



Attendance and the Sports Merchandise Preferences of Fans – the case of Hungary

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Abstract: This study examines product preferences in one of the most profitable areas of the market for sports: sports merchandising. Sports merchandising refers to the adaptation of corporate design elements such logos and other emblems of sports club on products for the purpose of communicating positive attitudes and feelings towards fans. The aim of this paper is to identify the features that support on-site consumer willingness to purchase sports team-licensed merchandise, and furthermore to explore consumption preferences in the Hungarian market from a sports marketing perspective. Results of the online research indicate that on-site purchases depend on ticket prices for events, and that it is mainly football fans who buy sports-related products, preferring jerseys. The first part of the research described in this paper deals with the sports market and its relation to merchandise; the second section delineates the research findings and their limits. As a managerial conclusion, the price sensitivity of supporters can be highlighted as an important factor in attendance-related-decision-making processes. However, sports team-licensed merchandise can include any kinds of products and services, although the marketing of jerseys and scarves should be emphasised, especially for football supporters.

Keywords: Sports marketing, sport team-licensed merchandise, on-site fans

1 Introduction

Sports merchandising is one of the most prosperous fields of sports marketing. In 2015 the income of the sports market reached 20.07 billion US dollars (Statista, 2016) in spite of the fact that revenue from the black market in this area is also significant. Merchandising not only serves the business goals of organizations but also has a positive impact on the relationship between the audience and sportspeople because it increases their personal involvement in sports.

The aim of this study is to examine the consumption of sports merchandise in relation to on-site support through investigating consumer behavior. In this context, the paper highlights the interaction between on-the-spot fan support and willingness to buy sports-team merchandise. In addition to this, the research described in this paper explores supporters' preferences for fan-related products.

2 Literature review

Sports marketing refers to the identification and satisfaction of sports consumers' needs and wants (Mullin, 2014). Sports marketing should focus on fans, who provide significant returns (Liu, 2011); accordingly, this research focuses on fan-related activities and preferences.

The magnitude of sports-related consumption depends on the event and on economic factors (Zhang et al. 2003). Due to this fact the main external hindering factor is ticket price, although weather and travelling distance to the event may also have an influence (Kim-Trail, 2010). The cost of supporting sports performers are important in the attendance-related decision making process (Karakaya et al. 2016).

H1: The buying decisions and on-site attendance (vs. off-site/home viewing) of supporters are affected by the ticket price, weather conditions, the travelling distance to the event, the team's current success, the existence of star players, the atmosphere of the facility, staff readiness and match.

Sports merchandising refers to the conveyance of a message from the sports brand (athletes, clubs) image to products. Novel marketing models which place services and customers in a central position (service-dominant logic) can explain customer attendance and consumer involvement (Kelemen-Erdős, 2014).

Supporters can express their identity and membership through merchandise (Crawford, 2004). In accordance with fact that supporters are willing to buy sports merchandise, especially on-site fans, the following hypotheses are defined.

H2: Fans are willing to buy their favorite teams' sports merchandise with team emblems.

H3: Supporters who attend games are more willing to buy sports merchandise.

From the rights holder's point of view, such merchandising fosters the acceptance of new products and shortens the period required for their introduction. For rights holders, especially club owners, license and franchise agreements increase global market penetration, especially in case of football. (Beech-Chadwick, 2007, Kassay-Géczi, 2016). To that fact the following hypothesis refers:

H4: Football fans are more willing to purchase sports merchandise than other fans.

This piece of research describes the results of an analysis of market opportunities for sports marketing and management with an emphasis on sports merchandising and consumer preferences.

3 Research method and sample

Based on secondary research the empirical investigation explores the characteristics of the consumer behavior of fans concerning sports-related consumption on the Hungarian sports market.

Quantitative research was carried out within the framework of online questionnaires. The target population of the survey consisted of youth from age 18-29 who were deemed to be open to supporting sports and willing to purchase sports team-licensed merchandise. However, the relevance of the fact that respondents belong to the 'y' generation (i.e. were born between 1980-1999) is noted. This demographic group is characterised by lower levels of personal contact, so sporting events can act to bring them together is potentially elevated (Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, 2016).

During the course of data collection, non-probability quota sampling techniques were applied, taking into account the demographic distribution according to census data from 2015 (KSH, 2015). Based on the census gender distribution (women 52.4 per cent; men 47.6 per cent), the latter responses were filtered out, so the surveyed sample comprised 52.6 per cent (i.e. 90) women and 47.4 per cent (81) men: accordingly, the data refer to 171 respondents.

