
WHAT KEEPS PEOPLE AWAY FROM THE STADIUM? CONSTRAINTS ON SOCCER ATTENDANCE IN A EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

Aim

Soccer certainly holds a global appeal (Giulianotti, 1999), and there is a huge passion among its devotees. For instance, in the Portuguese culture, soccer is commonly considered as a religion (Costa, 1997). However, the attendance numbers are paradoxically quite low, with an occupation rate of the stadiums of only 46%, i.e., around 10,000 spectators/game, during season 2012-13 (Liga Portuguesa de Futebol, 2013). In Belgium, the average number of spectators was of around 11,000 during the same season. Nevertheless, there are five stadiums in Belgium with a capacity exceeding 25,000 places, which are rarely full (<http://www.european-football-statistics.co.uk/>).

This paper aims to understand the constraints on soccer attendance, i.e., the motives people have to not attend soccer games at the stadium, in Belgium and in Portugal. We focused on two countries in order to compare different soccer attendance cultures within a broad European perspective.

Theoretical framework

Besides being motivators for attendance, some factors can also be constraints, meaning, they can be factors that impede or inhibit an individual from attending a sporting event (Kim & Trail, 2010). However, what encourages fans to attend may not be reflected in what discourages fans from attending (Tomlinson, Buttle, & Moores, 1995). Only few studies have focused on the constraints on attendance, and some research has mixed up motives and constraints indistinguishably. Nevertheless, some constraints have been mentioned in literature, such as ticket pricing, game being televised, accessibility to stadium and parking availability, or low game quality (Douvis, 2007). Further research

on this topic is needed. From a marketing perspective in particular, it might be of interest to understand how different the constraints on attendance might be for different segments (e.g., fans of a club or non-fans; fans of a first league club or fans of a lower league club; male and female fans; fans with different attendance habits).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Dutch-speaking Belgian (n=4,957) and Portuguese (n=2,150) fans and non-fans completed a twenty minutes online survey about soccer fandom, with the following questions: if respondents were fans of a club or not; number of games attended the previous season; a 5-point scale previously tested with a pilot-study about their constraints on attendance with options ranging from 1 (nothing) to 5 (totally), with 21 items collected from the literature (e.g., lack of interest, game on TV, or lack of time); measures that the clubs could take to make them attend to games (respondents had to choose, among 14 items, the three main measures); and demographic questions such as sex, age, and financial status. The link to the survey was spread on the web through e-mail, Facebook pages but also the official pages of clubs or fan clubs. A Belgium and a Portuguese newspaper also published the link to the survey on the paper and on the online version. In this manner, instead of only reaching attendants around the stadium, we aimed to have a broad perspective, by reaching both attendants and non-attendants, and fans and non-fans. Descriptive and multilevel analyses using SPSS software version 22.0 were conducted.

Results

The Belgian respondents refer that expensive tickets, bad stadium conditions and low level of play keep them away from the stadium. The non-fans would attend more games if there were more promotions as well. The fans do not attend because of lack of time and bad schedules in particular. Organisational issues, such as lack of time, or the game being televised, and bad level of play, keep the men away from the stadium, when compared to women. On the other hand, marketing related actions, such as offers and promotions, and special prices for groups, are more important for women than for men. People attending less to the games are less satisfied with the competition formula (play-offs).

For the Portuguese sample, the results are different, since people mainly focus on money issues, and ask for cheaper tickets, promotions and special prices for groups. The non-fans are also worried with safety issues and demand better soccer quality. For fans of the first league, money issues are more fundamental, while for fans of lower leagues, a better management should also be the focus. Expensive prices, organisational issues, and bad level of play keep the men away from the stadium, while violence, bad stadium conditions, disinterest and detachment for soccer keep women away from the stadium. People going less to the stadium live further from the stadium, are more

disinterested in soccer, and feel less safe at the stadium.
Further results and marketing implications will be discussed.

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