Classifying spectators – The case of AIK at Råsunda 2002 and 2007

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Aim of paper and research questions

Football spectators in previous decades were often quite homogenous. The increased media interest and introduction of comfort oriented stadiums and satellite television have transferred the traditional football spectators into a more heterogeneous audience (Tapp & Clowes, 2002). Since the football brings out subjective feelings in the spectators' eye, the audience in modern football is more diverse and the complexity of the industry makes market segmentation a key concept for modern football clubs.

This research was based on work by master students familiar with football. They collected the data and then wrote their theses in 2002 (Lyberg & Ingeholm, 2002) and in 2007 (Kozanli & Samiei, 2007) using exactly the same questionnaire.

The Stockholm football club AIK has had the highest average attendance in the Swedish top league during the last decade and makes an interesting case study from a marketing point of view. AIK is the club that plays home matches at the national arena, Råsunda, one of the biggest stadiums in Sweden.

Thus, the research question is: What are the differences and similarities of AIK football club's audience during a five year period?

Literature review

Market research in the sports industry has put great focus on identifying "clear cut" segments in order to assist the clubs in their pursuit for revenue creation through ticketing. Identification of segments based on demographical and behavioural factors have been studied by many researchers like Dobson & Gerard, 1994; Hunt et al., 1999; Beech et al., 2000, together with classification of fans in order to understand their motives and needs. Attendance variables and reasons for attending live games have also been studied (Madrigal, 1996; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Lonsdale, 2004; Wang, 2006).

In this project, audience segmentation has mainly been based on three studies: Tapp & Clowes (2002), Richelieu & Pons (2005) and Kim et al. (2007). Each of these articles starts from an initial perspective to define segmentation according to some variables identified through the use of surveys. Whereas all other studies use the single period approach, this study focuses on the two periods 2002 and 2007.

Research design and data analysis

Two surveys were conducted based on data from four of AIK´s home games collected in April 2002 and April 2007. More than 200 randomly selected spectators were interviewed in 2002 and in 2007. Randomly chosen entrants were interviewed just before the match was to begin. The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions and 28 variables which were coded.

Results

We assumed that seating was the classification variable in AIK, meaning that (the devoted AIK fans ie) Klacken was supposed to sit on one section breach, family on another stand and the rest anywhere. After analysis this turned out not to be a viable assumption.

From the analysis of variance (ANOVA) 11 variables were statistically significant and 8 were used to correlate with the differences between the two groups: "Klacken" and "non-Klacken". We then searched for the biggest gaps between them according to the first answer for each group. The biggest difference was found when asked if the spectator would buy a season card. 89% of Klacken answered they already had one as compared to 9% only for the other group. In terms of number of visited games, 85% of Klacken attended more than half of the home games, whereas 40% for the non-Klacken did so.

Discussion and conclusion

With reference to the data collected in the 2007 sample there seems to be some differences from the 2002 study. At first we immediately noticed that Klacken "dominates" all variables. The biggest gap in the second study occurs for the variable related to the number of visited games where 76 % of Klacken attend more than half of the home games compared to only 39% for the non-Klacken.

The comparison of the two studies seems to show a shift in the supporter profile. As we saw, from the first three variables with the biggest gaps, only one appears in the two studies and is related to the number of visited games. Striking is the result related to the shrinking willingness to buy a season card. Importance of togetherness has increased for both groups and interestingly both groups also show the same percentages in relation to the price of tickets. The heterogeneity at the stands seems to increase at the Råsunda stadium.

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