

Customer engagement platforms towards a better understanding through customer roles in sport events

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Aim of abstract

The concept of customer engagement (CE) has recently gained broad attention from both practitioners and academics across several contexts. Several studies investigated the construct and measurement of CE (e.g. Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Due to unique aspects such as value co-creation in the context of sport, CE construct and scales cannot be properly adapted. Moreover, the few studies specifically analysing fan engagement (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014) are limited to a particular sub group of customers.

In general, customers take in different generic roles such as user, selector and payer (Sheth, 2002). This also applies to sport event customers. In the sport context, sport events can be characterized as platforms (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014) where cluster organizations engage in sport clusters (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2015) and customers engage as fans, VIP guests in lounges, advertising companies as well as brand communities. Therefore, this paper focuses on the customer perspective of sport events as engagement platforms. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature on CE and peculiarities of a sport context, we develop a comprehensive overview about the discussion of customer and fan engagement. Furthermore, we derive specific customer roles based on a generic customer role classification to get a better understanding of sport events as customer engagement platform.

Theoretical background

Lacking a consistent definition of CE, academics agree that CE goes beyond purchase and incorporates different levels of customer's interactions with a brand or firm's offering or activities. In the sports context, CE is considered to be particularly important, as it influences the atmosphere in the stadium and ensures income from ticketing, media-rights, merchandising and advertising with sports. Hence, fans and customers are an essential part of co-creating value before, during and after a sport event. As a consequence, sport organization can reach their profit and non-profit goals by fans' and customers' engagement.

Despite the wide agreement upon the benefits of CE, the discussion about the constructs' conceptualization and measurement (e.g. dimensionality, antecedents and consequences (Hollebeek et al., 2014)) is still ongoing and missing a consensus. Even though Yoshida et al. (2014) developed an innovative multidimensional construct of CE, there are certain shortcomings despite many advantages. Most of all, Yoshida et al. (2014) and all existing CE scales and concepts do not consider multiple social actors, but rather focus

on the customer. But, understanding sport events as customer engagement platform requires a multi-social actor approach. Therefore, generic customer roles (Sheth, 2002) help to define specific customer roles on customer engagement platforms.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Not all customer roles are officially documented. Anyhow, the customer as payer has to be documented in the bookkeeping of sport organizations. That is why, financial income can be used as a starting point to discover more hidden customer roles. We analyse financial statistics to derive most important income sources of sport events to make sure that all kinds of customers as payers are captured. We propose a two-dimensional framework consisting of eight generic customer roles as payer, user and selector and as well as main different revenue models of sport events (ticketing, media-rights, sponsoring, transfers, merchandising and others). To further develop this framework, we carried out a repertory grid with experts and customers of sport organizations. Customers were asked for what they paid for, why and how they wanted to engage in sport events and how they selected them. Experts were asked about their perspective of customer behaviour. Independent researchers built categories of specific customer roles in sport events. Reliability was checked using Perrault-Leigh index.

Results, discussion, and implications

Based on our theoretical and empirical findings, we derive a comprehensive typology of specific customer roles on sport events as customer engagement platforms as well as detailed descriptions how sport customers co-create value before, during and after a sport event. As a consequence, we provide a fundament of theorizing sport events as customer engagement platforms. By using the proposed typology, researchers can deeper analyse interactions of sport event customers. Furthermore, by better understanding sport events as a customer engagement platform, managers are able to derive strategies, strengthening their relationship with customers as well as customer to customer relationships. Hence, this framework delivers a starting point for future empirical research about co-created value in sport.

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