# UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES ON SPECTATOR SATISFACTION IN FRENCH ICE HOCKEY

**Guillaume Bodet**, Loughborough University, United Kingdom, G.S.P.Bodet@lboro.ac.uk
**Iouri Bernache-Assollant**, Université de Bourgogne, France

## INTRODUCTION

Given the growing economic value of sports spectatorship, sport managers should aim at enhancing customer satisfaction, which is one of the core customer variables of the service industry. Indeed, customer satisfaction has been found to be a powerful trigger to achieve favourable organisational outcomes such as repeat purchases, positive word of mouth, lower price elasticity, higher frequency of visit, higher profitability and increased customer loyalty (Cronin, Brady and Hult, 2000; Howat, Murray and Crilley, 1999). However, one of the specific features of the sport industry is the heterogeneity of the crowd which comprises several types of spectator (Tomlinson, Buttle and Moores, 1995). This implies that there is a real need for managers to understand which spectator variables impact upon the level of customer satisfaction in order to fit their customer's expectations. This study, determines if the level of spectator satisfaction varies according to demographic and psychological variables.

## METHODS

### Variables measure
The authors developed a questionnaire which consisted of a customer satisfaction measure, an evaluation of the team identification level and several demographic and behavioural features. Customer satisfaction was measured with the scale developed by Oliver (1980) which has been validated by numerous authors in the field of sport spectatorship services. Team identification was measured with the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS, Wann and Branscombe, 1993).

### Data collection
An on-line questionnaire survey was used to collect the different measures needed in order to answer the research question of this study. First, the internet address of the questionnaire was presented, with a brief explanation of the goal of the survey, in several French ice-hockey forums of discussion. Thus, in order to complete the sample, the e-address of the questionnaire was also sent to numerous spectator e-mail addresses which had been collected during a game of the *Premiership Magnus league* in a French town of about 300,000 habitants.

### Sample characteristics
423 questionnaires were collected and 395 were useful. The ice hockey spectators interrogated were mainly male (66.6%), young ($M = 27.69$ years old, $SD = 10.015$), middle-class and probably university students if we compare the age and the household income value, and mostly (81.5%) out of an official fan group. The social, demographic and behavioural features of the sample are widely in accordance with the results of Crawford (2001) found in England, except for the gender proportion which appears to favour males.

## RESULTS

Concerning the team identification variable, three groups of spectators were identified using a tripartite split, based on the frameworks of Dimmock and Grove (2005) and Wann and Branscombe (1993). Then, an ANOVA was conducted. The satisfaction level of the lower identified group is significantly inferior to the level of the two other groups (F=6.07; p=.002). No significant difference was found between the medium and the highly identified group in term of level of satisfaction.

Household income was found to influence satisfaction level (F=3.65; p= .012). One income group indicated a level of satisfaction that was significantly inferior to the second and the fourth group.

No significant difference was found regarding the age and the gender of the spectators.

## DISCUSSION

This research is based on the frameworks which aim to analyse sport spectatorship consumption based on a segmentation of customers. This research has examined the influence of several demographic and psychological variables on spectator satisfaction. The results have suggested that age and gender do not have a significant influence on overall customer satisfaction although most of the sport spectatorship literature supports this assumption (Greenwell, Fink and Pastore, 2002). However, among the demographic variables, household income has been found to have an impact on customer satisfaction. Finally, in accordance with Madrigal (1995), team identification has been found to influence customer satisfaction, even if the relationship between the two constructs does not appear to be linear. More precisely, medium and high identified spectators are more satisfied than low identified, which could mean that low identified spectator are harder to satisfy or do not have the same expectations in term of service performance.

From a managerial perspective, segmentation based on psychological variable, particularly on team identification level, seems to more relevant than demographic segmentation regarding spectator satisfaction.

Further investigation could take into account other demographic or psychological variables such as customer orientation toward sport spectacle, or distinct dimensions of customer satisfaction in order to provide a better understanding of the differences between sport spectator segments.

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