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# Examining the relationship for sport motives, relationship quality, and sport consumption intention

Bomin Paek<sup>a,\*</sup>, Alan Morse<sup>a</sup>, Susan Hutchinson<sup>a</sup>, Choong Hoon Lim<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Northern Colorado, 501 20th St, Campus Box 118, Greeley 80634, CO USA

<sup>b</sup> Seoul National University, 1, Gwanak-ro, Gwanak-gu, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea

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## ABSTRACT

As the sport industry becomes progressively competitive, most professional teams focus on ways to develop a long-term relationship with fans. One such strategy is sport marketing intended to enhance relationship quality between fans and teams, which may be related to high sport consumption. Accordingly, in this study the authors developed a model that explains the antecedents and outcomes of relationship quality initiatives in the context of professional sport. To this end, a sport fan motivation framework and a relationship quality model were used to explain fan behaviors within a professional volleyball league. Results showed that sport fan motives significantly affect relationship quality and behavioral intention regarding sport consumption, with emotional motivation exerting a considerable association. The study also demonstrated that relationship quality mediates the association between emotional motives and behavior intentions. The current research extends the sport management literature by empirically investigating the effects of emotionally driven sport motive on relationship quality and desired relational outcomes.

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## Introduction

The evolution of professional competitive sport has driven ongoing efforts to boost the popularity of sporting events. Such growth is reflected by the increasing number of professional sport franchises being established, which in turn, highlights the need to identify marketing strategies intended to build a strong fan base (Achen, 2016). Cultivating loyalty among sport enthusiasts is crucial in capitalizing on professional sport franchises for revenue generation in the fiercely competitive sport market (Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Exler, 2008). In this regard, current marketing approaches are directed toward maintaining or strengthening long-term relationships with existing sport fans (Lee, Kunkel, Funk, Karg, & McDonald, 2019), but this undertaking is considerably challenged by ambiguity regarding how and why relationships between consumers and companies endure (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). These issues have elicited interest from both academics, as avenues from which to educate future sport managers, and from practitioners, as sources of insight on nurturing consumers. Their resolution lies in understanding the perspectives of sport consumers by examining various antecedents of the relationship between sport followers and sport franchises.

Relationship quality is a necessary consideration in preserving connections between service providers and consumers (Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006). Despite the importance of relationship quality, researchers espouse a primarily

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [bomin.paek@unco.edu](mailto:bomin.paek@unco.edu) (B. Paek).

buyer-oriented, rather than a consumer-centric, approach to elucidating its strategic predictors (Fernandes & Proen  a, 2013). A customer-grounded exploration of motivation would, for instance, shed light on the psychological and cognitive characteristics of consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Sport fan-centric explorations into relationship quality are necessary particularly because highly engaged sport consumers tend to indulge their self-interest (e.g., attending or watching sporting events) and seek self-enhancement; in other words, their engagement is intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014).

The experiences of sport fans are constituted by their affective, cognitive, and social reactions to encounters during consumption (Yoshida, 2017). Different encounters in the investment in a relationship are transferred to decision making by sport fans (Yoshida, 2017). On the whole, ascertaining the relationship quality-motivation connection through emotional, cognitive, and social approaches is essential because individuals who experience positive emotions are motivated to behave in a manner designed to maintain these favorable psychological states (Mittal & Ross, 1998). Illuminating the quality of relationships between sport fans and sport teams necessitates investigating motives as this would unravel why they consume sports products and endeavor to improve their bonds with their favorite teams. Looking into motivation and relationship quality will also impart consumer-centric insights regarding what prompts the formation of connections between sport teams and fans.

Previous scholars underscored relationship quality in the increasingly competitive sports industry (Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim, Trail, & Ko, 2011), but they insufficiently clarified fundamental or alternative approaches to reinforcing the strength of relationship quality. Relatively little research has been conducted on related antecedents of relationship quality (Whitburn, Karg, & Turner, 2020). Among the few initiatives in this respect is that of Lee et al. (2019), who discussed relationship quality precursors, such as service quality, team administration, and team outcome. The problem is that these antecedents were identified on the basis of service-oriented actions (e.g., prompted by the service or managerial actions of a sport team) instead of sports consumer-related psychological or behavioral facets (e.g., emotion or cognition). These deficiencies denote the necessity of additional empirical evidence regarding which consumer attributes sports practitioners should consider as they fortify their relationships with sport consumers or increase their fan bases.

Identifying the consumer-based antecedents of relationship quality and sports consumption intention can facilitate the continuous involvement of sports devotees in the industry. This approach is best suited for investigations into professional sport settings where sport customers are commonly a principal part of products (Lee et al., 2019). Along with the nature of professional sport, researchers should scrutinize relationship marketing issues given their criticality in determining how professional sport marketers compete in the entertainment industry for discretionary consumer spending (Neale, Georgiu, & Purchase, 2004). Furthermore, relationship marketing strategies can be ideally studied with respect to professional sport teams given the intangible and experiential nature of sport products and interactions between sport consumers and professional sport franchises (Achen, 2014). Correspondingly, discovering distinctive and comprehensive approaches (e.g., those involving psychological factors) to attracting sports consumers has become vital within professional sport markets. Integrating sport consumers' relational attitudes with their motivations develops awareness among sports marketers as to the needs and wants of customers concerning relationship maintenance. The consideration of why sports fans form and maintain bonds with sports teams is required for team survival in the market.

## Literature review

### Sport motives

Understanding sport consumers' motives offers insight as to why sport spectators, particularly highly involved individuals, attend games and why they purchase sport merchandise (Andrew, Kim, O'Neal, Greenwell, & James, 2009). Such understanding was facilitated by the efforts of Wann (1995), who categorized notable sport fan motivations into eight domains to represent sport fandom, and Trail and James (2001), who suggested that the motivations of a sport spectator or fan lie in psychological and social need fulfillment. Other researchers developed sports market-specific models to inquire into the archetype of consumers of particular sports (Sondhi & Basu, 2018). Several scholars uncovered a multitude of variables that hinted at the necessity of market-specific segmentations, such as Andrew et al.'s (2009) nine-motive scale of mixed martial arts and Trail, Fink, and Anderson's (2003) sport media consumption (SMC) motivators among National Football League fans (Sondhi & Basu, 2018).

