? How does the presence of both a primary and secondary rival team influence fans' behavioral and consumption intentions? An important gap in the literature reveals we know little about how

college sports fans' perceptions and consumptive behavioral intentions differ between primary and secondary rivals.

The current study compares fan perceptions and behavioral intentions towards primary and secondary rivals. A primary rival represents the out-group that fans compare (1) most frequently and (2) most passionately to their favorite team. An example would be a Michigan fan identifying Ohio State as their primary rival. A secondary rival represents an out-group that fans choose to compare against their favorite team, and take pleasure in defeating, but not to the same level as they do toward the primary rival. This would be a Michigan fan identifying Michigan State as their secondary rival. It is important to note that the participants in the current study were instructed to identify their primary and secondary rival. For this reason, individual participants could choose varying teams as rivals as both levels. For the purpose of the current study, the specific team identified as primary or secondary rival is not important, rather the degree of importance fans place on a team they see as primary or secondary. Gaining a better understanding of these perceptions will help academic researchers and practitioners in the dynamic world of intercollegiate athletics.

BACKGROUND

Rivalry research in sport investigates individual and group behavior, specifically in-group bias. Kilduff (2014) found that rivalry increased motivation and performance in adults, supporting one of the earliest observations into rivalry when Triplett (1898) found that cyclists exerted more effort when competing against others than when riding alone. According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), people belong to groups based on how the groups reflect on them internally and externally. This phenomenon is supported by observations of Cialdini et al (1976) and Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986), who found that people tend to associate with successful sport teams and distance themselves from unsuccessful teams. Individuals want to feel good about themselves, and one way to accomplish this is recognize favorable in-group biases (Turner, 1982) and derogate rival sport teams. By doing this, individuals can point to rivalry competitions as a basis for interpersonal and group comparisons; hence, rivalry contests are sometimes referred to as bragging rights games.

Kilduff, Elfenbein, and Staw (2010) identified a number of antecedents that contribute to rivalry. Among them, proximity and prior competitive interaction (i.e., historical competition) are very important. In their definition of rivalry, Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schaffer (2013) also identified historical competition along with on-field, off-field, and historical incidences as factors contributing to rivalry. Tyler and Cobbs (2015) identified characteristics of rivalries, finding close match-ups, and off-field factors such as perceived fairness and unfairness, and competition for personnel as important factors.

Many of the rivalries the public and popular media see as relevant typically contain a number of these characteristics. For example, the oldest rivalry in United States college athletics between the Harvard Crimson and Yale Bulldogs began as the two schools competed for federal funding to support their institutions. This historical competition has played out annually for the past century through athletic competition. The rivalry between the Texas Longhorns and Oklahoma Sooners acquired its name (i.e., Red River) from a land dispute over acknowledged state lines, while the Kansas Jayhawks and Missouri Tigers rivalry can be traced back to state militia conflicts in the Civil War (sportrivalry.com, 2017).

Through the lens of consumer behavior, rivalry influences how fans identify with favorite teams (Kimble and Cooper, 1992), consume games (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017; Havard, Shapiro et al., 2016), and relate to sponsors (Bee and Dalakas, 2015; Dalakas and Levin, 2005; Davies et al., 2006). The presence of a rival team can increase a fan's likelihood to watch the favorite team at the college (Havard, Shapiro et al., 2016) and professional levels (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017), and differ across sports (Havard, Reams et al., 2013). Intrapersonal and team-related assessments of

superiority (Havard, 2014), fan enjoyment (Cikara et al., 2011; Heider, 1958), the intensity in which they follow a favorite team in the media (Wann et al., 2016), and their likelihood to help others in emergency situations are also impacted by this phenomenon (Levine et al., 2005). Tyler and Cobbs (2017) provided an impetus to the present study when in a recent publication they asserted that fans perceive relevant rival teams differently.

To that end, much of the existing research on rivalry focuses on a single team fans identify as the primary rival. A comparative dearth of literature exists on literature examining the evolving landscape of multiple rival scenarios. Researching how fans perceive and react to rival teams at different levels of categorization is needed to help academics better understand the phenomenon, and to provide practical data for industry professionals to promote team brands and rivalry contests.

