Market Analyses of Race and Sport Consumption

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Abstract

Numerous sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, gender, income, and occupation) have been found to influence sport consumption; however, research examining the influence of race/ethnicity on sport consumption has yielded conflicting results. The purpose of this study was to further examine the manifestations of race on sport consumption. Data were collected at women’s professional basketball games from Black and White spectators \( n = 2,063 \) in two different US markets (one in the midwest and the other in the south). The findings generally revealed consistent similarities and differences in the Black and White spectators’ sport consumption patterns in both markets. The results implied an influence of race effects (i.e., the racial classification of the spectator/consumer, the racial demographics of the sport team as the product to be consumed, and the racial demographics of the environment in which the sport consumption takes place) on sport consumption.

Market Analyses of Race and Sport Consumption

A number of sociodemographic variables have been found to influence the consumption of sport. Among them are age (Pan, Gabert, McGaugh, & Branhvold, 1997), gender (Pan et al., 1997; Sutton & Watlington, 1994), income (Baade & Tijhen, 1990), and occupation (Zhang, Pease, Hui, & Michaud, 1995). Another sociodemographic variable that has been posited to influence sport consumption is race/ethnicity. Zhang et al. (1995) revealed that race may influence the decision-making process in which sport spectators engage as they ponder the decision to attend professional sport events. In that study, differences were found in spectators’ responses to a decision-making inventory concerning sport attendance based on the spectators’ race/ethnicity. Zhang et al. (1995) also revealed that game promotions in particular equally influenced African Americans’ (used interchangeably with Blacks in this study) and Hispanics’ decisions to attend games of the National Basketball Association (NBA). However, game promotions influenced the attendance decisions of African Americans and Hispanics more than those of Asians and Caucasians. Additionally, Zhang et al. (1995) also revealed that African Americans’ decisions to attend NBA games were influenced by schedule convenience more often than for any other ethnic group. According to Schurr, Wittig, Ruble, and Ellen (1988), race was statistically significant in explaining the difference between college basketball game attendees and non-attendees. Schurr et al. (1988) also found an interaction between race and gender, suggesting that Black males, Black females, and White males were equally likely to attend the respective basketball games, with such likelihood being significantly lower for White females. Goldsmith (2003) offered further evidence of the influence of race-related factors on Blacks’ participation in sport.

Neither the Blacks nor Whites in the midwestern or southern markets were committed spectators; the majority of them were considered light users, having been to only one or two of the professional women’s basketball games.

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Baade and Tiehen (1990) offered findings to refute those presented by Noll (1974) and Schofield (1983) by revealing that as the percentage of a city's total population represented by Blacks increased, so would attendance at sport events (when everything else is equal).

Another likely influence on sport consumption is the race/ethnicity of the players on the participating sport teams. According to Zhang et al. (1995), the general influence of the home team had a similar effect on attendance decisions by each ethnic group (e.g., Caucasians, Asians, African Americans, and Hispanics). However, Sapolsky (1980) offered findings to the contrary. To specifically examine the influence of the race of the athletes competing on spectators’ enjoyment of the contests, Sapolsky (1980) conducted an experimental study in which Black and White male spectators viewed a video presentation of an edited basketball game featuring an all-Black and an all-White team. The results revealed that the Black spectators enjoyed scores by the Black athletes significantly more than did the White spectators. There were no significant differences between the Black and White spectators' enjoyment of scores made by White players. Additionally, Black spectators' enjoyment of the game was not predicated on the suspense of the contest as it was for Whites, as Blacks were significantly more pleased with the game when the Black team won.

Purpose of the Study

While many sociogeographic factors undoubtedly influence sport consumption, the primary foci of this exploratory investigation were race-based factors: (a) the racial/ethnic classification of the sport consumers, (b) the environments' residential racial/ethnic composition, and (c) the racial/ethnic composition of the respective home teams. The collection of research previously reported on the expressed and/or implied influence of race/ethnicity on sport consumption has yielded varied and often conflicting results, warranting further investigation of this topic. This study continued the exploration of race and sport consumption by examining whether Black and White consumers of professional women's basketball teams from two different (environmental) markets in the United States differed significantly regarding (a) communication tools they relied on for game or team information, (b) their game/event purchase patterns, (c) their active participation in basketball, (d) factors motivating their game attendance decisions, and (d) predictors of their game attendance frequency.