Consumer motives that are specific to the emerging sport market (Sondhi & Basu, 2018) can be suitable for exploring the growing volleyball market because of the increasing popularity of professional volleyball. In Korea and China, for example, since the foundation of Korean professional volleyball leagues in 2005, attendance has increased by a factor of five, specifically from 101,436 spectators in 2005 to 614,551 attendees in 2018 (Korean Volleyball Federation, 2019). In China, the online viewership of volleyball events reached 7.4 billion views, and attendance records rose by 16.8 % from 2016 to 2018 (CCTV, 2017; People.cn, 2018). Correspondingly, attendance trends and interest in Korean and Chinese professional volleyball have been expanding, bringing forth the necessity of probing the reasons for increased attendance.

Some motivations exhibit high correlation with one other, suggesting motives represent second-order latent variables (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003). Second-order variables in the context of sports motives indicate specific types of motivations are subsumed within more general constructs (Kim, James, & Kim, 2013). For example, general motivations such as overarching spectator motives encompass subconstructs such as escape and social (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). Raney

(2006) contributed to the definition of what a prototypical sport spectator or fan is and helped clarify how sport fans enrich their sporting experiences (Billings & Ruihley, 2013). In the current study, we examined sport consumer motives using constructs that we classified into three general categories on the basis of Raney's classification, using a second-order latent variable approach. That is, the general sports motives treated in this work are emotional, cognitive, and behavioral motivations, which subsume eustress, escape, entertainment, self-achievement, knowledge, aesthetic, family, group affiliation, and economic.

#### *Emotional motives*

The emotional motivations that stimulate sport consumption are reflected in intense or weak displays of sentiment as individuals watch sporting games (Raney, 2006). In general terms, people view sporting events out of the expectation that desired emotional effects are experienced in the process (Raney, 2006). Specifically, sport consumers are encouraged by the stirring reactions that emerge from the victory secured by favored individuals or teams (Raney, 2006). "These emotional reactions to sports programming are assumed to be dependent upon and governed by the affiliations—or affective dispositions—that viewers hold toward one of the competing teams" (Raney, 2006 p. 315). In our study, we included four of the emotional motives proposed by Raney (2006): eustress, escape, entertainment, and self-achievement. With regard to eustress, sports fans watch sporting events because these occasions arouse their senses in an enjoyable manner and provide them with the positive stress they seek (Zuckerman, 1979). Self-achievement pertains to the accomplishment that sport fans derive when their favorite teams succeed (Wann, 1995). Escape refers to the desire of sports devotees for a diversion from daily life (Wann, 1995), and entertainment centers on their yearning for pleasure and recreation (Wann, 1995).

#### *Cognitive motives*

Cognitive motivation can be described as the need to gather and seek information about other people or activities (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). The requirement for cognition is manifested as people's propensity to seek, be involved with, and actively enjoy cognitive activities (Cacioppo, Petty, & Sidera, 1982). Cognitive motivation also intensifies when individuals are engaged in pleasurable thinking (Preckel, Holling, & Vock, 2006). Cacioppo et al. (1982) conceptualized the need for cognition as a motivational tendency that is general, intrinsic, stable, and distinguishable from intellectual ability. Raney (2006) confirmed this requirement within the sport context in his examination of fans watching sporting events on television. Raney proposed two factors of cognitive motivational factors, namely, knowledge and aesthetic. To illustrate, sport fans are motivated by knowledge in terms of the performance skills or strategies they learn as they view sporting events, and they are inspired by aesthetic aspects, such as a well-executed game performance or the beauty of agility (Wann, 1995).

#### *Behavioral motives*

Behavioral motives are behavioral processes activated by the expression of emotions, companionship, communication with others, and financial involvement in a given event (Raney, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2012). When highly engaged sport fans express support for their favorite teams, their sense of belonging can diffuse to group members with whom they share familiar identities and interests (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). This affinity can arise out of interactions among sports fans' family or group members in their endeavor to spend time with their favorite teams (Raney, 2006). Such social companionship is instrumental to identification with and loyalty to sport teams (Smith & Stewart, 2007). Also, the economic aspect of sport consumption motivation is associated with the appeal of gambling, wherein sport consumption is connected to a financial reward (Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014). On the basis of these behavioral dynamics, sport fan consumption can be regarded as compelled by sport-related gambles and social forces (Raney, 2006). In line with this standpoint, we adopted the three sources of sport motives put forward by Raney (2006): family, economics, and group affiliation.

#### *Relationship quality*

Relationship quality is an "overall assessment of the strength of a relationship, conceptualized as a composite or multidimensional construct capturing the different but related facets of a relationship" (Palmatier et al., 2006, p. 138). It is characterized by distinctive elements, such as trust, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, and reciprocity, which have been recognized as important to the quality of connections between sports enthusiasts and sports institutions or teams (Kim et al., 2011). Relationship quality can serve as an invaluable resource in developing a framework from which to better assess sport consumption behaviors for marketing strategies (Kim & Trail, 2011). Scholars strongly suggest that more studies be conducted to better understand the exceptional characteristics of relationship quality and how they can be interrelated with behaviors of sport consumers and sport spectators (Kim, 2008).

#### *Trust*

Trust refers to people's belief that others will fulfill a desired action or implement a coveted decision (Anderson & Weitz, 1989). It can take different forms, such as trust between individuals, employees and employers, and salespersons and customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009). Trust is essential in all types of relational exchanges, having a role in constituting and maintaining long-term relationships (Palmatier et al., 2006). Among consumers trust in an organization is represented by their overall evaluation of the organization's services or products (Garbarino &

Johnson, 1999). This assessment can elevate the quality of relationship between sport fans and sport organizations when the assessment of the service or product is favorable (Kim & Trail, 2011). Sport consumers value trust in sport organizations as much as they regard trust in an individual (Ross, 2007). When a sport consumer places their trust in a sport organization, there is a strong possibility consumption intention will develop (Funk & James, 2006).

#### *Commitment*

Commitment pertains to the consistent continuation of a relationship with others when the association is viewed as consequential enough to warrant maintenance (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It can be classified as stemming from relational partnerships that go beyond functional transactions, as is the case with purely business (i.e., non-emotional) ties to a service provider (Ahn, Ock, Greene, & Rho, 2014; Levy & Weitz, 2004). Commitment from consumers can trigger acquiescence and cooperative action, as is occurring when highly committed consumers comply with company policies regarding advertising or products (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the context of spectator sport, commitment is the desire of sport fans to persist in a relationship with a certain sport team (Ross, James, & Vargas, 2006). Commitment to a sport organization is critical to relationship building between sport fans and sport teams as well as consumption decision making by sport fans (Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000).

