
MOTIVES OF FOOTBALL STADIUM VISITORS AND CONSEQUENCES FOR SERVICE DESIRES IN STADIUMS: A LADDERING APPROACH

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Abstract

AIM OF PAPER/RESEARCH QUESTION

Different types of spectators have varying motivations for watching a sport event, and are somewhere between indifferent and highly committed to the sport or a team (Trail et al. 2003). When all these types of spectators come together at a stadium, it can be difficult for sport clubs to meet their broad range of needs. The goal of this study is thus to identify the specific services a stadium provider can offer in response to spectators' varying motives. We also aim to address the personal values of different groups of spectators.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Sport spectators' motives are the main drivers of their social and psychological needs. Watching a game live offers a good opportunity for spectators to meet these needs (Trail et al. 2003). To adjust its service offer, a football stadium operator should thus be aware of the motives of stadium visitors. However, sport spectators are not a homogenous group. They have different motivations, and this may result in a wide range of behaviors that need to be classified. (Hunt et al. 1999). Stadium operators can offer several services to satisfy the needs of different groups of spectators. These services can include different seat categories, catering and much more. According to segmentation theory, every type of customer should be activated separately (Smith 1956). Focusing on customer motives and personal values may yield satisfying results for service providers (Wedel & Kamakura 2000). For this reason, it is important to find out which services spectator groups expect to have in the football stadium and how these are related to their motivations and values.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

To answer our research question, we employed a qualitative research approach. Ten semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with spectators from every part of a football stadium (seat on the straight, standing area, and no preference) to ensure the heterogeneity of the sample. The interviews (mean duration: 27 min) were based on soft-laddering theory to reveal the link between a single service desire, the motive associated with it and the personal value behind it. Participants were repetitively asked to indicate how important a specific service at the stadium was to them, the motive associated with it, and finally, the deeply-rooted value (Reynolds 1988). Two researchers independently conducted content analysis and inter-coder disagreements were resolved by consensus.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our results show that spectators in a football stadium have different motives for watching a game live. Here, the results are in line with the findings of Trail et al. (2003). Additionally, our results reveal that specific services meet certain needs, which are in turn connected to personal values. Furthermore, we can identify three groups of spectators with different patterns of service desires, motives and values. We reveal a gap in needs between people who choose the curve of the stadium (group 1), those who choose a seat on the straight (group 2) and those who have no preference regarding the seating (group 3). For group 1, having the opportunity to stand during the game is the most important service a stadium can provide, because their main goal is to support their team and to distinguish themselves from other spectators. They have a sense of belonging to their reference group and a strong sense of togetherness. This group of spectators is less interested in catering services and merchandising offers.

Group 2 prefers watching the game from a good position. For this group, seating is crucially important because they have paid more for their seats and want to analyze the game. Also, this group of spectators attaches importance to catering in the stadium and to having a good quality seat. Some of them could imagine buying a VIP ticket. Their need to have security staff in and around the stadium is also very distinctive. For this group, feeling safe is very important.

For group 3, being part of the event and feeling the atmosphere in contrast to watching a game on television are the main motives for visiting a stadium.

Our results show that stadium operators must serve heterogeneous customer desires. These are linked to motives and values and are therefore deeply rooted in the customers' personality structures.

Achieving better capacity utilization in all areas of the stadium is decisive for stadium operators. Fulfilling the needs of various spectator groups may be crucial to achieving this goal.

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