

Taken Back at the Ballgame: The Impact of Nostalgia within the Minor League Baseball Spectator Experience

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(including questions)

Introduction

As the sport spectator experience continues to advance forward, one theme present at many facilities seeks to turn back the clock: nostalgia. Described as individuals' memory of a previous time that produces an overall pleasant emotion (Holak & Havlena, 1998), several previous studies have showcased the prevalence of nostalgia antecedents within sport facilities, with features such as exposed steel beams, manual scoreboards, and exposed brick designed to take fans back to a previous era (Ritzer & Stillman, 2001; Seifried & Meyer, 2010). Furthermore, components within the sport experience including music, food and beverages, and the overall social nature of sporting events are all connected to nostalgic experiences.

Consumer behavior research of nostalgia has revealed outcomes including enhanced attitudes toward brands (Merchant & Rose, 2013) and increased purchase intentions (Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010). However, despite the prevalence of nostalgia antecedents at many sport facilities, research has yet to examine the effectiveness of these facility features. To address this issue, the current study was designed to accomplish two objectives: first, to determine the overall impact of nostalgic stimuli on spectators' emotional and behavioral responses, and second, ascertain differences in the impact of nostalgia between facilities. The following research questions served as a guide to accomplish the study's purpose:

RQ1: What is the impact of nostalgia evoked through spectators' senses and social interaction on MiLB spectators' pleasure and behavioral intentions?

RQ2: Do ballparks engender significant differences in feelings of nostalgia for MiLB spectators?

Theoretical Framework

The current study employed the Stimulus – Organism – Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which suggests that emotional responses mediate the relationship between environmental stimuli and human behavior. While much research of nostalgia has employed qualitative and experimental methods, Hwang and Hyun (2013) employed the SOR framework to examine emotional and behavioral responses to nostalgic stimuli of restaurant patrons. Their results displayed that nostalgia resulting from factors including food, the environment, and the social element of the experience positively impacted pleasure, and that pleasure had a significant, positive impact on behavioral intentions. These findings served as this study's theoretical foundation.

Sample & Procedure

Data collection comprised spectators of two Double-A Minor League Baseball teams. The two teams (referred to as Team A and Team B) were chosen based upon their ballparks featuring both similarities and differences, which allowed for the study to examine the overall impact of nostalgic stimuli on spectators' emotional responses while also investigating differences between ballparks. Data were collected on site at three games at both ballparks during the summer of 2017. Paper surveys were distributed by one of the study's lead researchers and student assistants. Systematic random sampling was employed, with research teams randomly selecting sections throughout the ballpark.

A definition of nostalgia was provided and two manipulation checks were included to ensure comprehension of the concept as well as quality of data. In examination of spectators' nostalgic responses to ballpark stimuli, five sensory

factors (Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch) were adapted from Lee and colleagues' (2012) Sensoryscape. Further, the Sociability factor from Ko and colleagues' (2011) SEQSS was utilized to examine nostalgia evoked from spectators' family and friends. The emotional outcome of pleasure was assessed using a seven-point semantic differential scale previously used by Bigné, Andreu, and Gnoth (2005). Finally, Behavioral Intentions was measured utilizing three items from Yoshida and James (2010). Demographic data collected included gender, age, relationship status, average annual income, ethnicity, education, and attendance frequency.

Analysis & Results

In examination of RQ1, SEM was employed to examine relationships among the variables using a model combining results from both ballparks. RQ2 was addressed utilizing multi-group SEM, which tested the moderating effect of ballpark site on nostalgia, and its subsequent effects on pleasure and behavioral intentions. A total of 578 complete and usable surveys were obtained (Team A: n=232; Team B: n=346). Prior to examination of the individual and combined ballpark models, adequate model fit was exhibited for both models utilizing suggested fit indices by Kline (2016). Results of RQ1 indicated that spectators' social interaction ($\beta = .18$; $p < .05$) was the only factor of the six examined to have a significant, positive impact on Pleasure. Pleasure meanwhile was shown to positively impact Behavioral Intentions ($\beta = .30$; $p < .05$).

In examination of RQ2, a model comparison assessment rendered a significant χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 33.514$, $p < .001$), denoting differences in the research models between Team A (n=232) and Team B (n=346). Unique effects among the nostalgic dimensions were illustrated between the two settings. Team A fans indicated that Taste ($\beta=.21$) had a significant effect on Pleasure, while Team B fans revealed no such relationship. In fact, regarding Team B, Taste was not only non-significant, but had a negative relationship with Pleasure. Conversely, Team B fans revealed Sight ($\beta=.19$) to be most impactful when responding to what nostalgic elements influenced their pleasure at games.

Implications

Results of the study revealed several theoretical and practical takeaways. First, spectators at both ballparks were shown to experience pleasure resulting from their social interaction. While not surprising, this result showcases the importance of the social component of these experiences, and specifically, the memories attained from these experiences. Sport organizations should therefore continue to emphasize the social component of events, while also emphasizing previous experiences with family and friends. The current study also displayed differences in spectators' nostalgic responses based upon ballpark, with Sight and Taste differing based upon location. These results suggest that ballparks may differ in their ability to evoke nostalgia based upon components of the experience that are linked to spectators' senses including the views beyond the ballparks and food and beverage offerings. Finally, the current study measured spectators' emotional responses to nostalgic stimuli during their consumption experience, which builds off previous studies employing qualitative, experimental, and post-consumption surveys. Future research should continue to examine spectators' nostalgic responses during consumption experiences.

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