Current Study

Havard, Gray, et al. (2013) developed and validated the Sport Rivalry Fan Perception Scale (SRFPS) to measure how fans feel about rival teams. The SRFPS measures fan (1) willingness to support a rival against another team, (2) view of the academic prestige of a rival institution, (3) perception of rival fan behavior, and (4) the excitement and satisfaction they experience when their favorite team defeats a rival team. Rival perceptions can be influenced by individual characteristics such as gender and team identification (Havard, Eddy et al., 2016), conference affiliation (Havard and Reams, 2016), and conference realignment (Havard, Wann et al., 2013; Havard, Wann et al., 2017). Research also indicates fans of professional and international sport reserve stronger negative perceptions of their primary rival than of secondary rivals (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017). Based on the previous research, we expect that college fans will reserve stronger negative perceptions of the primary rival in comparison to secondary rivals. The following hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 1: Fans will reserve stronger negative perceptions of a primary rival team than a secondary rival team.

Rivalry can elicit negative and even deviant fan behaviors (Lee, 1985). For instance, fans indicated that games against rivals are typically more violent than games against non-rivals (Raney and Kinally, 2009). These findings have lead researchers to advise practitioners to show responsibility when promoting rivalries (Dalakas and Melancon, 2012). Wann and colleagues investigated fans' willingness to consider anonymous aggression against rival participants and fans, finding that highly identified fans are more likely to consider the actions than fans with lower levels of identification (Wann et al., 2003; Wann et al., 1999; Wann and Waddill, 2013). Regarding different rival teams at the college level, fans were more likely to consider acts of anonymous aggression toward participants and fans of historical rivals in comparison to more recent rivals (Havard, Wann, et al., 2013; Havard, Wann et al., 2017). Provided the earlier research, we expect fans will report a higher likelihood of considering acts of anonymous aggression towards primary rivals than secondary rivals.

Hypothesis 2: Fans will report higher likelihood of considering committing anonymous acts of aggression toward primary rivals than secondary rivals.

The presence of a rivalry game can influence a fan's likelihood to consume their favorite team. For instance, fans reported higher likelihood of attending a game, watching a game on television or the Internet, purchasing favorite team merchandise, and reading about their favorite team online when they play a rival as opposed to a non-rival (Havard, Shapiro et al., 2016). Fans have also indicated they would be willing to watch a rival team play someone other than the favorite team if they believed the rival was likely to lose (Mahony and Moorman, 1999). Regarding multiple rivals, fans of professional sport reported greater likelihood to watch the game, read about the team in the media,

and wear merchandise when analyzing differences across primary and secondary rivals (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017). Based on these findings, we expect that fans of college athletics will also indicate higher likelihood to consume their favorite team when they play a primary rival over a secondary rival.

Hypothesis 3: Fans will report higher likelihood to consume their favorite team when playing their primary rival over a secondary rival.

METHODS

Data was collected by distributing an online survey built through Qualtrics.com on team-specific fan pages (e.g., texags.com, blockm.com). Non-subscription based fan pages were used to allow fans to complete the survey that may not have had the chance if the survey were distributed on subscription based pages. Participants took approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey and were given a chance to enter a raffle for a chance to win one of four \$50 VISA Gift Cards.

Participants

A total of 1,558 fans started the survey, of which 1,424 completed the instrument. A total of 1,102 provided usable responses, for a usable completion rate of 70.7%. The vast majority of participants were white (90.9%) males (95.0%). The largest age groups in the sample were 25-34 (24.8%), followed by 35-44 (22.1%) and 45-55 (17.1%). A total of 37 schools from the five major (i.e., Power 5) conferences were represented in the sample.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used in the current study contained eight sections. First, fans were asked to identify their favorite team, the primary rival of their favorite team, and the secondary rival of their favorite team. Participants were then asked to report the level of identification they feel toward their favorite team using the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS: Wann and Branscombe, 1993). The SSIS is a 7-item measure, where higher scores on the 8-point likert scales indicate stronger identification with a team. In the third section, participants indicated their perceptions of their primary rival using the 12-item, four-factor SRFPS. Higher scores on three factors of the SRFPS indicates stronger negative perceptions of the rival team. Lower scores on the willingness to support the rival against another team items indicate stronger negative perceptions.

