

UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT CONSUMER AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: Using a semi-systematic literature review, this paper tackles the problematic of the sport consumer, tries to define the sport consumer and presents related areas of theory and findings of the reviewed literature. Then, the problematic of the paper is managed through three main research questions: who is a sport consumer, what has been scientifically investigated related to the sport consumer and why is it important to study this topic for sport managers? The sport consumer is a person who dedicates their time and monetary resources to sport. Through his life, the sport consumer may become the sport fan – a person who dedicates more of their time and money to sport. The key reason being the emotional link to the sport team. If sport managers understand this topic, they can (for instance) improve customer retention, which, ultimately and potentially, might help to gain a competitive advantage for a sport organization.

Keywords: sport management, sport fan, sport consumer, emotions

JEL Classification: M15, M21

1. INTRODUCTION

The sport consumer has become a popular area of study for sport management researchers [3]. At the same time (and also) Baier-Fuentes [3] argue, that emotions are considered a fundamental aspect of sport scenarios, and within sports, consumer behavior is a very popular area of research in the sport management field, thus – the interest of sport managers to investigate the link between emotions and sport consumer behaviour, has been growing. The topic is popular and considered important for sport managers and as new terms and more complex concepts are being build up on the basic terms, it might be harder for new researchers in the field, to get lost in definitions. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to answer basic questions – who is a sport consumer (definitions), what has been scientifically investigated (review of literature) and why is it important to study this topic for sport managers.

2. SCIENTIFIC AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The idea behind this paper, is to create a summarizing material of some of the theory and findings from scientific literature for future research, and for new sport managers. Thus, the main method of this paper is semi-systematic literature review, since the paper covers broader theory areas. That is mainly due to the broad character of one of the research questions asked (what has been scientifically covered). The research questions are: a) who is a sport consumer, b) what has been scientifically covered related to the sport consumer, c) why is it important to study this topic for sport managers?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW AND MAIN RESULTS

Who is a sport consumer? (the definition of the term and related terms)

Researchers in the field of sport management are often referring to sport consumer, sport fan, sport spectators and sport viewers. It is vital, to understand the differences between those terms.

Table 1 Definitions of a viewer, spectator, consumer, fan

The Term	The Definition
Viewer	A person watching television or a video on the internet.
Spectator	A person who is watching an event, especially a sports event.
Consumer	A person who buys goods or uses services.
Fan	A person who admires somebody/something or enjoys watching or listening to somebody/something very much.

Source: [20, 21, 22, 23]

Fan is defined as the person who thinks, talks about and is oriented towards sports even when – the fan – is not actually observing, or reading, or listening to an account of a specific sport event [5]. Da Silva et al. [5] argue, that fans are individuals who are deeply committed to the club, and their commitment manifests itself in a long term affiliation with one team (or club), in significant time and money expenditure, and in loyalty despite results, that is, commitment persists even when clubs are not performing well. Additionally, fans are not just spectators, they take part in the game and believe that their presence, engagement and involvement impact on their team's performance [5].

Speaking of spectators, Da Silva et al. [5] identify spectators as individuals who observe a sport and then forget about it, while fans will have more intensity and will devote part of every day to the team or the sport itself. However, the difference between a fan and a spectator lies in differing levels of passion. The same authors also argue, that sport fan is a sport consumer which spend on club merchandise directly to levels of fan engagement, i.e., engaged fans are likely to purchase club products, such match ticket, attire and general merchandise, on a frequent and continued basis.

A sport consumer experience is defined as sport consumers' cognitive, affective, social, and physical reactions to direct (e.g., purchase and consumption) and indirect (e.g., media and social network) encounters with a sport organization, its products, and other consumers [18].

Sport consumer behaviour represents consumer behaviour relative to the products and services offered in the sport and leisure industry [6]. Funk [6] then defines sport and event consumer behaviour as the process involved when individuals select, purchase, use, and dispose of sport and sport event related products and services to satisfy needs and receive benefits. Author then continues building up on this definition, relating to the decision making process of how individuals spend their time resources (for example time devoted to watching live sport event in TV or in person) and monetary resources (for example purchase of tickets or sport equipment).