#### *Intimacy*

Intimacy is an individual's level of familiarity with, openness to, and closeness into an organization (Fournier, 1998). It may be related to self-connection but differs from this attribute in that intimacy revolves around the distance between consumers and organizations; in contrast, the heart of self-connection is the degree of overlap between an individual's self and organizations (Kim, 2008). Fournier (1998) indicated that successful branding cannot be accomplished without forming a strong level of intimacy between consumers and service providers, which prompted Harris and Ogbonna (2008) to investigate sport consumer behaviors. Harris and Ogbonna revealed that intimacy among sport fans is equivalent to what is observed in business-to-consumer relationships. They also indicated that intimacy has been documented as a crucial element in addressing the characteristics of relationship bonding between sport fans and sport teams.

#### *Self-connection*

Self-connection is the degree to which customers' subjective beliefs cause them to identify with and express themselves through a brand (Fournier, 1998). The concept of self-connection has been continuously accepted as an important element to explain relationship quality (Fournier, 1996). Self-connection has been shown to induce consumers to maintain relational attitudes as well as enhance the strength of relationship stability with a company (Fournier, 1998). The concept of self-connection toward branding or an organization is comparable to the notion of team identification; self-connection thus represents who they are and how their identities guide their behaviors (Sternberg, 1986). The concept of self-connection has been regarded as a major component of the relational attitude by which a variety of sport consumer behaviors are described (Kim, 2008; Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim et al., 2011; Trail et al., 2005).

#### *Reciprocity*

Reciprocity represents the degree to which people internalize and expect mutual balance from a relational exchange (Palmatier, 2008). Reciprocity can serve as a major aspect of relationship marketing and can be applied in examining the consumer-firm relationship given the possibility that its psychological characteristics contribute to relational exchanges between customers and companies (Bagozzi, 1995). Consumers' reciprocity is an essential part of behaving equitably with sellers (Palmatier et al., 2009) and cultivating successful and strong relationships with firms (Schwarz, Trommsdorff, Albert, & Mayer, 2005). Kim and Trail (2011) emphasize the role of reciprocity in inducing sport consumer behaviors in the context of relationship quality. Researchers also generally agree that sport consumers are likely to form a rapport with sport teams when they feel thankful about the fiscal resources and psychological attachment they have invested in sport teams (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008).

#### *Sport consumption behavior intention*

A variety of sports consumption behaviors link to relationship quality (Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim et al., 2011). Behavioral intentions related to sport consumption can be used as the foundation for analyzing the nature of relationship quality in the sport field (Kim, 2008). Although such analysis benefits from a consideration of the different relationship quality components, an equally important task is to assess the predictive value of the relationship between sport fans and sport organizations. Also, major intentional aspects of sports consumer behaviors include: (a) attendance intention, (b) sports media consumption intention, and (c) licensed merchandise consumption intention (Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim, 2008).

Relational constructs, including trust, commitment, reciprocity, intimacy, and self-connection as discussed above, have been represented as the main drivers of game attendance (Kim & Trail, 2011). Attendance at, or the intention to attend, sporting events is the most frequently used indicator, in empirical research of relationship quality (Rascher, McEvoy, Nagel, & Brown, 2007). Sport teams have become increasingly concerned about sport fans' media consumption behaviors because their media-related consumption activities have important implications for the financial success of sport organizations (Kim et al., 2011). Finally, "Sport-related licensed products are any and all products bearing the name or logo of a sports team,

which manufacturers use, sell, and offer for sale through licensing contracts with the league or team" (Kim, 2008, p. 39). Sports organizations such as teams and leagues, consider licensed merchandise a significant source of profit as these commodities help sport teams communicate their brand with fans (Kim et al., 2011). The consumption of these commodities is predicted primarily by the sport consumer-team relationship (Kim & Trail, 2011). Many researchers in sport management have investigated how licensed products play a crucial role in the outcome of relationship quality (Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2011).

### *Hypotheses development*

#### *The antecedents and outcomes of relationship quality*

Various consumer motives influence the development of different relationships (Fernandes & Proen  a, 2013). For example, individuals are motivated to maintain relationships either because they sincerely aspire to such relationships or because they believe they have no other option (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Cognition-oriented motivation is typical of constraint-based relationships, whereas emotion-grounded motivation is characteristic of dedication-based relationships (Fernandes & Proen  a, 2013). Using linear discriminant analysis, Fernandes and Proen  a (2013) empirically validated that consumer-initiated relationship maintenance is the prime predictor of consumers' psychological states. In the sport context, Kim et al. (2013) suggested that social influence motives (i.e., pressure from peers and family members) positively influence different types of commitment (i.e., affective, continuance, and normative). Relational motives stemming from social benefits (e.g., behavioral motivations) are important components for maintaining relationships between consumers and companies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Consumers' motives explain their conceived fulfillment and are the basis of relationship stability, particularly when these motivations are closely connected to a core product (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002), as is the case with emotion aroused by sporting events or the outcomes of such occasions. To further clarify the relationship between sport motives and different components of relationship quality, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Emotional motives will have a positive effect on relationship quality.

**Hypothesis 2.** Cognitive motives will have a positive effect on relationship quality.

**Hypothesis 3.** Behavioral motives will have a positive effect on relationship quality.

Researchers found a positive relationship between relationship quality and the intention to attend a game (Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2011). They also observed that the five aforementioned elements of relationship quality affect the intention to attend spectator sporting events (Kim & Trail, 2011; Kim, 2008). Current relationship quality studies in sport management have also indicated that high levels of relationship quality affect the intent to consume media products (Kim & Trail, 2011). A path analysis conducted by Kim et al. (2011) revealed that the direct connection between relationship quality and sport media consumption intention explained 41 % of the variance in media consumption intention. Media influences the decisions of sport consumers to spectate games and purchase sport team licensed products (Kim, 2008). Sales of licensed merchandise are important for sport franchises due to being a substantial revenue source for sport teams (Kim et al., 2011). The consumption of these commodities is predicted primarily by the sport consumer-team relationship (Kim & Trail, 2011). Many scholars in sport management have investigated how licensed products play a crucial role in the outcome of relationship quality (Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2011). In line with the prior research, we formulated the following supposition:

**Hypothesis 4.** Relationship quality will have a positive effect on sport consumption behavior intention.

#### *Relationship quality as a mediator of the link between sport motives and sport consumption intention*

Relationship quality is anchored in relationship characteristics and the relational benefits (i.e., customer motivations) engendered by consumer-oriented advantages. Thus, the motivations of customers and the quality of their relationships with an entity indicate the fulfillment of needs and wants as central to successful relationship maintenance (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). The desired outcomes of relationship marketing usually interplay with multiple components, implying the need for a multivariate approach (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). The components of relationship quality partially mediate the association between relational benefits (e.g., emotional and behavioral advantages) and desired outcomes such as retention of affiliations with consumers through ongoing activities with sellers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997).

