



**Generating buzz or driving attendance? The influence of story type and source on university sports fan attitudes and behavioral intentions**

***Tom Isaacson***

*Michigan State University*

***Nick Bowman***

*Young Harris College*

***Charles Atkin***

*Michigan State University*

# Sports information (PR):

## Background

---



## Sports information directors ..

- Bulk of time spent on media relations activities (Stoldt, Dittmore, & Branvold, 2006)
- Typically involves facilitating media coverage of events
- Outcomes include game broadcasts and game stories

# Sports information:

## Background

---



## Athletic directors ..

- Would like to see from SIDs:
  1. Revenue generation
  2. Improved relationships with key target publics
    - Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort, 2001

# Sports information:

## Opportunities

---



### **Change media relations focus:**

- For example, an increased focus on human interest stories

### **Possible outcomes:**

- Better relationships with key target publics
- Revenue generation through attendance and/or team support

# Research question:

Controlled vs. uncontrolled media

---



**RQ1: Do students perceive a difference in the credibility of sports news between the university athletics, a local newspaper, and a national sports publication?**

# Research question:

Story type

---



**RQ2: Does the type of story – game story vs. human interest story – have an effect on:**

- a) Students' interest in the article?
- b) The likelihood of recommending the article to friends and family?
- c) The likelihood of talking about the article with friends and family?
- d) Interest in watching the sport?
- e) Future game attendance?

# Research question:

Story source

---



**RQ3: Does the source of a story – university, local, or national – have an effect on:**

- a) Students' interest in the article?
- b) The likelihood of recommending the article to friends and family?
- c) The likelihood of talking about the article with friends and family?
- d) Interest in watching the sport?
- e) Future game attendance?

# Research question:

Interaction effect

---



**RQ4: Is there a significant interaction between story type and story source on:**

- a) Students' interest in the article?
- b) The likelihood of recommending the article to friends and family?
- c) The likelihood of talking about the article with friends and family?
- d) Interest in watching the sport?
- e) Future game attendance?

# 2x3 between subjects design

---



## Participants:

- 174 undergraduate students at MSU
- Age range 18 to 28 years old ( $M = 20.09$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ); 137 females and 37 males

## Stimuli:



# Results

---



## **RQ1 (credibility differences):**

- Significant difference between sources ( $F(2,171) = 32.9, p < .001, r^2 = .279$ )
- MSU was seen as most credible followed by LSJ and SI

## **RQ2 (game story vs. human interest story):**

- Human interest story was significantly more:
  - Interesting, likely to recommend, likely to watch hockey
- But NOT significantly more:
  - Likely to attend a game

# Results

---



## RQ3 (story source effect):

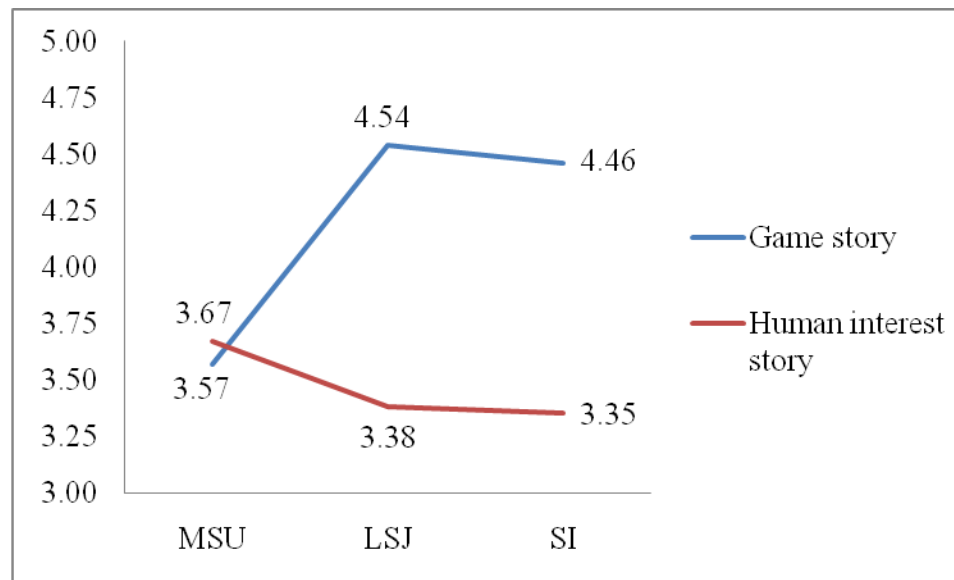
- More likely to attend game if source was SI compared to MSU ( $F(2,168) = 3.68, p = .027, r^2 = .042$ )
- No main effect of story source on other outcome variables (n.s.)

# Results



## RQ4 (interaction between story type and source):

*Significant interaction of story type and story source on interest in watching MSU hockey (1 = highly likely, 7 = highly unlikely).*



# Implications

---



- Opportunities for increased development of controlled messages
- Human interest stories to generate buzz
  - n.s. finding for influence on actual game attendance
- Less time helping media produce game stories (produce internally instead) and more time spent promoting human interest