Next, participants were asked to respond to nine items gauging their likelihood of considering acts of anonymous aggression toward rival participants and fans (Wann and Waddill, 2013). Higher scores indicate stronger likelihood to consider anonymous acts of aggression toward the rival. In the fifth section, fans were asked to indicate their likelihood to consume their favorite team via (1) attendance, (2) TV/Internet, (3) wearing merchandise, (4) purchasing merchandise, and (5) reading about the team. Sections six through eight replicated sections three through five using the secondary rival rather than the primary rival. The final section included demographic questions. All scales used in the current study displayed reliability with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from ($\alpha = .811$ to $.962$). Means, standard deviations, and reliability for the scales used in the current study can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability for SSIS, SRFPS sub scales, and Anonymous Aggression

Item	M	SD	α
SSIS	7.15	0.78	.811
Primary OIC	3.40	1.06	.899
Primary OAP	3.19	1.78	.937
Primary OS	5.14	1.63	.940
Primary SoS	5.90	1.22	.819
Primary Anonymous Aggression	1.80	1.64	.957
Secondary OIC	3.70	1.11	.914
Secondary OAP	3.24	1.76	.964
Secondary OS	4.84	1.71	.961
Secondary SoS	5.79	1.26	.844
Secondary Anonymous Aggression	1.40	0.86	.962

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 24. Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to test H1, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test H2, and a paired sample t-test was used to test H3. A significance level of .05 was used in all analyses.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that fans would reserve stronger negative perceptions for their primary rival than the secondary rival. Because team identification (Havard, Eddy et al., 2016) and conference affiliation (Havard and Reams, 2016) influence rival perceptions, these two characteristics were used as covariates. Main effects indicate rival perceptions differed significantly between primary and secondary rivals (Wilks' Lambda = .974, $F(4, 2193) = 14.66, p < .001$). Univariate results showed significant differences were present regarding willingness to consider supporting the rival against another team ($F(1, 2196) = 41.23, p < .001$), perceptions of rival fan behavior ($F(1, 2196) = 19.05, p < .001$), and the satisfaction received when the favorite team defeats the rival team ($F(1, 2196) = 4.10, p = .043$). The only facet of rivalry not to show significant differences was perceptions of rival school academic prestige. In all three instances, fans reported stronger negative perceptions toward the primary rival than the secondary rival. Thus, H1 was partially supported, and results can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean Scores by Primary/Secondary Rivalry for OIC, OAP, OS, SoS (H1) and Anonymous Aggression

	Scale									
	OIC		OAP		OS		SoS		Anonymous Aggression	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Primary	3.40**	1.06	3.19	1.79	5.15**	1.62	5.90*	1.22	1.80**	1.64
Secondary	3.70**	1.11	3.24	1.76	4.84**	1.71	5.79*	1.26	1.40**	0.86

* Significant at .05

** Significant at .001

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis (H2) stated that fans would report higher likelihood to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression toward participants and fans of the primary rival than the secondary rival. An ANOVA was used to test H2, and showed significant a difference [$F(1, 2202) = 51.85, p < .001$] between the rival teams. Fans reported higher likelihood of considering anonymous acts of aggression toward participants and fans of the primary rival than the secondary rival; therefore, H2 was supported (Table 2).

Hypothesis 3

For the third and final hypothesis (H3), we proposed that fans would be more likely to consume their favorite team when playing a primary rival than a secondary rival. This hypothesis was tested using a paired sample t-test, and significant differences were found regarding likelihood to wear favorite team merchandise and reading about the favorite team on the Internet. In both scenarios, fans were more likely to consume their favorite team when they played the primary rival over the secondary rival. Significant differences did not exist regarding attending a live game, watching a game on television or the Internet, or purchasing favorite team merchandise. As such, H3 was partially supported (Table 3).

Table3
 Mean Scores for Favorite Team Consumption Intentions

	Consumption Intention									
	Attend Live Game		Watch Game on TV/Int		Wear Favorite Team Merchandise		Purchase Favorite Team Merchandise		Read about Favorite Team on Internet	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Primary	5.73	1.51	6.69	0.98	6.65**	0.88	5.32	1.57	6.83*	0.59
Secondary	5.70	1.51	6.71	0.90	6.55**	0.99	5.30	1.60	6.79*	0.67

* Significant at .05

** Significant at .001

DISCUSSION

The current study investigated how the presence of a primary rival on comparison to a secondary rival influenced fan perceptions and behavioral intentions toward rival and favorite teams. Results show that fans reserve stronger negative perceptions of the primary rival than the secondary rival. In particular, fans reported being less likely to support the primary rival against another team, believe fans of the primary rival behaved more poorly, and experienced more satisfaction when their favorite team beat the rival team than when the secondary rival was present. These findings are consistent with previous research into rivalry at the professional level (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017). Additionally, the findings lend support to Tyler and Cobbs' (2017) assertion that fans can feel differently about relevant rival teams.