In the sport management setting, Kim et al. (2013) suggested that different types of motives (i.e., hedonic, psychological connection, and social influence) are antecedents of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Commitment may thus play a principal and mediating role in the relationship between the motivation and behavioral intention of sport consumers. An integrated model can serve as a guide in the development of relationship marketing and more efficient use of time and resources. Indirect effects arise from the quality of relationships between the benefits that sport consumers perceive as engendered by service quality and their intention to establish ties with sport organizations (Whitburn et al., 2020). To expound on the role of relationship quality as a mediator between sport motives and intention as regards attendance, media, and licensed product consumption, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 5.** Relationship quality will mediate the relationship between emotional motives and sport consumption behavior intention.

**Hypothesis 6.** Relationship quality will mediate the relationship between cognitive motives and sport consumption behavior intention.

**Hypothesis 7.** Relationship quality will mediate the relationship between behavioral motives and sport consumption behavior intention.

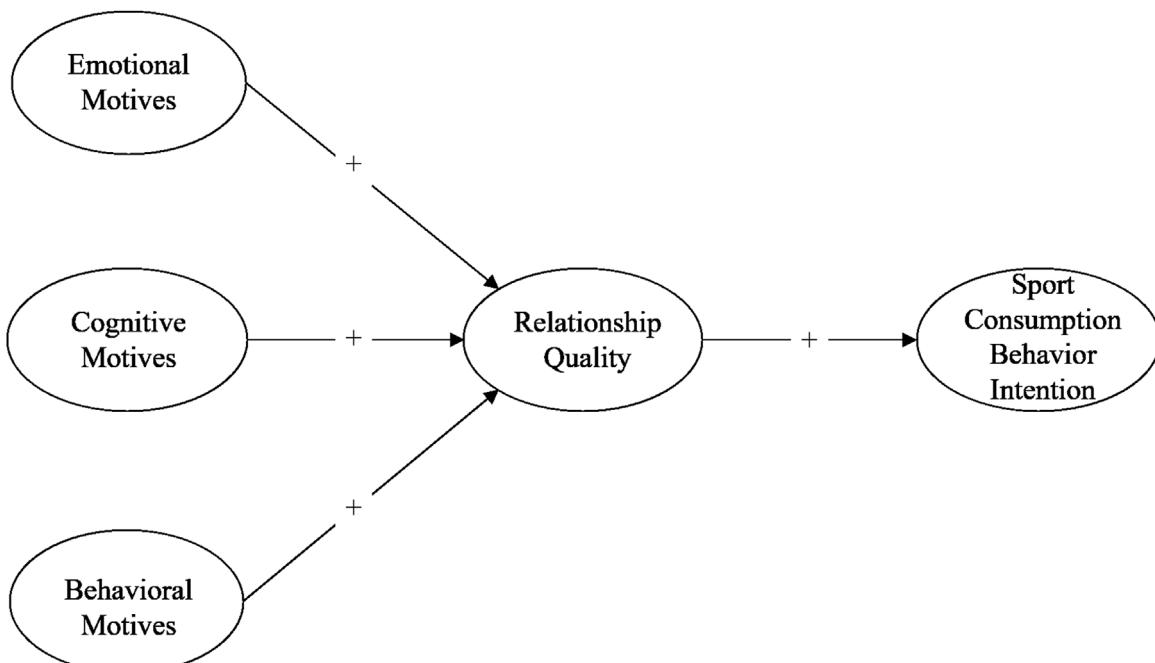
In accordance with the literature review, we investigated how sport fans' motives explain the quality of their relationships with sport teams. The research was also intended to probe into how relationship quality contributes to the intention to consume sport content or products. Finally, we determined the mediating effect of relationship quality on the association between the motivation and consumption intention of sport fans (Fig. 1). With regard to sport-induced motivations for building or maintaining relationships with sport teams, this research broadened the exploration into the prerequisites of relationship quality as well as the multiple variables affecting consumption decisions from the perspectives of sport consumers.

## Method

### Participants and data collection procedure

We collected data from Korean pro volleyball fans, who were recruited for participation via convenience sampling. To delve into relational attitudes and outcomes, we chose fans who physically attended games in stadiums and watched sporting events through media channels one to five times in a single year. One of the researchers in our group contacted the general managers of professional volleyball teams and the managers of online communities to ask permission to administer a survey to the participants online. The survey link was uploaded to online platforms (specifically, Facebook and Twitter) and the official accounts of professional volleyball teams, after which it was shared with other online volleyball fans.

To estimate the minimum sample size needed to conduct the structural equation modeling (SEM), we performed a power analysis of model fit ( $\alpha = .05$ , null root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .05 and alternative RMSEA = .01) using R software (version 3.5). This analysis allowed us to ensure that our sample size enabled an adequate level of statistical power (.90) with which to test our hypotheses. The minimum sample size suggested for testing the model was 200 participants; thus, the sample size in this current study ( $N = 371$ ) is adequate. Moreover, when testing structural models based on ordinal indicator variables, research supports the use of the weighted least squares means and variance (WLSMV) estimator with sample sizes as low as 250 even for large models similar to the model tested in the current study (Beauducel &



**Fig. 1.** The Hypothesized Model.

Herzberg, 2006). Similarly, Flora and Curran (2004) found the parameter estimation accuracy of WLSMV to be generally insensitive to increasing model size (as determined by a larger number of indicators) and sample size. Flora and Curran concluded that a model chi-square test can generate accurate estimations under a sample size as small as 200.