Market Analysis of Selected Sites

General Market Characteristics

The sites selected for this study differed in their geographical location; One was located in the southern region of the United States and the other was located in the midwestern region. Nevertheless, they were strikingly similar regarding their predominant sociodemographic market characteristics: (a) both had a gender composition of 51% female and 49% male; (b) both were perceived as young markets with a median age of 33; (c) both had a number of colleges and universities in close proximity yielding a student population of at least 90,000; (d) over 70% of residents in both markets completed high school, and at least 16% held college degrees; (e) both had unemployment rates that were approximately 4%; and (f) both cities were listed in Fortune Magazine's top 10 rankings for their economic and business opportunities (Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce Research Department, 1995; Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, 1996).

The marketing activities related to last-minute promotions and impulse buying may be more effective for the Black than the White spectators.

One notable difference between the two environments was the population size. The midwestern market was ranked as the 16th largest city in the United States and the 29th largest metropolitan statistical area (MSA; Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce Research Department, 1995). In comparison, the southern market had a smaller city population (ranked 37th) but a larger MSA (ranked 11th; United States Bureau of the Census, 1994, 1997). Another difference in the two environments was that the southern market had a higher household effective buying income than the midwestern market, reporting incomes of $46,099 and $39,283, respectively (Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, 1996). Thus, the overall sociodemographic characteristics of the two environments were more similar than dissimilar, notwithstanding the population size and (to a lesser extent) income differences.

Racial Composition of Markets' Residents

The most striking difference between the two environments under investigation, and the one most central to this study, was the racial composition of the individuals residing therein. The midwestern market had an MSA with an ethnic/racial composition of 86% White, 12% Black, 0.7% Hispanic, and 1.5% Asian (the midwestern city proper had a racial/ethnic composition of 74% White, 23% Black, 2% Asian, and 1% Hispanic). The southern market had an MSA with a
racial/ethnic composition of 71% White, 26% Black, 3% Hispanic, and 3% Asian (the southern city proper had a racial/ethnic composition of 67% Black, 30% White, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian). While both markets were predominately White, the southern market had an MSA Black population that was more than twice that of the midwestern market, and the southern city's Black population was approximately three times that of the midwestern city's Black population.

Racial Demographics of Home Team

Based on the findings of Sapolsky (1980) and the disposition that spectators may have for athletes who are racially similar, it was important to note the racial composition of the home teams (professional women's basketball) for the respective environments. The home team for the midwestern market included five Blacks, four Whites, and one athlete classified as interracial. The team's 'star' players were of both races. In addition, the team had an all-White coaching staff and one Black in a management position. The home team for the southern market included eight Blacks, two Whites, and one athlete classified as international. The team's celebrated star player was Black, the head coach was Black, and Black personnel held most of the front office positions.

Methodology

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in two separate consumer studies at professional women's basketball games held in the southern and midwestern markets using similar data collection methods. In both studies, data were collected by randomly distributing questionnaires to spectators as they entered the respective sport arenas. For the midwestern market, data were collected on two separate occasions at the end of the season (at a weekend game and at a weekday game). Attendance at each game was 2,165 and 5,429 respectively, for an average attendance of 3,797. The average home attendance for the team for the season was 2,682. A total of 736 questionnaires were gathered; however, only the questionnaires from respondents who classified themselves as Black or White were used in the analysis. This procedure yielded a usable sample size of 710 (606 Whites and 104 Blacks), which was deemed generally representative of the racial composition of the attendance population (approximately 84% and 14%, respectively).

