
PROFILING MEMBERS OF A SUPPORTERS' CLUB: A CASE STUDY OF THE V. PREMIER LEAGUE IN JAPAN

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Synopsis:

The comparison between genders of the reasons for joining supporters' clubs shows that while female members join to watch matches and for the benefits associated with match attendance, male members join for the social connections.

Abstract:

1. INTRODUCTION

Fan clubs are important to running sports clubs because they are the clubs' main source of income (Theysohn et al., 2009). Theysohn et al. found that offering services desirable to the members, and setting annual membership fees at levels perceived by fans' as optimal, are keys to customer loyalty. This type of research is also needed for fan clubs in Japan.

Sakai Blazers, the subject of this study, is the leading men's volleyball club in the top league (V.Premier League) in Japan. In 2000, Nippon Steel Chemical Company Limited relinquished its relationship with the team as owner and became a supporter, and the team became community-based. Consequently, the team is required to achieve managerial and financial independence. The annual membership fees for the Sakai Blazers supporters' club provide operating funds to run the club. So increasing the number of members is an urgent task for the club.

Considering the past process regarding Sakai Blazers, it is evident that male members have some social connection to the team. Further, in general, female members have an attachment with the players. This study aims to clarify the characteristics of gender differences based on this background. This study will facilitate the club's task of increasing female members.

2. METHODS

Data collection and respondents' attributes: A questionnaire was administered to members of the Sakai Blazers Supporters' club in November 2013, by post. The number of questionnaires distributed was 1,655, and 23 percent were

returned. A total of 30 questionnaires with missing values were excluded. Females represented 67.5 percent of the final sample, and males represented 32.5 percent of the final sample.

Reasons for membership: Twelve possible reasons for membership were provided.

Membership privileges: The respondents were asked for their opinions on the significance of club privileges available to them also using a seven-point scale. The Friends Members' membership offers six privileges, and Socio-Members are eligible for 11 privileges.

The attraction of the supporters' club: Six items pertaining to the attractiveness of the supporters' club were presented to the respondents. Respondents were asked to select all that applied to them.

Annual membership fees and privileges: The respondents were asked, 'Do you find the current annual membership fee 1. expensive, 2. about right, or 3. inexpensive?' The respondents were also asked, 'Would you like to have a more expensive membership category with more privileges than current Socio-Members receive, or would you like to have a less expensive category with fewer privileges than current Friends Members receive?'

3. RESULTS

The reasons for joining, which received higher scores from female respondents than their male counterparts, included: 'because the club has the players I support', 'because I like volleyball', 'because I saw an exciting match', and 'because membership privilege was attractive'. However, the male respondents ranked the following reasons for joining higher than female respondents: 'because I live in the club's home town', 'because it is a strong club', 'because I am related to the supporter company', 'because a friend/acquaintance invited me', 'because I took part in the event/clinic', 'because I am related to staff', and 'because I am in the Kids' School'.

With respect to membership privileges, female respondents rated the following services more highly than their male counterparts: 'the official magazine', 'the supporters' club newsletter', 'priority access to free tickets to official matches', 'priority booking of tickets to the home games/members' discount', 'members' discount for the Blazers' goods', 'admission to the Fans' Festival', 'the Socio-Party', 'the Year Book', 'the birthday card', and 'the calendar'.

The chi-square test of the supporters' club attractiveness showed a correlation between three activities — 'learn the latest about the players', 'get a discount on the ticket', and 'meet the players'— and gender. The proportion of female respondents who considered these activities significant for club appeal was greater than the proportion of male respondents. Additionally, a greater correlation was found between the perception of whether annual membership fees for Socio-Members were expensive, about right, or inexpensive. More male respondents indicated that the fees were inexpensive.

4. DISCUSSION

The comparison between genders of the reasons for joining supporters' clubs shows that while female members join to watch matches and for the benefits associated with match attendance, male members join for the social connections. Because female respondents rated membership privileges higher than male respondents, the study concludes that female members are more aware of membership privileges. The analysis of supporters' club appeal shows that 'the players' are significant to female members, who seek out information on the players and opportunities to interact with them.

References:

Theysohn, S., et al.(2009) Official supporters clubs: the untapped potential of fan loyalty, International Journal of Sports Marketing & Sponsorship;10(4), pp302-324.