

Image effects through junior sports – the UEFA U19 case

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Introduction and research question

Our overall research effort is to examine the impact of national junior football teams, their matches and events on the image of their sports association. This specific research paper focuses on the question whether the UEFA Under 19 European Football Championship (2016) in Germany influences the public perception of the German Football Association (DFB) – initially assuming and then to be tested that (as the event takes place in a province of Germany and the DFB runs the campaigns preceding the event) spectators convey at least some share of a potential image effect to the national association and not or not only to the UEFA or the match cities. Finally, if there is a positive image transfer at all, an additional question comes up: Do junior tournaments provide opportunities to address specific target groups of spectators, e.g. “teenagers” (main spectator group) or fans in the “periphery” (defined as provincial towns that have no proximity to a major soccer club and that will never have the opportunity to host a senior tournament of national teams).

Theoretical background

In sports economics, a number of studies have been conducted on the image transfer of (mainly mega-) sports events on sponsors, sports associations and teams (Gwinner/Eaton 1999; Nufer, 2006), recently also small events have become a research focus (e.g. Koo, 2014). However, hardly any study addresses young athletes, junior teams and tournaments. The presented research examines the impact of a sports event on image and brand of the organising sports association. To do that the presented research follows Nufer’s S-O-R based Image Transfer Model of Event Marketing (Nufer, 2011), as it is simple (reflecting the explorative character of the study) and as its necessary condition for image transfer contains the unconditioned stimuli triggered by the event, which might explain the potentially different amplitude of image effects in the target segments mentioned above. The assumption is that the two defined target segments will especially experience more intensive affective stimuli leading to a higher positive image transfer.

Methodology

The (yet) rather explorative and descriptive research approach builds on surveys before and after the UEFA Under 19 European Football Championship. The first image values (pre-test) were assessed at the Confed Cup in October 2015 (State of Baden-Württemberg), the basic image values were surveyed in Mai 2016 to be compared with the results of the upcoming surveys during and after the UEFA Under 19 European Football Championship in July and August 2016, followed by a legacy-

survey end of 2016. As the tournament only takes place in Baden-Württemberg, control group results are collected in other German states to isolate the specific event effects from overall image trends due to e. g. DFB or FIFA scandals and, of course, the “senior” UEFA Euro 2016 in France.. The required sample size per target segment per survey location and date (confidence level of 95 %) is about 50 – derived from the standard deviation of the pre-test results. Given the sequence of a basic image value survey, an event image value and a legacy image value survey as well as the aim to distinguish the target segments mentioned above and the necessity to provide control group results the overall sample size is 1200.

The evaluation of the collected data aims to show frequency distributions in the different image aspects, an overall image score as well as the comparison of times of measurement and of segments. The current project phase allows the presentation of the (short term) event impact, whereas the legacy survey only takes place later this year.

Results and implications

The delta image value of the pre-test already showed the positive event impact (image value improvements in a range from 0.6 to 1.2), but could not (yet) support our target segment specific hypotheses. The findings will have valuable implications for youth sports. When organizing junior championships, such as the UEFA Under 19 European Football Championship or the Youth Olympic Games, there is limited opportunity to actually make them profitable given their rather low market value (e. g. for ticketing or TV-broadcasting). Identifying and measuring their positive influence on the image of a sports association would provide the respective junior departments within these sports associations with additional power in addition to the lonesome argument to grow young athletes.

References

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