The sample in the present study comprised 371 participants, whose ages ranged from under 19–60 years. Almost 58 % (57.4 %) were 20–29 years old ( $n = 213$ ), and 26.7 % were 30–39 years old ( $n = 99$ ). Over half (56.1 %) of the participants were men ( $n = 208$ ), whereas 43.9 % were women ( $n = 163$ ). As for the duration of fanship, 35.0 % of the participants had been fans for less than a year ( $n = 130$ ), and 35.8 % had been devotees for more than three years ( $n = 133$ ). Of the respondents, 251 (67.7 %) attended games from one to five times per year, and 67 (18.1 %) spectated one to three times per month. Lastly, 105 (28.3 %) participants watched games through media more than four times a week.

### Measures

To measure the three types of sport motives, we employed a sport fan motivation scale (Wann, 1995) and the nine-motive scale of mixed martial arts (Andrew et al., 2009), which consists of 27 items. With Raney's (2006) classification of sport motives as the basis, all components of sport fan motivation, except knowledge, were incorporated into Wann's motivation scale, which we used in the current study. Accordingly, we included the items under the knowledge subscale from the nine-motive scale of mixed martial arts into our measurement because these items specify the knowledge-relevant characteristics of sports fans. Sport motives were measured with a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Scores on the sport motivation scales in prior research involving respondents similar to those in the current study indicated acceptable levels of reliability and validity (Andrew et al., 2009; Wann, 1995).

To assess relationship quality, we employed the sport consumer-team relationship scale, which consists of 15 items distributed as follows: three trust items, three commitment items, three intimacy items, three self-connection items, and three reciprocity items. Relationship quality was measured by using the 15-item sport consumer-team relationship scale based on a seven-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). This measurement of relationship quality has been shown to demonstrate good psychometric support such as internal consistency, discriminant validity, and construct reliability in college baseball fans (Kim et al., 2011).

To investigate the intention to consume sport products or content, we used a sport consumption behavior intention scale (Kim et al., 2011) that comprises items focused on attendance intention (three items), media consumption intention (three items), and licensed merchandise consumption intention (three items). Completing this instrument entails rating the items on a seven-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The choice of this scale was informed by previous evidence on adequate psychometric properties and discriminant validity of its scores in college football fans (Kim et al., 2011).

Five demographics-related questions were also included in the survey, namely, those centering on gender, age, duration of fanship, the frequency of game attendance at a stadium, and the frequency of game viewing through media. The participants spent approximately 15 min to complete the questionnaire, so fatigue was not a validity-related concern.

### Analytic overview

A second-order SEM was run using the Mplus 7.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) software to verify the hypothesized research model (Fig. 1). Ensuring internal consistency reliability necessitates generating a Cronbach's alpha that exceeds .80 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In addition, guaranteeing composite reliability (CR) requires a threshold that goes beyond .70 (Hair et al., 2010). Standardized factor loadings were reviewed to ensure they were each statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ), greater than .50 (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016), and in the hypothesized direction. These values demonstrate evidence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010). Additionally, confirming discriminant validity involves the calculation of average variance extracted (AVE) values for each subdimension. The values of latent variables should be greater than the threshold of .50 (Hair et al., 2010).

Prior to conducting the SEM, we first checked and removed outliers and estimated reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the sets of items within each latent variable. The coefficients ranged from .68 to .96 (Table 1). To validate the scores of the constructs, we estimated AVEs, which ranged from .51 to .93. The CRs obtained ranged from .86 and .97. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE values of each construct must be greater than the squared correlations among the constructs. In the present work, the squared correlations did not exceed the AVEs of any of the constructs, thus confirming discriminant validity. The analysis of correlations among second-order factors indicated that such associations remained below .85, suggesting that excessive multicollinearity (or singularity of relationships) was not a concern with respect to the data (Kline, 2005). The correlations between all pairs of latent factors were substantially lower than .85 (Table 2).

All confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and SEM examinations were conducted using Mplus 7.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) on the basis of the WLSMV estimator noted above. WLSMV is the default estimation procedure in Mplus when ordinal data, such as rating scale items, are analyzed. WLSMV has shown satisfactory performance across studies that used ordinal data (Beauducel & Herzberg, 2006; DiStefano & Morgan, 2014; Flora & Curran, 2004).

The hypothesized model was examined in terms of global and component fit, with overall fit assessed using a variety of goodness-of-fit indices, namely, RMSEA (Steiger, 1990), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; Bentler, 1990),

**Table 1**

Summary results for confirmatory factor analysis of all factors and items.

FACTORS		$\beta$	$\alpha$	AVE	C.R
<b>Sport Motives</b>					
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and discuss sport is because . . .					
<b>Eustress</b>					
I get pumped up when I am watching my favorite teams.		.93			
I enjoy being physiologically aroused by the competition.		.88			
I like the stimulation I get from watching sports.		.89			
<b>Escape</b>					
Doing so gives me the opportunity to temporarily escape life's problems.		.92			
Doing so allows me to forget about my problems.		.85			
It is like daydreaming because it takes me away from life's hassles.		.77			
<b>Entertainment</b>					
I enjoy sports because of their entertainment value.		.73			
I enjoy watching, reading, and discussing sports simply.		.63			
Sports spectating is simply a form of recreation.		.90			
<b>Self-achievement</b>					
Doing so makes me feel good when my team wins.		.81			
It increases my self-esteem.		.70			
My favorite team's successes are my successes and their losses are my losses.		.63			
One of the main reasons that I watch, read, and discuss sport is because . . .					
<b>Knowledge</b>					
I can learn about the technical aspects of sporting events.		.79			
I increase my understanding of sport games strategy by watching a sporting event.		.90			
I increase my knowledge about sporting event.		.96			
<b>Aesthetic</b>					
Sport is for the artistic value.		.90			
I enjoy the beauty and grace of sports.		.87			
I enjoy watching sporting events because of a form of art.		.77			
<b>Family</b>					
Doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my spouse.		.80			
Doing so gives me an opportunity to be with my family.		.92			
It is a good activity to spend a time with my family.		.91			
<b>Group affiliation</b>					
Most of my friends are sports fans.		.72			
I am the kind of person who likes to be with other people.		.89			
I enjoy watching sport more when I am with a large group of people.		.84			
<b>Economic</b>					
I can bet on the sporting events.		.94			
Sports are enjoyable only if you can bet on the outcome.		.98			
Making wagers is the most enjoyable aspect of being a sports fan.		.91			
<b>Relationship quality</b>					
<b>Trust</b>					
I trust the (Team Name).		.95			
The (Team Name) is reliable.		.92			
I can count on the (Team Name).		.92			
<b>Commitment</b>					
I am committed to the (Team Name).		.94			
I am devoted to the (Team Name).		.94			
I am dedicated to the (Team Name).		.83			
<b>Intimacy</b>					
I am very familiar with the (Team Name).		.90			
I know a lot about the (Team Name).		.87			
I feel as though I really understand the (Team Name).		.91			
<b>Self-connection</b>					
The (Team Name) reminds me of who I am.		.93			
The (Team Name) image and my self-image are similar in a lot of ways.		.94			
The (Team Name) and I have a lot in common.		.87			
<b>Reciprocity</b>					
The (Team Name) unfailingly pays me back when I do something extra for it.		.93			
The (Team Name) gives me back equivalently what I have given them.		.95			
The (Team Name) constantly returns the favor when I do something good for it.		.91			
<b>Sport consumption behavior intention</b>					
<b>Attendance intention</b>					
I intend to attend the (Team Name)'s game(s).		.89			
The likelihood that I will attend the (Team Name)'s game(s) in the future is high.		.96			
I will attend the (Team Name)'s game(s) in the future.		.97			
<b>Media consumption intention</b>					
I will track the news on the (Team Name) through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.).		.96			
I will watch or listen on the (Team Name)'s game(s) through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.).		.97			
I will support the (Team Name) by watching or listening to (Team Name)'s game(s) through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.).		.97			

