

Customer satisfaction surveys in the Finnish football league; the match day event experience from the spectator point of view

Author: Osmo Laitila

Institution: HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

E-mail: osmo.laitila@haaga-helia.fi

During years 2010 and 2011 Sport Business School Finland, which is an operational body of sport research established by HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences and JAMK University of Applied Sciences, conducted a numerous studies that concentrated on the football spectators in the Finnish Football League, Veikkausliiga. These studies comprehended a practical point of view in customer satisfaction as simple functions and factors of the match day event were evaluated by the attending spectators. One of the key points of the survey and of the whole research project was to link the recommendations of the match day event to the different functions and services developed and produced by the event organizers (clubs). Simple correlations were made in order to study which areas of the match day event functions the respondents' positive or negative recommending was dependent on.

The main objectives of the research were to study the customer satisfaction in football matches and point out the key success factors of a football match day event. The results can and ought to be used to improve the quality of the match day event by concentrating resources in the essential functions from the spectators' point of view. Also, another purpose of how to utilize the study results was to create a guideline of the best practices in organizing a match day event and this way to conceptualize the event so that it would possible to develop a standard level of event quality for the spectators. The objectives were drawn based on the following research questions; 1) How satisfied the football spectators are with the different factors of a football match arrangements? 2) Which kind of connections can be found between the recommending of a football match event and different factors of a football match event?

The methodological approach of the survey was quantitative. The data was collected on Webropol software database by using web based questionnaires. The link to the questionnaire was published after the match on the web page of the home club, and the questionnaire was available for responses for the next 2-3 days. Consequently, there were no restrictions for survey participation and anyone who

visited the web pages after the match was able to take part in the survey. A few exceptions excluded, the study was conducted after every match in 2010. During 2011, the data was collected after 6 matches for every club in the beginning of the season, during midsummer and at the end of the season.

The theoretical framework of the research was a combination of theories concerning the customer buying behavior (Principles of Marketing, 2002), services management and customer satisfaction (Services Management, 2003) and marketing of sport and leisure (Torkildsen's Sport and Leisure Management, 2010). Theoretical framework suggests that a match day event forms a service concept and perceived service quality along with buying behavior factors influences on willingness to recommend and participate in the event.

The quantity of the total sample in 2010 was 4098 responses, and in 2011, 2039 responses. The key findings of the material pointed out that the Veikkausliiga clubs are quite successful in technical aspects of the match day event such as entering the stadium, ticket sales and the security of the event. Also the pre-event and post-event bulletins and the reportages on the clubs' web pages were rated positively. The majority of the respondents felt that a football match is a good venue to meet friends and have social contacts. The functions that need to be further developed were mostly related to the marketing of the event and to improving the quality of the services before, during and after the event. The stadium infrastructure, for example the sanitary facilities, was also rated as quite modest in many event venues. The correlations suggested that the most significant factors for the people recommending the event to a friend were the atmosphere of the event, the fighting spirit of the home club players, and the interaction between the players and the spectators.

The future challenges for the Veikkausliiga clubs are in marketing, in creating service culture and services in the matches, as well as in the stadiums' infrastructure. Presumably, the Finnish Football League has a huge amount of potential spectators, but the problem is how to reach them through marketing and partnering, and how to fulfill the first time customers and spectators' expectations.

References:

- Gemmel, P. & Van Dierdonck, R. & Van Looy, B. 2003. Services Management. An Integrated Approach. 2nd edition. Pearson Education Ltd.
- Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. 2002. Principles of Marketing. 9th edition. Pearson Hall.
- Taylor, P. 2010. Torkildsen's Sport and Leisure Management. 6th edition. Taylor & Francis.