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Chinese consumers' perceptions of action sports

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Background

Action sports also known as extreme sports were introduced to Chinese consumers in the 1990's (Jennings, 2005). They have since gained considerable popularity and acceptance, particularly among adolescents and youths due to their adventurous nature and forms. It was believed that the growth rate in action sports participation in China has been more than 20% annually (Jennings, 2005). The launch of the first national action sports competition in late 1990's signified that action sports, as a new form of spectator sports, started to take root in the Chinese sports marketplace. The world's largest extreme sports theme park built in Shanghai, China in the mid 2000's (Gladden & McDonald, 2005) is evidence. Despite the rapid development, there is little or no empirical research on the demographic profiles and perceptions of Chinese consumers towards action sports. A study with a specific focus on this area, therefore, becomes critically important to sport managers in the Chinese action sports industry as they will be able to design action sports events and promote them tailoring to the interest of their consumers.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the Chinese consumers' perceptions of action sports. Specifically, this study was designed to accomplish three objectives: (a) to identify the demographic characteristics of the action-sports consumers in China (e.g., gender, age, level of education, household income, etc.), (b) to identify the motives that influenced Chinese consumers to attend action sports events, and (c) to determine Chinese consumers' perceptions of action sports.

Methods

The study used the survey design in its data collection. A questionnaire was first developed from the modification of the questionnaires used by a number of action sports studies (Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2002; Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2003). The finalized questionnaire was then translated into Chinese.

The finalized questionnaire contained 33 items in four sections. The first section included 9 items concerning survey participants' personal experience with action sports. The second section asked the survey participants to rate 13 items that may influence their decision to attend an action sports event. A category scale ranging from Very Important (5) to Not At All Important (1) was used in this section. Section Three contained 16 statements regarding to perceptions of action sports. A

Likert 5-point scale anchored at Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The demographic items, concerning gender, marital status, level of education, age, and annual household income, were in the last section.

Data collection was conducted at the Kia X Games Asia held in Shanghai, China on April 30-May 3, 2009. A group of volunteers from the event staff have helped in data collection. They approached spectators at various locations of the competition site and solicited their participation in the survey during the four days of the event. Two hundred forty-eight spectators completed the survey instrument.

Results

Respondents were roughly evenly split on gender (51.2% male, 48.8% female). Their educational levels were spread across high school and graduate education with most of them holding a college degree (44.8%). Approximately 60% of the survey participants reported that they were younger than 29 years old.

The respondents were in moderate to high agreement with all 16 statements that reflected their perceptions of action sports in China ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.27$). Due to its exploratory nature of the study, the 16 statements reflecting Chinese consumers' perceptions of action sports were factor analyzed using the principal components technique with varimax rotation to identify underlying relationships or factors. The results of the factor analysis yielded three factors. Accounted for 50.89% of the variance, the first factor was loaded by six items, which were labeled as Advancement. The items that loaded in factor two were regarded Familiarity. They accounted for 8.73% of the variance. Popularity, accounted for 7.5% of the variance, was named for factor three as it was loaded by three items implying respondents' enthusiastic vision of action sports in China. These three factors are similar to those found in a study conducted by Bennett and Henson (2003) that examined the perceptions of action sports among college students in the US. Their study also yielded three factors: action sport familiarity, action sport popularity, and advancement. The Cronbach alpha for each of the three factors was calculated. The reliability for each factor (.897 for factor one; .878 for factor two and .815 for factor three) satisfied Nunally's (1978) criterion of .60 or higher as a standard for an exploratory research study.

Conclusion

This study yielded some interesting findings. The Chinese action-sports consumers were young and educated. Socializing with friends and family members was a primary motive for Chinese action-sports consumers to attend action sports events. In addition, the survey participants all demonstrated a strong preference of action sports over other popular sports and enthusiastically believed that action sports will have great development potential in China. This result could be attributed by the fact that a majority of respondents were relatively younger. According to Jennings (2005), action sports are most popular among youths of 20-30 years old.

While this empirical investigation provided several interesting findings, it also left a few research questions needing to be answered via further studies. What are the media viewing and preferences of Chinese action sports consumers? What are the Chinese consumers' perceptions toward a particular action sport? What are the purchasing behaviors of Chinese action sports

consumers? The answers to these questions, together with the findings of this study, would provide the action sport industry in China with valuable information about its consumers.