
TESTING A STRUCTURAL MODEL OF CONSTRAINTS NEGOTIATION IN PROFESSIONAL SPORT

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

Aim of the paper and literature review

Spectator sport is a major part of the sport industry in the United States, worth \$33.1 billion (Plunkett, 2013). Gate revenue remains the largest single segment at \$19.1 billion, and is expecting a modest 3.9% annual growth (van Riper, 2013). However, professional sport organizations are facing challenges such as increasing costs and falling attendance (Howard & Crompton, 2004). For example, baseball is popular globally and undoubtedly the most popular spectator sport in Taiwan. Nonetheless, a rapid decline in attendance occurred from an average of 5,488 spectators per game in 1995 down to 1,676 in 2000. Subsequently, the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) experienced fluctuations in game attendance until 2013. Teams responded to the economic fallout by freezing prices (van Riper, 2013). Thus, it would be helpful for sport managers to understand consumers' decision processes of attending professional sport events. In the sport management literature, a number of studies have examined constraints (e.g., Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008), or constraints in conjunction with motives (Kim & Trail, 2010), to spectator attendance, but limited attention has been devoted to the constraints negotiation process (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993). Despite the considerable research on constraints that has accumulated in the sport management field, a conceptual model to guide constraint negotiation research is still lacking. Furthermore, no research to date has examined constraints together with constraint negotiation, motivation, and participation, key variables in the constraint negotiation research (White, 2008). The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the relationships among event motivation, event constraints, event negotiation, and event participation.

Methodology

The survey was conducted to collect data from spectators attending CPBL games during the regular season in September, 2014. The questionnaire included four scales plus demographic items. Respondents were measured on five-point Likert scales with 9 items for motivations (Funk et al., 2001), 12 for constraints (Raymore et al., 1993), 5 for negotiation (Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007), and 3 for participation (Hsu, 2008; Mullin, 2007). Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling. The total number of respondents approached was N=400, from whom n= 372 valid responses were obtained. The demographic profile of respondents indicated that 60.2% were male and 39.8 were female, they were predominantly aged 20-29 years (47.0%), followed by 30-39 (29.6%), under 20 (11.6%), and above 40 (11.8%), while the majority were employed (49.5%) and students (25.3%). The average number of years supporting the team was 9.4 and the average frequency of watching on-site games was 11.1 times.

Results/ Discussion/Implications

The factor loadings for each item were statistically significant (5.0 to 0.95), indicating convergent validity. The values for composite reliability (CR) were above .70, and values for average variance extracted (AVE) were above .50. Therefore, each latent construct of the measurement model was acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The data showed a good fit to the model ($\chi^2=510.84$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 1.42$; RMSEA = 0.03; NFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.99). Examination of path coefficients showed that event motivation ($\beta=.40$) and event negotiation ($\beta=-.13$) had significant influences on event participation. Furthermore, event motivation ($\beta=.17$) had a significant influence on event negotiation. The result of the Sobel t-test ($t= 2.07$) indicated that event negotiation mediated the relationship between event motivation and participation. The results partly support Hubbard and Mannell's (2001) model where negotiation mediates the motivation-participation relationships, but do not support the constraint-participation relationship. Specifically, constraints ($M= 2.64$) did not trigger the use of negotiation strategies by the CPBL spectators. Attendees were those who perceived fewer constraints, and repeat customers. Motivation exerts an influence as an immediate antecedent encouraging participation. From a practical standpoint, the CPBL spectators are mainly motivated by 'interest in sport and excitement', 'fan (interest in players, and vicarious achievement)', and 'bonding with friends'. The findings provide important implications for professional baseball team managers interested in developing marketing strategies. To know and attract potential customers is an imperative step to ease the fluctuations in and increase attendance. In contrast to most of the current repeat customers, potential customers possibly perceive more constraints while also being less motivated. Thus, understanding their constraints and offering wider motivators (e.g., discount for group tickets, giveaways during the game, etc.) could encourage the use of negotiation efforts for participation. Future research should examine potential customers to fully understand the constraints negotiation model within the sport management field. (Note: This research was, in part, supported by The Aim for the Top University Project to the National Cheng Kung University)

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