**Table 1** (Continued)

FACTORS		$\beta$	$\alpha$	AVE	C.R
<b>Licensed merchandise consumption intention</b>					
I am likely to purchase (Team Name)'s licensed merchandise in the future.				.96	.92
In the future, purchasing (Team Name) licensed merchandise is something I plan to do.				.94	
In the future, I intend to purchase licensed merchandise representing the (Team Name).				.96	.97

Note. The AVE represents the average variance extracted (AVE) values and the CR represents the value of composite reliability (CR).

**Table 2**

Correlations among Second-order Factors.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional Motives	5.08	.95	1.00				
2. Cognitive Motives	5.50	1.07	.54**	1.00			
3. Behavioral Motives	3.26	1.15	.31**	.24**	1.00		
4. Relationship Quality	4.43	1.22	.60**	.51**	.30**	1.00	
5. Sport Consumption Intention	5.24	1.36	.57**	.44**	.06	.61**	1.00

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI; [Tucker & Lewis, 1973](#)), and the comparative fit index (CFI; [Bentler, 1990](#)). Robust TLI and CFI values greater than .95, RMSEA values less than .08, and SRMR values lower than .05 are reflective of acceptable overall model fit ([Hair et al., 2010](#)). Component fit was evaluated in terms of statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) and plausible path coefficients and other parameter estimates. When the global fit of either CFAs or full structural models were of poor quality, modification indices were examined to identify the sources of model misspecification.

To untangle the potential mediating role of relationship quality in the association between the three types of motives and sport consumption intention, we adopted an approach recommended by several researchers, that is, to test the statistical significance of indirect paths simultaneously with significance tests on the direct effects using bootstrapping ([Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010](#)). Such an approach is intended to disentangle direct from indirect relations between two variables and thus shed light on how and why the variables are related ([Hayes, 2018](#); [Iacobucci, Saldanha, & Deng, 2007](#)).

## Results

### Measurement model

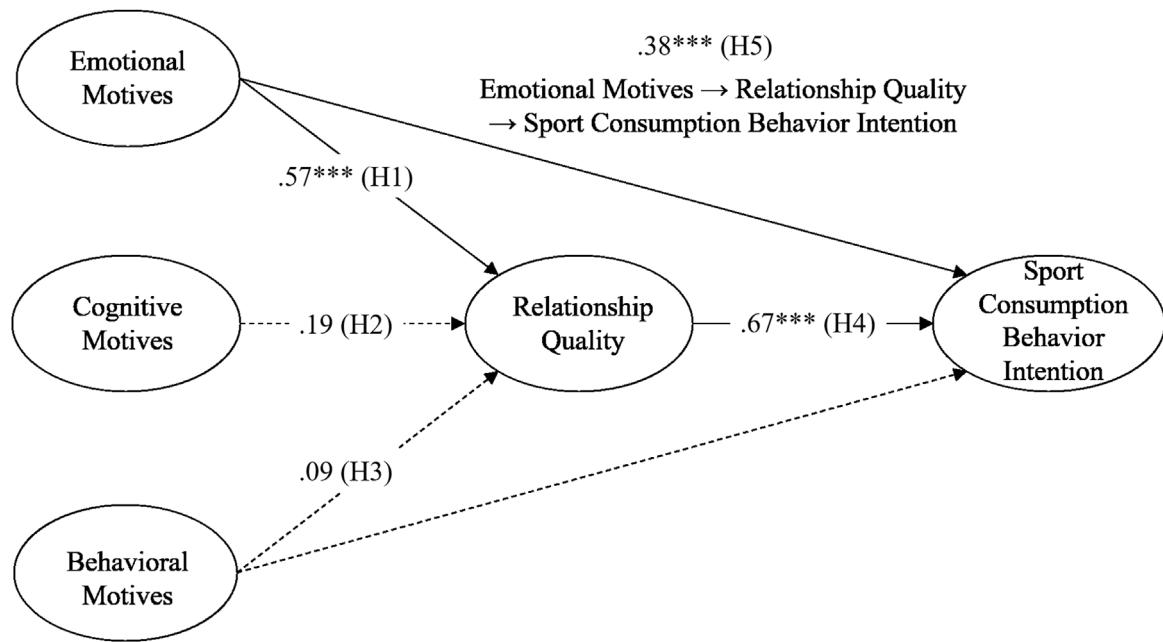
A CFA was conducted to assess a model of all latent variables specified in the structural model. The fit of the overall CFA model ( $\chi^2 = 2510.030$ ,  $df = 1088$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05) indicated good model fit, as determined from Kline's (2005) recommendations. The overall measurement model exhibited sound psychometric properties, as indicated by the statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) of the factor loadings and coefficients in the predicted direction.

After the preliminary CFA, three items under the latent self-achievement variable were removed given the presence of Heywood cases. Heywood cases are parameter estimates outside their possible ranges, including negative variance estimates arising from either excessively high correlations or from model under-identification ([Kolenikov & Bollen, 2012](#)). What remained were nine items related to emotional motives, six concerning cognitive motivation, nine items revolving around behavioral motives, 15 items referring to relationship quality, and nine items relevant to the intention to consume sport products or content. [Table 1](#) presents the standardized factor loadings of all the items, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, AVEs, and CR values from the full structural model.

