

(SP) “EXTREME” SPORTS: AN EXAMINATION OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE SPECTATORS’ ATTENDANCE AT AN EXTREME SPORT EVENT

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Introduction

As reported in “The Business of Action Sports in Europe” action sports, also known as “extreme sports” or “free sports,” are moving from the sideline to main activity events (Laub, 2005). Indeed, in the United States, “extreme sports” are additionally growing from backyard weekend fun to million-dollar sports activities and events (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). Further, as reported at EASM 2005 in “Extreme Sports: What is the Attraction? An Exploration of the Spectator Market of the ‘Eight-Second’ Sport – Professional Bull Riding,” (Pitts, Lu, Lucas, & Ayers, 2005), some of these activities are becoming mainstream and some now have a professional circuit (league, or association) and drawing sizable numbers of spectators. One of these extreme sports is a form of motorcycle racing known as SuperCross. This sport has grown into a sport that attracts individuals from all walks of life, and has a professional level presence with multi-million dollar events. Among the growth of this sport includes the AMA (American Motorcycle Association), the WMA (Women’s Motocross Association), and the world association, the Federation Internationale de Motorcyclisme (FIM) with worldwide events such as the Grand Prix of Germany, the Grand Prix of Monaco, the Grand Prix of Czech Republic, and the Superbike & Supersport World Championships. There is growth in the equipment and facility segments of this industry. For example, the Three Palms Extreme Sports Park in Conroe, Texas is a first of its kind extreme sports facility. Indeed, there is even a movie, titled simply, Supercross.

Methods

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what factors positively affect spectators’ attendance at super cross events. Four categories of variables that affect decision-making in attending identified in prior research were examined: (a) game attractiveness; (b) economic factors; (c) sociodemographic factors; and (d) audience preferences (Green, 1995; Lu, 2001; Lu, Pitts, & Ayers, 2004). Survey method was used and a questionnaire was developed based on prior research. The event selected was an annual Supercross tournament. The 2006 event was selected for study.

Results

Findings revealed that the average demographic of attendee was 18 to 44 years of age, male, white, with an annual income between \$40,000 and 99,000 USD. The factors having a more positive influence on attendance included: to see the sport itself, to see a star rider, to see a favorite rider, and to entertain family. Having less affect on attendance

include the factors “the price to attend the event,” “promotion and advertising,” and “to entertain clients.” Ninety percent (90%) of the survey respondents reported that they attended with family, while less than two percent (-2%) reported that they attended for business purposes. In spending, 72% of the respondents reported that they spent nearly \$250.00 to attend the event. (Full findings will be presented.)

Discussion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the typical spectator is a young, white male. However, in yearly studies, the number of females comprise an average of 37% of spectators. Therefore, the sport is growing in popularity among females; more promotion and marketing to females could perhaps positively affect the female spectator base.

Further, it can be concluded that the sport at this point in its growth is attractive more for its pure entertainment value than as an event for entertaining business clients. More could be done with facilities and marketing to build the sport toward this market.

Sport marketing professionals and other stakeholders in the extreme sport industry and specifically those in the Supercross sport would most likely benefit from this information. In addition, faculty and students of sport management can benefit from research into non-traditional sports, especially those in which there appear to be a growing job market.

Sport management faculty can be relating this information in the classroom and students can learn about one more sport in the vast sport business industry.

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