Another useful term linked with the fan definition is the fan identification. As Milne & McDonald [12, 8] state, fan identification is a strong predictor of sport fan consumption behaviour, and it is defined as the personal commitment and emotional involvement a person has with a sports organization.

What has been scientifically investigated?

Related to the investigation of the link between the emotions and sport consumers, Jang et al. [9] state, that the amount of positive emotions that sports consumers experience while engaging in sports consumption determines their information-processing behavior, various types of behavioral consequences, such as future intention to attend or watch games, and purchase behavior. However, this is linked with hedonic perspective, that has been used in earlier studies. Recent studies, as Jang et al. [9] state, suggest, that there is more than concept of positive emotions as an outcome of actions in sport consumption. They talk about a type of consumption, that helps people experience greater purpose and meaning in life. The concept is referred to as a meaningful sport consumption (MSC) which focuses on presenting human virtues, and is driven by an individual's eudaimonic motivation, defined as the desire to "search for and ponder life's meaning, truths, and purposes" [14, 9]. Authors then go deeper, attempting to define moral-based (demonstration of moral excellence) and skill-based (demonstration of extraordinary skills) meaningful sport consumption. Those concepts are heavily linked to person's mindset, that is – independent (self-oriented individualism) and interdependent (other-oriented collectivism). Interesting findings of their study show, that moral-based MSC elicited greater motivation of passionate love from sports consumers, thus encouraging them to devote more money and time to prosocial activities than those elicited by skill-based MSC. In contrast, skill-based MSC induced greater motivation of self-improvement and persuaded them to invest more money in activities that helped them improve themselves than did moral-based MSC.

Sport consumption motives have been looked at from various perspectives by various researchers. As Bomin Paek, et. al [15] highlighted, there are studies, that categorize motives in general perspective, such as Wann did in 1995, who created eight domains to represent sport fandom.

However, several scholars uncovered a multitude of variables that hinted at the necessity of market-specific segmentations, For example - Andrew et al.'s nine-motive scale of mixed martial arts [2, 15]. The research of Bomin Paek, et. al [15] aimed their research towards relationship quality–motivation connection through emotional, cognitive, and social approaches. They argue, that that is essential because individuals who experience positive emotions are motivated to behave in a manner designed to maintain these favorable psychological states [13, 15]. For instance – they 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.

To understand an individual's psychological connection to sport, Funk & James [7] created The Psychological Continuum Model. By the words of Yoshida [18], it is an integrative examination of more than 20 years of different perspectives on the development of sport fan loyalty. The idea of the model suggests, that fan goes through several stages, until he becomes truly loyal to his sports team. They also named the model 3As to Allegiance, because they identified three stages leading to that true loyalty (or „allegiance“). The first stage – awareness – starts in the moment, when an individual first learns that certain sports, and/or teams exist, but does not have a specific favourite. The second stage – attraction – starts, when an individual acknowledges having a favourite team or favourite sport based upon various social-psychological and demographic-based motives. When a psychological connection is growing stronger, it is a sign, that the individual moved to the third stage – Attachment – there, various degrees of association between the individual and the sport object (e.g., a favourite team) are being created. Attachment represents the degree or strength of association based upon the perceived importance attached to physical and psychological features associated with a team or sport. And lastly – the fourth stage – Allegiance – is reached, when an individual has become a loyal (or committed) fan of the sport or team. Allegiance results in influential attitudes that produce consistent and durable behaviour [7].

There are studies, that suggest, that active spectatorship leads to happiness. More specifically, as stated in the study of Kesler and Wann [10], there is evidence suggesting, that the positivity of the game outcome (winning versus losing) significantly influences happiness of fans. These authors then examined the link between a fan identification, the outcome of the game (win or lose), but also between the game process (exciting or boring). According to authors – Kesler and Wann [10], the results indicated that sport consumers with high team identification exhibited greater degrees of happiness after recalling and imagining a boring win game compared to an exciting loss game. Meanwhile, sport consumers with low team identification exhibited similar degrees of happiness and game satisfaction after recalling and imagining an exciting loss game and a boring win game. This suggests, that the closer the fan is to allegiance (referring to the mentioned model 3As to Allegiance), the more he should prefer their team winning over the excitement of the game. On the other hand, fans in

the early stages of fandom should not significantly prefer the positive outcome before the excitement of the game.