Data in the southern market were collected on seven separate occasions throughout the season, during games held on both weekdays (n = 3) and weekends (n = 4). Attendance at each game: 2,325; 3,489; 2,187; 2,482; 2,251; 3,683; and 1,224, for an average attendance of 2,520. The average home attendance for the season was 2,780. A total of 1,361 questionnaires were collected during the seven games; however, only the questionnaires from respondents classifying themselves as Black or White were used for the analyses. This procedure yielded usable sample size of 1,284 (716 Blacks and 568 Whites), which was deemed generally representative of the racial composition of the attendance population (approximately 53% and 42%, respectively).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the sociodemographic and sport consumption profile variables. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to examine the differences between the spectators' game attendance frequency. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to examine responses to the summated game attendance motivation variable and the different factors posited to influence game attendance decisions. A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the degree to which active basketball participation and the summated attendance motive predicted game attendance frequency.

Results

Summary Demographic Profile

The demographic profiles of the Black and White spectators were similar in that for both samples from the midwest and southern markets (a) females comprised the majority (70% and 72%, respectively); (b) Blacks were generally younger, with greater percentages in the age range 25-34 (for the midwest market) and 25-39 (for the southern market); (c) more Blacks were single in both samples (69% and 58%, respectively); (d) Whites reported higher incomes for both samples (with 25% and 35% reporting incomes that exceeded $75,000 in the respective markets); (e) Whites had higher levels of education, with a greater percentage in both samples holding graduate or professional degrees; and (f) the majority of Blacks and Whites in both samples had professional occupations.

Pre-Game Activities

A similar percentage of White and Black spectators from the midwest market were at home prior to the basketball games (47% and 42%, respectively). However, over twice as many White than Black spectators were at a restaurant or a bar prior to the games (27% and 11%, respectively). Conversely, over twice as many Black spectators compared to White spectators (21% and 9%, respectively) were at work prior to the games.
The pre-game behaviors of spectators in the southern market were similar to those revealed for the midwestern market. Similar percentages of Black and White spectators were at home prior to the games (57% and 51%, respectively) and approximately three times more White than Black spectators (17% and 6%, respectively) were at a restaurant prior to the games. Unlike the midwestern market, similar percentages of Black (22%) and White (19%) spectators were at work prior to the games.

**Communication Tools**

The communication tools regarding game or team information that were examined in this study were determined by the researchers in consultation with the teams' marketers. The communication tools examined included: word of mouth advertising (from friends or associates), team schedules, radio, television, newspaper, and the internet. For the midwestern market, the tools that the spectators utilized to obtain information about the team's games were ascertained. The results revealed similarities between the Black and White spectators. The majority of both groups relied on team schedules for game information (i.e., 63% of Whites and 60% of Blacks). Regarding other communication methods: word-of-mouth advertising informed 33% of the White spectators and 28% of the Black spectators; radio informed 11% of the Black spectators and 9% of the White spectators; the newspaper informed 20% of the White spectators and 14% of the Black spectators; television informed 11% of Blacks and 6% of Whites; and the internet was negligible as a source of awareness of the team's games for both races of spectators (utilized by 3% of the Black spectators and 2% of the White spectators).

For the southern market, the communication tools the spectators relied on for general information about the team was ascertained. The results revealed that both Black (32%) and White (38%) spectators from the southern market most often relied on word-of-mouth advertising for information regarding the team. Both Black and White spectators also relied on the newspaper as the second most popular source of information (18% and 27%, respectively). While radio informed substantially more Black (14%) than White (2%) spectators, television appeared to inform both Black and White spectators similarly (8% and 5%, respectively). Pocket schedules were utilized by 7% of Blacks and 4% of Whites.

**Sport Purchase Patterns**

**Ticket Purchases.** For the midwestern market 43% of the White spectators purchased tickets prior to game day, compared to 26% of Blacks. Similar percentages of Blacks and Whites purchased their tickets just before the game (41% and 37%, respectively). Differences were also found in the time of ticket purchases for Black and White spectators in the southern market. Most notably, almost twice as many White spectators as Black spectators purchased tickets 15 days or more in advance of the games (35% versus 18%). On the other hand, more Black spectators (25%) than White spectators (16%) purchased tickets within 24 hours of the games.