### Hypothesized model

We tested the hypothesized structural model, which appeared to have acceptable fit ( $\chi^2 = 3727.811$ ,  $df = 1054$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .09). To address hypothesis 1 to hypothesis 4, we developed a hypothesized structural model that specified four direct paths ([Fig. 2](#)). The coefficient of the path from emotional motivation to relationship quality was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = .57$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus indicating support for hypothesis 1. The coefficient of the path from relationship quality to sport consumption intention was significantly positive ( $\beta = .67$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$ ); thus, hypothesis 4 is also supported. Neither the path from cognitive motivation to relationship quality ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .12$ ), nor the path from behavioral motivation to relationship quality was statistically significant ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .13$ ), failing to support hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3.

To test the significance of the indirect effects, we conducted bootstrapping procedures ([Hayes, 2018](#)), which revealed that relationship quality partially mediated the relationship between emotional motives and consumption intention ([Iacobucci et al., 2007](#)). The mediated path from emotional motivation through relationship quality to sport consumption intention was

**Fig. 2.** Structural Model.

*Note.* The dashed lines represent non-significant paths.

positive (emotional motives → relationship quality → sport consumption behavior intention) and statistically significant ( $\beta = .38$ , 95 % CI [confidence interval] = .26–.57,  $p < .001$ ). A mediated path between cognitive motives and sport consumption intention (cognitive motives → relationship quality → sport consumption behavior intention) was not significant ( $\beta = .13$ , 95 % CI = .06–.28,  $p = .18$ ). Finally, a mediated path between behavioral motives and the intention to engage in sport consumption (behavioral motives → relationship quality → sport consumption behavior intention) was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .06$ , 95 % CI = .02–.33,  $p = .29$ ).

## Discussion

The multidimensional view of sport fans' motives provided in this research can be used to predict relationship quality and the intention of fans to consume sport products. Previous studies on motivation inquired into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to illuminate degrees of intimate relationships (Pittman & Heller, 1987). In the sports setting, Funk, Beaton, and Alexandris, (2012) explored sports consumers' motivation by differentiating the intrinsic and extrinsic incentives that drive their behaviors, but they did not directly examine the outcomes of these motivations, which might have explained their different roles. On this account, we disentangled three different sport fan motivations to represent varying levels of relationship quality and sport consumption intention. We also tested a model on the basis of a sport fan sample acquired in a professional Korean volleyball league, which has been experiencing increased attendance and television viewing over the last decade (Kim, Won, & Lee, 2014). The league has striven to strengthen its affiliation with sport consumers as a means of sustaining growth within this emerging market. To explicitly address the antecedents of relational attitudes in professional sport and expand the body of literature on sport management, we constructed a comprehensive model of the associations among fan motivation, relationship quality, and consumption intention. The model provides information that professional sport teams and leagues can use to develop relationship marketing schemes and assess the efficacy with which sport consumers are conferred relationship-oriented benefits.

With regards to the link between sport fan motives and relationship quality, sport fans are involved in a long-term relationship with a sport team through emotional and cognition-based connections (James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002). We extended the research on these linkages by empirically scrutinizing the association of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral motivations with relationship quality. The strong influence of emotional motives on relationship quality pointed to the potential of emotionally driven content as a path by which to solidify relationship building (Fournier, 1998). Emotion-focused content can also reduce the stimulation of unproductive behaviors, such as attendance in sporting events if a team is likely to win. The appraisal of consumption transfers emotional response and then leads to intention, implying that emotional aspects (e.g., emotional motivation) can reinforce intent (Bagozzi, 1992). Similarly, in the current study we found that sport fans exhibit a predilection for cultivating strong relationships with sport teams when they are emotionally motivated to do so.

Although the impact of cognitive and behavioral motives on intention was not mediated by relationship quality as hypothesized, the results remain useful in understanding cognitive mechanisms or extrinsic motivation in association with

relational maintenance. Cognition-related facets are connected to calculative involvement and are therefore more vulnerable to external changes in relationship forms (Fernandes & Proen  , 2013; Zajonc, 1998). To illustrate, the aesthetic attraction and learning stimulation that sport consumers perceive from sporting events may relate to conditional relationships with a team. The findings of the current study additionally implicated sport consumers' cognitive motives in low relationship quality. As regards behavioral motives, the external regulation of motivation is the least autonomous form of behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Such form of control is associated with an individual's goal to fulfill an external demand or a socially formed action (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Being afforded the opportunity to make decisions independently is crucial to nurturing a close relationship between consumers and companies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). In this research, family and group affiliation motives were primarily related to social activities, indicating the occurrence of few self-determination continuum behaviors.

The research confirmed that relationship quality partially mediated the link between emotional motives and behavioral intention: That is, emotional motivations catalyzed relationship quality, which in turn, enabled sports consumption intention. Intrinsic motives, such as engaging in an activity purely for pleasure, have been found to be associated with positive responses closely linked to the caliber of a relationship (Pittman & Heller, 1987). Thus, the characteristics of emotional motives, including pleasure and enjoyment, may strengthen relationship quality and sports consumption intention. Although the partially mediating role of relationship quality was empirically validated, its partiality also highlights the need to probe into and test additional mediators in future research (Zhao et al., 2010). Recommending further research into possible factors that might mediate the relationship between emotional motives and consumption intention stems from the fact that emotional motivation was significantly related to sports consumption intention. A necessary task, then, is to clarify the mechanism of relationship quality by exploring various mediators such as gratitude (Palmatier et al., 2006). The results implied, however, that cognitive and behavioral motives may not alter the attitudinal or behavioral continuum in a relationship maintenance context. Specifically, the curiosity of sport enthusiasts about sport-related information or simple social activities may be connected to short-term consumption intention. It may have no bearing on relationship maintenance and may not be contributory to the continuous, long-term sports consumption activities.