Furthermore, team identification and general sport fandom are two potential routes to improve an individual's satisfaction with his or her personal or social life [10]. Authors (of [10]) -also argue, that their study results document the link between team identification and social psychological health. Additionally, they state, that the link between social life satisfaction and team identification appears to be firmly established.

Why is it important to study this topic for sport managers?

To answer the question - by the words of Puig [16, 3] customers' emotions and the way they express them allows sport managers to act on these emotions and reproduce them in an efficient way, with the aim of influencing and guiding them for the benefit of the organization.

Emotions are important in the field of marketing because emotions can generate differentiation between products and brands through experiences and sensations that arouse these emotions in the consumer [1, 3]. According to Baier-Fuentes et al. [3], no studies have analyzed the evolution of this area of study of sport management. In general, emotions are a key factor in human behaviour [11, 3].

Additionally supporting the claim of importance of the topics presented in this paper, the link between emotions and postpurchase reactions is essential to help club managers develop strategies to increase spectator attendance at sport events and improve customer retention [4]. That leads to the topic of relationship quality, Bomin Paek et al. [15] argue, that sport fan motives significantly affect relationship quality and behavioral intention regarding sport consumption, with emotional motivation exerting a considerable association.

Then, for example, Jang et al. [9] based on their findings, suggest that marketers should place their advertisements or promote products after a winning game rather than a losing game because the feeling of happiness that sport consumers experienced may transfer to the evaluations of advertisements and products. This example demonstrates, how sport managers in the role of sport marketers could practically apply the knowledge of their customers and benefit from it. Another – more specific - example of applicable knowledge is the analysis of Yue Hai Xia on the variance analysis on gender characteristics influence of sports consumption behavior of college students and his conclusion was that female students are more rational in sports consumption [19, 17].

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There has been a growing interest for sport managers regarding the role that emotions play in sport consumer behavior [3] which also reflects the importance of the topic.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As was found by literature review, the sport consumer can consume sport in many different ways, such as by watching TV, attending a live sport event (as he dedicates his time to sport), but also by buying merchandise, or tickets to a match (as he dedicates his money to sport). Then the sport consumer can also be a sport viewer or spectator. This has been differentiated (in this paper), because these terms might be confusing for new sport managers, especially for non-native english speakers. Additionally, there is also the sport fan, who has specific characteristics, but the sport fan is also the sport consumer. What is the difference between the sport viewer and the sport fan, if it was said, that both are sport consumers? The sport viewer can consume sport and later he wont even think about it (or forget about it), but the sport fan talks and thinks about the subject of consumption even after the consumption. The sport fan is more engaged with his team, because - over time - he cultivated an emotional bond (with his favourite team). Because of that, he spends more of his disponible time and monetary resources to subjects related to his favourite team. The emotional bond is being established over time, and sport managers can help this bond to grow. Sport managers, therefore, should pay attention to sport fans. Perhaps they can view them as an important segment of customers, and establish specific strategies, to fulfill specific requirements of sport fans, to establish long-term sustainable relationships.

A sport consumer is a person who dedicates their time and monetary resources to sport. A sport viewer is a person, who consumes a sport content by watching the sport (particularly by watching a television or online broadcast), sport spectator is a person who physically attends a sport event (or a match). A sport fan is a more dedicated sport consumer, who dedicates more of their time and monetary resources (by buying official merchandise – for example) to sport than a spectator/viewer, because he has developed an emotional bond with his favourite sport team or organization than. A fan also thinks and talks about their favourite sport team, even when is not consuming a content about their team at the moment, additionally, he believes, that he has an impact on his team by attending a match. By understanding how and why he emotionally bonds to a sport team, a sport manager can make such decisions, so he can create an environment for the quality of the relationship with a fan can be established.

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