**Game and Team Merchandise Purchases.** In terms of sport purchases made during the game, there were similarities between Black and White spectators from the midwestern market, as both races were equally likely to purchase game programs, concession items, and team merchandise. Thirty percent of Whites and 29% of Blacks purchased game programs; 68% of Whites and 66% of Blacks purchased concession items; and 22% of Blacks and 20% of Whites purchased team merchandise.

Specific purchases were not ascertained for consumers in the southern market. Instead, spectators from the southern market were asked the frequency with which they purchased products that they saw or heard advertised at the team's games. Forty percent of the Black spectators and 49% of the White spectators indicated that they frequently (i.e., sometimes or often) purchased products associated with the team.

**Game Attendance Frequency**

Seventy-six percent of the Black spectators in the midwestern market had attended from 1-5 games; more specifically, 53% had attended only one or two games. Comparably, approximately 70% of the White spectators were also considered light users, with 57% of them having attended only one or two games. The ANOVA revealed no statistically significant differences in the basketball game attendance frequency among the Black and White spectators in the midwestern market \( F(1, 706) = 1.65, p = .20, M \) for Blacks = 4.6, \( M \) for Whites = 5.5. Thus, race did not appear to significantly influence the frequency of basketball attendance.

Spectators in the southern market were also categorized as predominantly light users. Forty-six percent of Black spectators and 59% of White spectators attended only one of the professional women's franchise basketball games. Twenty percent of both Black and White spectators attended two games, while only nine percent of Black and three percent of White spectators attended three games. Unlike the midwestern market, the ANOVA revealed that the game attendance frequency in the southern market significantly differed based on the race of the spectator, with Blacks attending at a
higher frequency, \( F(1, 1184) = 16.16, p < .001; M \) for Blacks = 1.92, and the \( M \) for Whites = 1.55.

**Active Basketball Participation**

For the midwestern market, approximately 59% of the Black spectators compared to 42% of the White spectators were active participants in basketball. For the southern market, both past and current basketball participation patterns were ascertained. The rates of basketball participation for both Black and White spectators in the southern market were similar: (a) 47% of Black spectators and 50% of White spectators previously participated in competitive basketball, and (b) 14% of Black spectators and 13% of White spectators were current participants in organized basketball leagues.

**Motivations for Game Attendance Decision**

**Midwestern Market.** For the Midwestern market, items that were identified as motives for the spectator’s attendance decision included: (a) being fans of the game of basketball, (b) the opportunity to see positive role models (i.e., professional women athletes), (c) to see the team’s players, (d) to support the league, (e) the quality of the play, (f) for entertainment, (g) to share the experience with family, and (h) to see the opposing team. Participants were asked to respond to the manner in which each factor influenced their decision to attend the team’s games using a Likert scale of 1 (not influential at all) to 7 (very influential). The MANOVA revealed that two of the factors were significantly more important to the attendance decisions of the Black rather than White spectators: (a) the opportunity to support the league, \( F(1, 612) = 6.72, p = .01; M \) for Blacks = 6.51, \( M \) for Whites = 6.13 and (b) the opportunity to see the opposing team. \( F(1, 612) = 18.86, p < .001; M \) for Blacks = 4.25, \( M \) for Whites = 3.14. See Table 1.

The attendance decision motives had a reliability coefficient of .78. Based on the internal consistency of the responses, a composite attendance motivation variable was computed to examine the differences between the overall responses of Black and White spectators. Also revealed in the MANOVA was that the summated attendance motive variable was more important in the attendance decisions of the Black rather than White spectators, \( F(1, 612) = 10.19, p = .001; M \) for Black spectators = 5.84, \( M \) for White spectators = 5.47.