Because of the sampling method and limited sample size this research is not representative, but the findings may justify further investigation.

4 Results

Preliminary analysis of the sample indicates the limitations of the research. The database does not permit complex statistical analyses, although attempts were made. Data were evaluated using the SPSS Statistics 19 software package.

In the context of H1, the key explanatory variables were examined, including the ticket price, the travelling distance, weather conditions, match experience, or rather the atmosphere of the facility, staff readiness, and the team's success and the presence of star players. Multicollinearity of variables was monitored by application of multivariate linear regression analysis during which the reference value of five (VIF > 5) was exceeded by match experience and facility atmosphere, which were thus excluded. The remaining valid values are depicted in Table 1. Findings of

greater than two indicate strong multicollinearity (e.g. ticket price and travelling distance) and thus should be treated with caution. The explanatory value (adjusted R²) of the model is 0.693.

Model	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T-test	α	Collinearity	
	B	Standard error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.789	.034		53.210	.000		
Ticket price	-.038	.017	-.162	-2.284	.024	.357	2.798
Travelling distance	-.078	.015	-.355	-5.148	.000	.381	2.627
Staff readiness	-.083	.016	-.301	-5.305	.000	.560	1.787
Team's current success	-.046	.017	-.167	-2.780	.006	.501	1.997

Dependent variable: Visiting sport events

Table 1.
Multivariate linear regression model coefficients
Source: Author's own construction

Significant T-test findings ($p < 0.05$) indicate the suitability of the model factors. The model indicates that support on the sports field is affected by ticket price, although not significantly. The results of the survey also indicate that travelling distance is an important factor, so holding matches in more locations, thereby increasing travelling convenience, may impact sales.

H2 addresses whether fans are willing to buy their favorite teams' sports merchandise with team trademarks and/or logos. 60.2 per cent of respondents (103 people) have already bought one or more of their favorite team products (principally jerseys and scarves), so the second hypotheses is supported (Fekete, 2015).

H3 is related to consumer choice factors and the proposition that on-site fans are more likely to buy merchandise. Of considerable importance in this purchasing decision is the visibility of the purchased item to others: sports merchandise typically fosters personality identification or contributes to the individual's desire, through signaling, to belong to a group.

To examine the relationship between two variables, cross-tabulation analysis was performed (Table 2). Because of the low cell frequency (Malhotra–Simon, 2009) the analysis was not worth supplementing with further factors.

A Pearson's chi-square test indicates a significant relationship between the variables ($\chi^2 (1) = 37.715$, $p < 0.05$). Based on Cramer's association coefficient, the association is moderately strong ($V = 0.470$). Accordingly, there exists a relationship between on-site support and the purchase of sports-related products, so the third hypothesis should not be rejected.

	Fans have merchandise		All
	Yes	No	
On-site support			
Yes	96	36	132
No	7	32	39
All	103	68	171

Table 2.

Relationship between on-site support and purchases of sports merchandise

Source: Author's own construction, N=171

H4, which refers to the correlation between football fans and the frequency of purchase of sports merchandise, was also examined using cross-tabulation. Table 3. displays the findings.

The results indicate that football fans are more likely to buy sports-team merchandise ($\chi^2 (1) = 26.138, p < 0.05; V = 0.391$) than other sports fans, even if this relationship is relatively weak.

	Fans own merchandise		All
	Yes	No	
Football fan			
Yes	45	5	50
No	58	63	121
All	103	68	171

Table 3.

Correlation between football fans and owning merchandise

Source: Author's own construction, N=171

5 Conclusions

The market for sports merchandise is significant and demand is affected by consumption; especially important is the visibility of products to outside observers. Consumption characteristics are dependent on the supporting venue. In the case of on-site fans, consumption is influenced by the ticket price, the service experience of the fans, team success, and staff readiness. On-site football fans are more willing to buy sports merchandise than other fans, probably because their emotional involvement is higher. In spite of the diversity of sports-team licensed merchandise, customers are willing to buy sports jerseys, and sometimes scarves.

One managerial implication is that supporters are price sensitive about the decision to attend sports events so ticket prices should be defined with caution. Merchandise companies should emphasize the design and sale of jerseys and scarves to fans who attend matches, especially in the case of football supporters.

It would be worthwhile carrying out comprehensive research to analyze the additional determinants of willingness to purchase sports merchandise. In addition, further research that explores attitudes and consumer satisfaction variables would contribute to the establishment of a better-targeted market strategy.

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