Second, the current study found that fans reported higher likelihood of considering acts of anonymous aggression toward participants and fans of the primary rival than the secondary rival. This finding lends support to existing research regarding relevant rival teams in a previous and current athletic conference (Havard, Wann et al., 2013; Havard, Wann et al., 2017). This finding is plausible because of the level of animosity fans reserve for their biggest rival.

Finally, fans reported higher likelihood of consuming their favorite team when playing a primary rival than a secondary rival. In particular, results showed that people were more likely to wear their

favorite team's merchandise and read about the team when playing a primary rival rather than a secondary rival. In the intercollegiate setting this finding now extends Havard and Hutchinson (2017), who found that fans were more likely to display greater consumptive behaviors when a primary rival was playing in comparison to a secondary rival. Future study could focus on what causes fans of professional sport to report higher likelihood of watching their favorite team play a primary versus secondary rival on television or the Internet but not at the collegiate level. Further, fans indicated they were more likely to consume their favorite team when it was playing a rival team rather than a team they did not consider a rival. The current study adds to these findings as it extends to the college level.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING PRACTITIONERS

The findings add to the literature on in-group bias (Turner, 1982) and rivalry (Havard, 2014). In particular, the current study provides empirical support that the level or relevance of rivalry a fan reserves for a team influences their perceptions and behavioral intentions toward a rival team. Findings also add to the literature on fan likelihood to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression (Wann et al., 2003; Wann et al., 1999; Wann and Waddill, 2013) by asserting how fan behavioral intentions differ between primary and secondary rivals at the college level.

Practitioners can also utilize the findings from the current study. For example, the current study provides empirical evidence that fans do reserve stronger negative perceptions of a primary rival over a secondary rival. Therefore, opportunities to generate greater revenue through ticket sales, media rights, merchandise, should be explored extensively moving forward. Second, knowing that fans reported higher likelihood to consider committing anonymous acts of aggression toward a primary rival than a secondary rival, practitioners can better prepare for contests against rival teams.

The findings provide industry professionals with important information regarding how fans consume their favorite team. Taking the current findings in combination with those of Havard, Shapiro et al. (2016), practitioners know that (1) playing a rival team positively influences fan consumption intentions, and (2) the type or degree of rival team also influences fan consumption intentions. Additionally, it is also important for practitioners to consider that the presence of a primary rival does not make fans more likely to attend a game, watch a game on television or the Internet, or purchase favorite team merchandise than when playing a secondary rival. It is also important to recognize that fans reported high scores for all three mediums of consumption.

The current study also provides practitioners with important information about fan behavioral intentions toward rival groups. In particular, the current study supports previous work on anonymous aggression that indicates fan behavioral intentions can be influenced by characteristics such as team identification (Wann et al., 2003; Wann et al., 1999; Wann and Waddill, 2013) and relevance of rivalry (Havard and Hutchinson, 2017; Havard, Wann et al., 2013; Havard, Wann et al., 2017).

Finally, the current work should serve as a cautionary tale to practitioners. Specifically, previous work on rivalry and anonymous aggression indicates that even as the vast majority of fans indicate they would not consider committing anonymous acts of aggression toward rival participants and fans, between one and two percent indicate they definitely would be willing to consider the most heinous acts of anonymous aggression toward the out-group (e.g., either physically harm or murder). On the surface, this does not seem like a large statistic, but when one considers the size of many college football venues, it becomes more alarming. For example, in a stadium that seats 100,000 fans, practitioners have to be aware that between 1,000 and 2,000 people would at least indicate they definitely would consider committing the most heinous acts of aggression toward a rival group. This statistic should be used by practitioners to assist them in preparing for contests between rival teams.

Specifically, the current study indicates that fans are more willing to consider anonymous aggression when playing a primary rival than a secondary rival. These findings, combined with data indicating that exposure to negative promotional titles (Havard, Wann et al., 2017) and negative media stories (Havard and Ferrucci, 2017) can increase negative perceptions of the rival team mean that practitioners should plan accordingly, and show caution, when planning for and marketing a rivalry contest.

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