**Southern Market.** Factors that were posited as motives for the attendance decision at the professional women’s basketball games in the Southern market included the following variables: (a) basketball action, (b) pre-game entertainment/activities, (c) social atmosphere, (d) promotional/giveaway items for adults, (e) promotional/giveaway items for children, (f) other special promotions, (g) quality of food, and (h) ticket price. Using a Likert scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important), participants were asked to respond to each item in terms of its importance in determining their decision to attend the game. The MANOVA revealed that seven of the eight motives were more influential in the attendance decision of the Black rather than White spectators. The only factor the spectators did not respond significantly different to was basketball action, \( F(1, 1226) = .001, p = .98 \) (means for both groups = 4.70). See Table 2.

### Table 1

**MANOVA Results of Black and White Spectators’ Responses to Factors Influencing Attendance Decision in the Midwestern Market** *(7 = Very Influential; 1 = Not Influential at All)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Factors</th>
<th>Black Spectators</th>
<th>White Spectators</th>
<th>F-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Fan of the game of basketball.</td>
<td>6.03 (1.34)</td>
<td>5.74 (1.71)</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To see positive role models.</td>
<td>5.89 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.74)</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To see the team’s players.</td>
<td>6.35 (1.03)</td>
<td>6.09 (1.28)</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To support the league.*</td>
<td>6.51 (1.04)</td>
<td>6.13 (1.35)</td>
<td>6.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The quality of the play.</td>
<td>6.26 (1.04)</td>
<td>6.09 (1.24)</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Entertainment.</td>
<td>6.32 (.960)</td>
<td>6.23 (1.12)</td>
<td>.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Share experience with family.</td>
<td>5.11 (2.18)</td>
<td>4.68 (2.33)</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. To see the opposing team. **</td>
<td>4.25 (2.21)</td>
<td>3.13 (2.12)</td>
<td>21.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Attendance Motive Variable**</td>
<td>5.84 (.936)</td>
<td>5.47 (1.04)</td>
<td>10.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes factor that is significant at the .01 level.

** Denotes factors that are significant at the .001 level.
Table 2
MANOVA Results of Black and White Spectators’ Responses to Factors Influencing Attendance Decisions in the Southern Market (5=Most Important; 1=Least Important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Factors</th>
<th>Black Spectators</th>
<th>White Spectators</th>
<th>F-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (Std. Dev)</td>
<td>Mean (Std. Dev)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Basketball Action</td>
<td>4.70 (.75)</td>
<td>4.70 (.69)</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Entertainment*</td>
<td>2.66 (1.52)</td>
<td>1.95 (1.28)</td>
<td>80.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Atmosphere*</td>
<td>3.33 (1.39)</td>
<td>2.99 (1.42)</td>
<td>17.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adult Giveaways*</td>
<td>2.52 (1.59)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.42)</td>
<td>38.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Children Giveaways*</td>
<td>2.46 (1.71)</td>
<td>1.65 (1.44)</td>
<td>81.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Special Promotions*</td>
<td>2.80 (1.62)</td>
<td>2.11 (1.46)</td>
<td>60.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Food*</td>
<td>2.34 (1.69)</td>
<td>1.73 (1.44)</td>
<td>49.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ticket Price*</td>
<td>3.59 (1.57)</td>
<td>3.05 (1.52)</td>
<td>36.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Attendance Motive Variable*</td>
<td>3.05 (1.03)</td>
<td>2.52 (.920)</td>
<td>90.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes factors that are significant at the .001 level.

The attendance decision motives had a reliability coefficient of .85. Based on the internal consistency of the responses to the items, a composite attendance motivation variable was computed to examine the differences between the overall responses of Black and White spectators. The MANOVA revealed that the summed attendance motivation variable was more important to the attendance decision of the Black rather than White spectators, \( F(1, 1226) = 86.95, p < .001; M = 3.05 \) for the Black spectators and \( M = 2.52 \) for the White spectators.

