

Spectator demand for women's football in Germany

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Aim of paper and research questions

In Germany, women's football has undergone an enormous surge in popularity. Today, women's national team matches are covered by television and draw huge crowds as a result of constant international success. We wanted to examine whether this change from marginalized women's sport to crowd drawer is also evident throughout league football. High consumer interest in women's league competitions would signal a sustainable development in this sport. Firstly, studying attendance numbers at Bundesliga matches, the first division in women's football, can indicate how women's football teams are able to attract their audience week by week. Secondly, a qualitative breakdown provides more information about consumer attitudes towards women's football as well as consumer behaviour. On a practical level, the results can guide the clubs' future marketing activities.

In this paper, two research questions are mainly focussed: Is there an increase in spectator demand for women's league football in general or does it depend on the clubs' performance? And does the social profile of women's football consumers reflect a shift from women's football as a sport with small female fan base to a broadly based accepted team sport?

Literature review

Although there is now a great deal of work on women in sport, there is still not much on women's team sports. Hong & Mangan (2003) presented one of the first international comparisons of women's football from a sociological perspective. Amongst others, Klein (2009) looked at how women's football is marketed in Germany.

Research on spectator demands in team sports is still in its infancy. Such studies for women's team sports are often restricted to intercollegiate sport (Shackelford & Greenwell, 2005), which makes international comparisons difficult. Funk, Ridinger and Moorman's (2003) study provides a new stepping stone by extending the sport interest inventory questions to include gender politics as attendance motivation. Sociological studies tend to examine the socio-demographic profile of spectators, such as Zhang et al.'s (2003) empirical study of professional basketball teams' spectators.

Roy (2004) established four useful prime determinants in consumer demand in professional (men's) team sport. Briefly, these are the socio-cultural significance of the respective sport, the socio-demographic profile of the consumers, micro-economic factors and how the event is packaged.

Research design and data analysis

Data was collected in two ways. Firstly, we collated attendance statistics from Bundesliga clubs from 1999–2008. Secondly, in 2007, a questionnaire (described in Mintert & Klein, 2007) was distributed in all twelve clubs of the women's Bundesliga, at two home games respectively. The total sample comprised 2680 respondents.

Extending Roy's work, the questionnaire examines the following main factors influencing spectator demand in women's football. These are the socio-demographic characteristics of the

spectators, like sex, age, education, income, sports biography. On a micro-economic level we looked at the impact of factors like entrance fee structures, travel time and costs. Furthermore, other alternatives to attending a women's match were taken into consideration. We also developed a battery of questions regarding the packaging of the event, like stadium comfort, catering facilities and merchandising products. The data were analysed using explorative and descriptive methods (means, chi-square) as well as inference statistics.

Results

Our quantitative research has shown that the number of those attending women's football league competitions has definitely risen over the last few years. But, attendance depends obviously on the club's brand. The better the club is positioned in the table and the more national players who are involved in the team, the more spectators can be attracted. That means, on the other hand, most of the Bundesliga clubs suffer from weak demand. Briefly, the qualitative results indicate that spectators come from a broad social recruitment base far exceeding the personal social network of each player, as was previously the case. Male spectators outnumber females by about 3:2, whereby the female proportion is statistically significantly younger. Finally, spectators maintain that they attend the match to watch good football rather than to watch women on the sports field.

Discussion and conclusion

Although there is definitely an arousing interest in women's football matches, spectator demand is still an unstable phenomenon on the level of league football. This result provokes more strategic marketing action of the clubs to raise public interest in the women's football Bundesliga. Here, today, the clubs have to take into account that consumer attitudes towards women's football and consumer support are mainly influenced by a positive bias to football in general and to the specific event atmosphere (see Roy, 2004) than by gender politics motivation (see Funk et al., 2003).

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