

Together is Better – The Influence of Accompanying Persons Along a Sporting Event on Preferences and Willingness to Pay

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Aim

Various scholars have highlighted the influence of accompanying persons on value indicators of sport spectators, like customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth (Koenig-Lewis, Asaad, & Palmer, 2017). However, research on preferences and willingness to pay (WTP) in sport management solely focus on quantities and qualities of goods (Kaiser, Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2017), although such a context can influence value co-creation (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). Here, we are especially interested in the influence of accompanying persons to spectators' preferences, because spectators' preferences present spectators' value capture in the value co-creation process. Lack of context in an analysis can lead to biased predictions (Swait et al., 2002). Therefore, we examine spectators' preferences and WTP in two different sports by focusing on the importance of accompanying persons along the sport event as well as ticket features like opposing team, seat category and price (Kaiser et al., 2017).

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Sport value framework indicates, “sport customers co-create value primarily by integrating resources from their social groups” (Woratschek et al., 2014, p. 17). Hence, value depends on the context defined as a set of unique actors with unique reciprocal links among them (Chandler & Vargo, 2011, p. 40). This fits to latest research findings that other spectators can influence perceived value of an event (Horbel, Popp, Woratschek, & Wilson, 2016). Therefore, preference and WTP measurement, besides product characteristics, should also include the influence of context. Therefore, we extend preference measurement to context variables, like other spectators. The focus of our study is on the expected value captured by an actor at the time of a ticket purchase decision. Therefore, we operationalize value capture as the overall utility of an actor, not only dependent of product characteristics, but also on the context in the sense of reciprocal links, not controlled by the provider. By doing this, we are able to better understand consumer responses to sport event ticket pricing.

Methodology and Research Design

In this study, we adapt the research design of Kaiser et al. (2017) and apply adaptive choice-based conjoint analysis (ACBC) with summed pricing. Based on Swait et al. (2002), we add “accompanying persons” as a context variable in the preference function. Therefore, our survey focused on the attributes “seat category”, “opposing team”, “accompanying persons”, and “price”. In order to identify the relevant levels of each attribute, we conducted qualitative prestudies at both, a German first division basketball club and a German second division football club. ACBC was applied in the quantitative main study. Data collection took place on four home games of each club. Within each study, a target quota was designed based on gender and age. In total, 379 interviews in basketball and 378 interviews in football could be used for further analysis. In order to identify heterogeneous groups with homogeneous preference structures we apply Sawtooth's convergent cluster and ensemble analysis.

Results and Discussion

We notice that the influence on ticket preferences of accompanying persons is as important as the influence of opposing teams. Therefore, accompanying persons have a relevant impact on preferences. Due to heterogeneity of spectators, we applied convergent cluster and ensemble analysis. Hence, we identified four clusters in both studies: (1) seat-quality-oriented spectators, (2) price-sensitive spectators, (3) price-performance-oriented spectators and (4) top-game-oriented spectators. Accompanying persons have a relevant influence in all spectator clusters. In particular, a visit alone has the least utility for spectators, whereas visits with different quantity of accompanying persons have much higher utilities. These result in an additional WTP of price-performance oriented spectators of up to €9.97 / €15.30 when visiting an event within a group compared to a visit alone. In general, preferences are increasing with the number of accompanying persons. However, what kind of accompanying persons plays also a role (spouse, family members, friends, colleagues).

Conclusion and Implications

Rather exploratory in nature, this study filled a perceived void in the literature by empirically investigating the role of accompanying persons in preference analysis and studies about WTP for tickets. This study focused on the relevance of accompaniers for spectators at sport events. The results of the empirical analysis clearly reveal that there is a noticeable influence of interaction between spectators on preferences and WTP. Hence, the results indicate that besides offerings of sport organizations, other actors, in particular accompanying persons, also influences value co-creation during a sport event. Therefore, managers should more focus on opportunities of social experiences than on game related aspects in their marketing campaigns.

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