#### Research and managerial contributions

We attempted to close gaps in the sport literature by carrying out our investigation from the perspectives of sport consumers. This study addressed the importance of elaborating why sport consumers maintain relationships with sport teams as such an endeavor advances the treatment of the unpredictability of the sport industry's core products, such as sporting events. We also supplemented the growing body of empirical evidence on the relational approach to examining sport consumer markets. The quality of relationships between sport fans and sport franchises/teams (along with sport consumption intention) is a crucial aspect in determining the future behaviors of sport consumers. We pinpointed relationship quality as a potential driver of sport motivation and consumption intention, thereby going beyond reliance on attachment with and loyalty to sport teams in elucidating the issues of interest. By regarding the motivations of sport consumers for establishing or maintaining relationships as a prerequisite of relationship quality, this research expanded the relationship marketing approaches (e.g., sport consumers' relational investment) available to organizations. This study likewise derived support for the essentiality of sport emotional motives in managing the development of relationship quality and sport consumption intention.

The major finding of this research is how sport organizations sustain their bond with fans from a sport consumer viewpoint. Such maintenance is occasioned by strategies that promote emotional stimuli and motivation. Certain motives (e.g., cognitive and behavioral) may not affect sport consumers' behavioral intentions, whereas others may exert considerable influence, which can differentially affect consumption intention. Support for the outcomes of the current study comes from Ryan and Deci (2002), who found that different motivations imply disparate relationship levels. The most important concept regarding motivation (in terms of a continuum) is internalization. A fully internalized individual typically exercises self-determination, which bolsters his/her conduct continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In the context chosen in this research, the different motivations of sport fans denoted disparate internalization, consequently engendering a continued or constrained relationship quality. In particular, emotion-related motivations were more strongly connected to intention than cognition-and behavior-related motives. Sport marketers can use these outcomes to deepen their understanding of sport fans and accordingly improve relationships between sport fans and the teams that they support.

Most of the research on sport relationship marketing (70.5 %) has been conducted in the professional sport setting and emphasized consumers' perspectives (Abeza, Finch, O'Reilly, MacIntosh, & Nadeau, 2019). Aligned with this trend, the present work contributes to the literature by identifying the effects of consumers' psychological attributes on relationship building. Sport marketers should consider what perceptions of sport fans can serve as a springboard for enhancing their relationships with sport teams and incorporate this information into their marketing strategies. Given that emotion-related motivations can strengthen relationship quality, an emotionally oriented approach can be reinforced by the adoption of experiential marketing, wherein consumer encounters are leveraged as opportunities to foster psychological connections with service providers (Madhvapaty & Rajesh, 2019). Experiential or engagement marketing can be efficiently operated using social media as these platforms extend reach to a broad base of sport fans (Naraine, Wear, & Whitburn, 2019). Then, such sport fans can more consciously evaluate the rewards of pro-maintenance acts, such as accepting ticket price increases or attending sporting events without fixation on game outcomes.

In emerging markets, such as the Korean professional volleyball industry, sport marketers should focus on schemes catering to entertainment, escapism, and eustress to foster an environment that creates memories and promotes activities around a game. Marketers would do well to supplement an emphasis on entertainment, escapism, and eustress with the introduction of premium seating and event opportunities that are currently unavailable in Korean indoor sports. Offering prime recreational options will help sport marketers capitalize on opportunities available in the market, while the privileged and personalized experiences that these options afford fans can induce positive emotional responses. Some examples are club-level seating, sky suites, and group sections, which provide sport fans respite from the stress of everyday life.

Other practical schemes include, but are not limited to, the offering of theme nights; in-match promotions; hospitality events before, during, and after games; and opportunities to interact and connect with athletes. These types of interactions are expected to cultivate emotional attachment between consumers and athletes/organizations, thereby engendering strong, mutually beneficial relationships. In turn, solid relationships driven by entertainment value create a bond that helps marketers better understand consumers and make them feel they are an integral part of sport activities and athletes' endeavors. Once sport marketers enhance their comprehension of the wants and needs of their consumers through strong relationships, then loyalty programs can be implemented to reinforce communication and connection between customers and organizations.

### *Limitations and future research*

Similar to any other research, this study is encumbered by certain limitations. First, we did not examine the effects of interaction among relationship quality-related factors on individual (e.g., gender, brand experience pertaining to sponsors, or identification with favorite teams) or situational (e.g., flow experience at a stadium or the perceived online service quality of official websites and social networking sites [SNSs]) determinants. Future researchers should explore and test potential moderators of the connection between sports motivation and relationship quality. Examining these moderators can clarify relationships, thus advancing current theories and the field overall (Cunningham & Ahn, 2019).

Second, the participants were sampled using social media. The convenient sampling may have prevented the authentic prediction of professional sports fans' behaviors and intentions, which raises the issue of coverage bias. This implies that the participants might not be representative of the target population (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2014), thereby diminishing generalizability to the spectators or fans who do not use social media. This problem arose from the failure to control the distribution of the questionnaire link. Members of non-targeted populations may have participated in the survey owing to recommendations by professional athletes or friends. Sampling that involves SNS or other types of websites should be strengthened with various means of contact, such as direct messaging or commenting on social media accounts. In addition to recruiting potential participants, the inclusion of Korean professional volleyball fans might pose limits to generalizability in terms of other sports. Thus, future studies should expand other populations of sport fans, for example, U.S. college sports fans or soccer fans in the United Kingdom.

Third, we did not address the dynamic process that underlies the synergy among motivation, relationship quality, and sport consumption intention. To describe the dynamics of the association between motivation and relationship quality, relationship marketing researchers should adopt established theories (Debnath, Datta, & Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Particularly, useful recommendations in this regard are those of Debnath et al. (2016), who suggested using (1) motivated reasoning theory (Wang, Beatty, & Liu, 2012) to explain the tendency of individuals to examine assessments of information related to their goals of extrinsic control, (2) self-determination theory (Ryan, Kuhl, & Deci, 1997) to expound on human motivation and personality development that emphasizes behavioral characteristics with self-regulation, and (3) Keller's theory (Stahl, Heitmann, Lehmann, & Neslin, 2012) to unravel people's motivation to learn in situations where presented knowledge is valued and there are optimistic prospects for success.

### *Conclusion*

This study presented a multidimensional model for an enhanced examination of how relationships are successfully formed between sport fans and sport teams. The model extends the relationship marketing and sport management literature by enabling the exploration of the association among sport motives, relationship quality, and sport consumption intention. Furthermore, it integrates emotion-related sport motives with relationship quality, thus advancing interpretations of the dimensions of desired outcomes as mediators of the link between sport followers' motivations and marketing outcomes.

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