

# Attendance And Drop-Out Determinants Of Active Football Fans In Germany

**Kurscheidt, Markus**

University of Bayreuth, Germany

E-mail: markus.kurscheidt@uni-bayreuth.de

## **Aim of the research**

The Bundesliga is the football league with the worldwide largest stadium attendance since more than a decade (<http://www.worldfootball.net>). This is typically explained by modern stadia built for the FIFA World Cup 2006 and a fan-friendly governance approach. However, after dynamic growth in the 2000s, attendance stagnates around an average of 42,500 spectators in recent seasons (<http://www.kicker.de>). Supporters increasingly doubt the fan-friendliness of the league's governance and criticise "overcommercialisation". For instance, the popular fan magazine 11FREUNDE lately featured formerly passionate fans explaining why they dropped out of active fandom (<http://www.11freunde.de>). Therefore the research question on the risk of drop out and the drivers of attendance of active football fans in Germany arises. Losing this target group that co-creates value for the matchday product by chanting and cheering for the team (Stieler, Weismann, & Germelmann, 2014) may sensibly damage the overall product of the Bundesliga.

## **Theoretical background**

The large body of literature on stadium demand analyses aggregated figures on matchday attendance which are regressed on diverse direct and indirect quality characteristics of the sport event product (Villar & Guerrero, 2009). It is only lately that studies try to explore disaggregated micro data on defined consumer groups, like season ticket holders (Schreyer, Schmidt, & Torgler, 2016). The present paper follows this idea of analysing segments of attendance demand by focusing on active football fans referring to supporters' categories and behavior discussed in the sport sociological literature (García & Welford, 2015). In sports economics, rather the negative impact of illicit behaviour of active fan groups (i.e., hooliganism) on aggregate measures for demand and revenues has been analysed so far (e.g., Jewell, Simmons, & Szymanski, 2014). Therefore, this paper has to refer to the modelling of studies outside the sport-related literature that links individual attitudes and characteristics to the purchase intention of consumers (e.g., Kos Koklic & Vida, 2016).

## **Methodology**

The attendance and drop-out decision of active fans is tested on data of a large online survey of committed fans in Germany (N = 1,021 with N = 682 finishers, i.e., 66.8% response rate). In late summer 2014, a questionnaire on fan identification, reported attendance, attitudes towards the league and club governance, behavioural intentions and sociodemographics was placed in more than 30 national and club internet fora. The data represent a clustered convenience sample which sufficiently captures active fan groups while covering also control groups committed less to football fandom. (Ordered) Logit regressions are run on the construct of a 5-point (inverted) purchase scale on the question whether the respondents "think about attending less matches" in the stadium, considering a set of more than 50 explanatory variables and model variants.

## **Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

Although 55% of respondents in the sample dislike commercialisation, only less than 20% intend to change their behaviour or even drop out. 10% consider attending lower division football, 20% say that their fan loyalty suffered and 27% think about attending less. In addition, 65% criticize the club governance. The regression analysis finds that, all else equal, firm loyalty to the team and preferences for stadium comfort, quality of play, modern sponsorship, TV oriented match schedules and ticket price acceptance significantly explain retention of attending behaviour. While club members tend to stay loyal, season ticket holders, away supporters, *Ultras* and younger fans (convexly curved in age) are significantly more likely to attend less. Thus, there is indeed evidence that the group of particularly active young supporters who contribute to the stadium ambiance might drop out sooner or later whereas more customer-type fans are not bothered with the commercialised league governance and keep attending on the same level.

20% of potential attendance drop out may or may not be seen as a risk for stadium demand and ambiance. However, this would mean a loss of 8,500 spectators on average resulting in a setback of attendance on the level of the Premier League. Definitely, a substantial discomfort of fans with the current league and club governance is observable. Thus, further commercialisation and modernisation of German pro football should be treated with care by governing officials. Worrying is that attractive target groups, like season ticket holders and dedicated young supporters, seem to lose their passion and might reduce attendance. So

there is a risk of displacement of active supporters by less committed customer-type fans (García & Welford, 2015) which might result in more pronounced “gentrification” (Jewell et al., 2014) of stadium spectators as in English football.

## References

- García, B., & Welford, J. (2015). Supporters and football governance, from customers to stakeholders: A literature review and agenda for research. *Sport Management Review, 18*, 517–528.
- Kos Koklic, M., & Vida, I. (2016). Interplay of the drivers and deterrents of leisure counterfeit purchase intentions. *Journal of Business Economics and Management, 17*, 916–929.
- Schreyer, D., Schmidt, S. L., & Torgler, B. (2016). Against all odds? Exploring the role of game outcome uncertainty in season ticket holders’ stadium attendance demand. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 56*, 192–217.
- Stieler, M., Weismann, F., & Germelmann, C. C. (2014). Co-destruction of value by spectators: The case of silent protests. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 14*, 72–86.
- Villar, J. G., & Guerrero, P. R. (2009). Sports attendance: A survey of the literature 1973–2007. *Rivista di Diritto ed Economia dello Sport, 5*, 112–151.