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The perceived consumer value of sport teams - A new multi-dimensional approach

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Introduction

Sport teams face strong competition within the sports market as well as from other entertainment options (Mullin et al., 2007). To maintain a good market position, sport organisations should adopt a consumer orientation approach and create consumer value which is the “fundamental basis for all marketing activities“ (Holbrook, 1994, p. 22). However, limited conceptual and empirical research has examined the value of sport teams as perceived by sport spectators and requires further exploration. The current research addresses this limitation by adopting a multi-dimensional view of perceived consumer value ascribed to sport teams to investigate the influence of the value dimensions on consumers’ commitment with their favourite team.

Literature Review

The Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991) accounts for the perceived value consumers derive from market choices (e.g., following a favourite team). The theory proposes that five perceived value dimensions (functional, social, emotional, epistemic and conditional value) operate independently to influence consumer choice. Sweeny and Soutar (2001) added an economic dimension and suggest that the six dimensions are inter-related and worked together. In contrast to the multidimensional view of perceived values, spectator sport research has generally utilized a simplistic one-dimensional approach to examine consumer value perceptions (Cronin et al., 2000; Hightower et al., 2002). The current research advances knowledge in sport research by adopting the multidimensional conceptualisation of consumption values and integrates sport motives and service quality literature (e.g., Brady et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2002). Specifically, five value dimensions were theoretically identified relevant to sport; functional, social, emotional, epistemic and economic. In addition, the influence of the value dimension is likely to be contextual and thus would vary between culture and teams of different sport leagues (Sweeny & Soutar, 2001).

Methods

To measure consumer perceived value scales from existing literature were adapted (Brady et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 2004; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Wakefield, 1995; Wann, 1995). Participants were recruited for an online-based survey via fan forums of teams of the German Bundesliga and the Australian A-league, generating 225 respondents for the Bundesliga and 291 for the A-League. Surveys were conducted during the 2009/10 season and questions were asked in the national language. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to

examine the multi-dimensional nature of perceived values. Furthermore ANOVA was employed to compare the mean scores of each dimension between the two leagues. Finally a stepwise regression analysis was utilized to examine the relationship between the value dimensions and respondents' psychological commitment.

Results

Overall, results show spectator-based perceived value has five dimensions. The first dimension can be interpreted as value for money and contains performance aspects (employee's and team's performance), entertainment aspects, and economic aspects. The other four dimensions are social value, epistemic value, escape value and stadium value. Comparison of mean scores for the two leagues revealed significant differences for the dimension value for money, social value, and epistemic value, with fans of A-League teams rating the identified values higher than fans of Bundesliga teams. The dimension escape value and stadium value did not show significant differences. The results of the stepwise regression analysis identified that the four values – value for money, escape value, social value and stadium value – explained 23.9% of the variance of sports consumers' psychological commitment with their favourite team.

Discussion

This study explores the multidimensionality of spectator-based perceived value consumers' link with their favourite football team and examines the influence of these dimensions on the commitment of consumers' of differently structured leagues. The analysis of perceived value extracted five dimensions, which are slightly different to the five proposed conceptual dimensions. However, it seems that sport consumer values can be conceptualised both similar and different to other consumption experiences. Fans of A-League teams ranked three value dimensions higher than fans of Bundesliga teams, despite the A-League being a young league. This might be due to a very critical German audience. Although the perceived value dimensions for sport teams show contextual differences in their strength between the leagues, they seem to show an overall consistency and could be utilised to explain 23.9% of commitment with a team. Opposed to existing literature (e.g., Bauer et al., 2008), this study identifies the influence of functional value dimensions on consumers commitment. In conclusion, a multi-dimensional view of perceived consumer values of sport teams has been explored and the influence of the value dimensions on consumers' commitment with their favourite team was demonstrated.

Managerial Implications

Team managers can use the identified dimensions to gain a better understanding of their consumers' perceived value. This information can be employed to develop strong connections with the team. Thus, helping the teams in creating committed fans.

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