A Structural Equation Modeling for Factors Influencing Attendance at Professional Sports Events

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The factors that influence attendance at sporting events are based on consumer behavior research. Since increasing attendance is a primary objective of professional sports teams, an increased knowledge concerning the factors influencing attendance would be most useful to any organization. The understanding of those factors influencing spectator attendance at sporting events is a key to developing plans, strategies, and processes leading to the achievement of organizational objectives. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects on the desire of people to attend a professional sport games on attendance factors, subsequently, upon their intention to attend future sport events. The survey instrument for this study was a self-developed tool constructed by the investigator using information attained from studies conducted by James et al. (1995), Debbie (1996) and Lee (2000). The total number of subjects of 745 surroge questionnaires was obtained from these fans in attendance at baseball and soccer games among the professional sporting events held in the 2001-2002 season. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on LISREL program was used for analyzing the null hypothesis of this study. The results of this study indicate that attendance factors (promotion, attractiveness, schedule, economics) were shown to directly influence the consumer's desire to attend as well as their desire to return to a professional sports event in the future.

key words: Structural Equation Modeling, Factors Influencing Attendance

Introduction

By understanding the attendance factors, sports executives will be better able to effectively apply strategies and plan to increase attendance at professional sporting events. There are numerous factors that are associated with attendance at sporting events. Melnick (1993) has suggested that many spectators seek social interaction and entertainment through sports encounters. He also noted that factors such as stadium design, food service quality, attractiveness of the game, entertainment, and fan interaction might influence how spectators feel about their experience at a sporting event. Bittner (1986) implied that the physical and social surroundings of the sporting event spectators attend might strongly influence their perceptions of the experience and their willingness to attend another sport game. There are numerous factors that are associated with attendance at sport games.

Winning has traditionally been viewed as the main factor in helping sports organizations sell tickets to sports consumers. There appear to be several other factors that play an important role in attracting sports consumers to sport games. One of the factors that has been linked most often with attendance at sport games is team performance (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Branscombe & Wann, 1991). The general rule of thumb is that the better a team does, the more people attend. Some
people attend games because of a star player (Baade & Tiehen, 1990). Other people consider the social (league standings, games ahead or behind leader), objective (team quality, percentages of games won and lost) and temporal (compare past and present success) performance information in making decisions while still others attend for the pure enjoyment and excitement of the sport game (Hall et al., 1991; Zillmann et al., 1989).

A few of the prominent factors within the current status of sports are such as new arena, record breaking performance, superstar factor, violence and give away days. Although all these factors exist, winning is still considered a very important factor within sports events marketing (Hansen & Gauthier, 1992).

In Korea, the rapid industrialization, democratization, globalization, and the current economic crisis in recent years have brought about tremendous social changes. These changes have also had an impact affecting attendance at professional sporting events. These few studies had attempted to study professional sport consumer behavior. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects on the desire of people to attend a professional sport events on attendance factors, and subsequently, upon their intention to attend future sport events.

**Literature Review of Attendance Factor at Sports Event**

One of the factors that has been linked most often with attendance at sporting events is team performance (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Becker & Suls, 1983; Branscombe & Wann, 1991; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kennedy, 1980; Schurr et al., 1988).

The general rule of thumb is that the better a team does, the more people attend. Some people attend games because of a star player (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Schurr et al., 1988). Other people consider the social (league standings, games ahead or behind leader), objective (team quality, percentages of games won and lost) and temporal (compare past and present success) performance information in making decisions, while still others attend for the pure enjoyment and excitement of the sporting event (Hall et al., 1991; Sloan, 1989; Zillmann et al., 1989).

The intentions of people to attend a sporting events are also affected by personal factors (Bergier, 1981; Schofield, 1983; Shamir & Ruskin, 1984), products (Brooks, 1994) and environmental factors (Schofield, 1983). Personal factors are related to the scarcity of time and money to spend on attending as well as interpersonal influences (family and peers). Product-related factors deal with the availability and quality of the sporting event while environmental factors relate to the accessibility and location of the events and a concern for weather conditions.

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Promotion is tied to the type of market a team is attempting to attract and the geographic area of the individual sport team (Petto, 1982; Boeck, 1993).

Schofield (1983) categorized attendance factors as production functions and demand functions. Production functions focus on team performance and player performance and the factors relating to the influence of player skills on team output as measured by player statistics, team statistics, and team winning percentage.