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Segmenting NBA's Chinese viewers based on their searched experiences

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Research question

What do Chinese viewers look for when watching NBA games?

Background

For Gantz and Wenner (1995), the audience for sports should not be considered as a monolithic mass and there is then a stake for sport managers to identify these characteristics and determine how viewers can be segmented. According to Stewart et al. (2003), live and mediated sport audiences have been studied according to three main perspectives but multidimensional models, which combine a set of relevant attitudinal and behavioral variables, allow to size the complexity of human behaviors. In this perspective, Bourgeon and Bouchet (2001) further extended Holt's (1995) framework which dealt with sport consumption experiences, and identified four sport spectator types. *Aesthete* spectators look for beautiful display, athletes' achievement and drama. *Supporter* spectators are active and partisan and look for their favourite team's victory. *Interactive* spectators consume for collective emotions and interactions and, *opportunistic* spectators are utilitarian and expect personal rewards for being associated with a sporting event.

Methods

In order to better understand mediated sport viewers, we focused on the case of NBA's Chinese viewers because numerous leagues and clubs (e.g., NBA, UEFA Champions League, Manchester United) increasingly target the Chinese market because of its size, because Chinese people tend to be highly passionate about sport in general and are super-consumers of merchandising and medias (Desbordes, 2007). The questionnaire comprised an adapted version of the SEES scale (26 items) developed and validated by Bouchet et al. (2010), along with socio-demographic and behavioral variables. It was administrated to TV and Internet Chinese viewers of NBA games by research assistants in two shopping centers in the city of Beijing in order to obtain capture the heterogeneity of this sport spectator population, in the last week of March and the first week of April 2009. We did not adopt a snowball email strategy or a strategy using sport fans forums of discussion, as we did not want to focus only on die-hard fans and wanted to avoid surveying individuals from the same fan community. 298 questionnaires were administrated and 236 were useful.

Results

The SEES scale was validated using a factor analysis and 12 items were kept representing 64% of the overall variance. An ascendant hierarchical analysis based on Ward's procedure was first conducted and a K-means method of classification was then conducted. Finally, 4 segments were identified: segment 1 gathered 55 individuals with high scores on all dimensions; segment 2 gathered 85 individuals with a high score on the aesthete dimension, an average score on the supporter and interactive dimensions, and a low score on the opportunist dimension; segment 3 gathered 28 individuals with low scores on all dimensions; segment 4 gathered 110 individuals with high scores on all dimensions except for the opportunist one.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to segment NBA's Chinese viewers according to the experiences they look for. The results first showed that few individuals were considered as opportunist (segment 1), which means that few Chinese viewers see these viewing experiences as an opportunity to get utilitarian benefits. Therefore, most of them watch NBA games for experiential purposes, and simultaneously look for a beautiful show, the victory of the team they support and emotional interactions with others. It can be noted that some of them (85) were primarily orientated towards aesthetic features which highlights the fact that sport managers should not only focus on the supporter dimension in relation to particular teams (e.g., Houston Rockets) or players (e.g., Yao Ming). This result corroborate the findings of Bodet & Chanavat (2010) who found that having Chinese players in European soccer teams was not sufficient to appeal to Chinese fans. Moreover, managers should also try to focus on the interactive dimension which is a real challenge for mediated spectators.

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