Predictors of Game Attendance Frequency
To examine the manner in which active basketball involvement- and attendance-decision motivations (previously discussed) actually predicted attendance frequency at the professional women's basketball games, multiple regression analyses were performed for Black and White spectators. For the midwestern market, the results revealed that the model of predictors was significant for the White spectators, explaining approximately 21% of the variance in attendance \( F(2, 510) = 67.44, R^2 = .209, p < .001 \); with both variables being significant at the univariate level: (a) active participation in basketball, \( \beta = .286, t = 7.23, p < .001 \), and (b) the summed attendance-decision motivation, \( \beta = .390, t = 9.84, p < .001 \). In contrast, the model for the predictors was not significant regarding the attendance frequency for the Black spectators \( F(2, 86) = .981, R^2 = .02, p = .38 \).

The predictor variables for the southern market included past basketball participation, current basketball participation, and the summed attendance-decision motivation variable. For the southern market, the multiple regression analysis revealed findings that were opposite the ones found for the midwestern market. The model of predictors were not significant for the attendance frequency of the White spectators \( F(3, 526) = 2.20, R^2 = .012, p = .09 \). However, the model of predictors was significant for the Black spectators \( F(3, 652) = 3.12, p = .03 \), although it explained only a negligible amount of the variance in attendance \( R^2 = .014 \). The results indicated that while current basketball participation was not significant at the univariate level \( (B = .043, p = .28) \), past basketball participation was significant \( (B = .091, t = 2.29, p = .02) \), as was the composite attendance-decision motivation variable \( (B = .076, t = 1.94, p = .05) \).

Discussion
The profile of the participants in this study revealed demographic differences among the subsamples of Black and White spectators; however, the demographic differences between Blacks and Whites were similar in both markets (e.g., more Blacks were younger and single, more Whites were educated and affluent, yet both Blacks and Whites were employed in professional occupations). Based on these findings, in both markets, demographic segmentation strategies based on age, income, and marital status may not capture the Black and White spectators similarly. The communications tools used for team/game information were more similar than dissimilar for the Black and White spectators in the midwestern and southern markets, with the exception of Black spectators in the southern market relying more on radio for team information. This lat-
ter finding reiterated the effectiveness of radio in promoting sport to Black consumers as discussed by Johnson (1995).

The finding regarding pre-game activities highlighted the potential attractiveness of pre-game social activities to the White spectators, because White spectators were more likely to make their sport experience an extension of a social outing at a bar or restaurant than were the Black spectators. Black and White spectators in both markets exhibited similar behaviors regarding their game purchases or willingness to purchase team merchandise. A noteworthy difference regarding team purchases was that a greater percentage of the White spectators in both markets were more likely to engage in advanced ticket purchases. Therefore, marketing activities related to last-minute promotions and impulse buying may be more effective for the Black than the White spectators as the Whites tended to engage in planned or advanced purchases.

Black spectators were overrepresented at the games, while White spectators were under represented.

Burnett, Menon, and Smart (1993) discussed the need for sport marketers to examine the manner in which sport spectators may differ from sport participants in order to further segment the market for sport consumers. Shank (1999) also contended that in some instances the sport spectator and sport participant markets overlap. The findings of this study suggested that basketball participant and spectator markets among Black and White consumers existed and overlapped to varying degrees in the respective markets; however, differences in the basketball spectator and participant markets between the Black and White consumers were also revealed (such that active basketball participation was a particularly positive predictor for Whites’ attendance in the midwestern market and past basketball participation was predictive of attendance for Blacks in the southern market). These findings indicated that promotional activities that seek to involve spectators in active basketball participation may vary in their appeal to Black and White spectators in different regions of the country.

Concerning the spectators’ attractions to the respective games, in both markets the Black and White spectators’ attendance was primarily influenced by game- and basketball-related attributes. These findings supported those of Ferreira and Armstrong (2003) regarding the importance of product attributes to sport-attendance decisions. Zhang et al. (1995) revealed promotions were more influential on game attendance for Blacks than for Whites. This study supported the findings of Zhang et al. (1995) in that Black spectators in both the southern and midwestern markets responded significantly higher to the summated attendance-motivation variable. Moreover, for the southern market adult giveaways, children giveaways, and other special promotions were more important to the attendance decision of Black than White spectators, and the summated attendance motivations were significant predictors of Blacks’ game-attendance frequency, offering further support for the influence of promotional activities on ethnic minorities’ sport consumption decisions.

According to Zhang et al. (1995) the influence of the home team was similar for ethnic groups; however, this study revealed that for the midwestern market (where the home team reflected a racial balance between Black and White players) the opportunity to see the opposing team (rather than the home team) was more important to the attendance decisions of Black spectators than of White spectators. For the southern market, the influence of the players on the home team (predominately Black) on the spectator’s attendance decision was not directly ascertained. Nonetheless, a comparison of the findings for the two markets offered insight into a likely latent influence of race of home team on attendance.

For example, Gouke (1987) suggested that two distinct markets exist: one for general (mainstream) consumers and one primarily for Black consumers. Blacks and whites may purchase a product that is designed for the general market at similar rates; however, a product primarily designed for the Black consumer market is most often purchased by Black consumers only. Relating Gouke’s (1987) contentions to this study, since the team in the midwestern market had a racially balanced composition, it may have been perceived as a product for the “general” market and therefore, consumed by Blacks and Whites similarly. The ANOVA findings supported this premise in that game-attendance frequency in the midwestern market did not differ statistically based on the spectators’ race.

Consequently, the racial composition of the attendees at the professional women’s basketball games for the team in the midwest generally reflected and represented the racial composition of the MSA (approximately 14% and 12%, respectively). These findings supported Baade and Tiehen’s (1990) contention that the representation of Black and White sport attendees would generally correspond to their representation in a population.

Conversely, also based on Gouke’s (1987) premise, the team (and management) in the southern market was predominately Black, and therefore may have been perceived as a product with a specific appeal to the “Black” consumer market, and thus more likely to be
consumed more often by Black consumers. The ANOVA findings supported this premise in that game attendance frequency for the southern market differed significantly based on the spectators’ race, such that Black spectators attended the games of the predominantly Black home team at a frequency that was significantly higher than that of the White spectators. Consequently, the representation of Blacks generally in attendance at this team’s games was more than twice the percentage of Blacks living in this metropolitan area (53% and 26%, respectively). Black spectators were overrepresented at the games, while White spectators were underrepresented. These results collectively imply modest support for: (a) Schurr et al. (1988), regarding race being statistically significant in explaining differences between basketball attendees and nonattendees; (b) Sapolsky (1980), regarding the disposition Black spectators may have to watch Black athletes perform; and (c) the premise offered by Gouke (1987), regarding the race of a consumer-product features - and rate of product consumption phenomenon, such that certain product features are likely influence the consumption rates of certain consumers.

Implications for Sport Marketers

The findings of this study illustrated similarities and differences in the consumption-related profiles of two regional samples of Black and White spectators. There are a number of practical implications of the results of this study. The racial differences revealed implied that race effects may influence (a) sport consumer/target market segmentation, (b) advertising and marketing communications strategies, (b) the sale and distribution of sport event tickets, (c) effectiveness of pre-game promotions, and (d) the success of community-relations activities involving basketball participation. This study also demonstrated that the impact of race on sport consumption may be geographically influenced, such that the impact of race on sport marketing strategies (and subsequently sport consumer behavior) might be more pronounced in some regional locations than in others.

The results of this study also have theoretical implications regarding the nuances of sport consumer behavior. For example, although attendance at the professional women’s basketball games in the midwestern market was relative to the racial demographics of the environment’s population, the substantial Black attendance at the games in the southern market was anomalous and offered an illustration of an exceptional consumption pattern referred to by Mason (1981) as conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption has traditionally been viewed as an economic, status-directed activity (i.e., a consumption pattern that affirms a desired economic status for the consumer); however, it may be influenced by a myriad of personal and social factors as well (Mason, 1981). In the context of this study, it may be surmised that an illustration of socially conspicuous consumption was displayed by the Black spectators in the southern market in that social factors such as racially/ethnically related consumer, environmental, and/or product utility characteristics may have collectively influenced their sport consumption patterns.

This study sought to continue the explorations of previous conflicting research findings on the influence of race on sport consumption.

Limitations and Future Considerations

The nature of this investigation did not allow the researchers to infer causality; therefore, inferences could only be made from the descriptive data gathered (as inferred from and supported by previous, related research). As such, this study offered valuable insight into the similarities and differences of the sport consumption of Black and White professional women’s basketball attendees from different geographical markets. Nevertheless, the results of this study are not generalizable to (a) Black and White sport consumers in general, (b) Black and White sport consumers in the respective markets, or (c) Black and White basketball consumers in particular. One limitation of this study was comparing similar data ascertained using different instruments (albeit relevant to the respective consumer studies in each market) for each team under investigation. Future research on market analyses should seek to standardize the instruments used at the outset.

Race does not exist in isolation, as it undoubtedly interacts with a myriad of sociodemographic and psychographic variables to influence behavior. Additionally, race is not a homogeneous or finite construct, and therefore is a difficult ‘variable’ to measure. The amount of uncontrolled and unexamined variance in this study prevented the researchers from attributing the differences found between the Black and White spectators exclusively to their race. Future research should examine how demographic (particularly age, gender, income, marital status and education), social, and psychological factors may interact with facets of race to influence sport attendance. Sport does not exist in isolation from the sociocultural environment in which it operates. Based on the manner in which attitudes often influence behavior (Fazio, 1990), it is likely that the prevailing attitudes and beliefs of consumers in an environment may also influence the sport behaviors therein. As such, another
limitation of this investigation was that racial attitudes were not ascertained. Due to the manifestations of race in the findings for the southern market, which has a history of overt racial demonstrations (Viorst, 1981), future research should examine the degree to which racial attitudes and perceptions (at the macro and micro levels) contribute to differences in Blacks' and Whites' sport consumption behaviors.

**Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, environments help to shape human behavior. As Danielson (1997) contends, “markets create probabilities, rather than determine outcomes” (p. 46). Therefore, one of the greatest challenges sport marketers may face, in light of an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population of sport consumers (Hofacre & Burman, 1992), is ascertaining the manner in which sociocultural and environmental market factors influence sport consumption. Social scientists such as Hacker (1992) have long concluded that racial dynamics pervade various factions of human life including social institutions that guarantee or contest it such as economics, politics, education, religion, etc. Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton (2000) asserted that “race is the enduring American conundrum, especially in the sport marketplace” (p. 62) and “...there is little evidence that the patterns of Black sport involvement have any basis in 'race'” (p. 61). However, Harrison, Lee, and Belcher (1999) revealed that race serves as a self-schema that influences sport involvement, and Goldsmith (2003) revealed that while Whites' participation in sport was influenced more by structural and socioeconomic variables, Blacks' sport participation was influenced more by race relations.

Notably, of the two markets under comparison, the one in which a significant influence of race was revealed (i.e., the southern market) was the one that had the most pronounced minority racial characteristics. With other sociodemographic and market characteristics being fairly equal and more similar than dissimilar, the results of this study implied that differences in Blacks' and Whites' active and vicarious sport consumption may indeed be based in latent and manifest elements of race [e.g., the racial classification of the individual consumer, the racial characteristics of the sport team (players and management) as the product to be consumed, and the racial demographics of the environment in which the sport consumption takes place]. Thus, the findings of this study implied support of Hacker's (1992) contention, reiterated the premise of Goldsmith's (2003) findings, and thus refuted the previous assertion of Mullin et al. (2000).

Although the focus of this study was on the sport of basketball, the findings supported previous studies on race and baseball attendance (Noll, 1974; Staples, 1987). Given baseball's storied racist past (Staples, 1987), a negative relationship between race and attendance was not surprising. Just as baseball has had a traditional social role in American culture, basketball has had a historical presence in the Black community and has long been thought to be a sport with particular appeal to the Black culture (Sachs & Abraham, 1979). Therefore, it was not too surprising that racial differences were also manifested in this study involving basketball consumption. Previous research on the influence of race on sport consumption has focused on men's sports. This study revealed that racial dynamics might also influence the consumption of professional women's sports.

**References**


