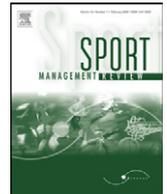


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Sport event innovativeness: Conceptualization, measurement, and its impact on consumer behavior

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ABSTRACT

Although scholars have had a long-standing interest in product innovation based on technological development, limited attention has been devoted to the study of the innovation of sport event experiences. Two quantitative studies, from the consumer's perspective, were completed to validate the proposed conceptualization of sport event innovativeness composed of six dimensions (player performance, respectful access, self-service technology, aesthetic environment, fan community, and loyalty program), and to examine the hypothesized relationships impacting consumer behavior. Including the dimensions of player performance, fan community, and loyalty program, extends previous research that has focused primarily on technology and process-based innovations. The results indicate the effects of the six dimensions on overall innovativeness are contingent on a consumer's age. The ideas merit further research with respect to formulating an explanation of what factors contribute most to connecting consumers to sport organizations through innovative sport event experiences.

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When sport organizations attempt to achieve growth, increase profitability, create superior value, and retain loyal consumers, the development of new products is a vital practice. Higgins and Martin (1996) note that innovations in the sport industry create opportunities for growth. In professional sport, innovations include new stadium construction (e.g., the New York Giants and the New York Jets' New Meadowlands Stadium³), facility renovation (e.g., the Boston Red Sox's Green Monster Seats), adding expansion teams in the major sport leagues (e.g., the Arizona Diamondbacks), new premium seating options (e.g., courtside seats at professional basketball games), and a variety of unique ancillary services (e.g., all-you-can-eat ticket plans at professional baseball games). Lachowetz, McDonald, Sutton, and Clark (2001) suggest that a large portion of the revenue of the major sport teams comes from innovations based on new premium seating and luxury suites.

There is a growing discussion of managing innovative sport products; emerging from such discussion are important research questions to explore. Previous research on product innovation has focused on the radical or incremental innovation of physical goods (Atuahene-Gima, 2005; Zhou, Yim, & Tse, 2005). Service innovation research has been concerned with the innovation of service delivery, store environments, and information technologies (Berry, Shankar, Parish, Cadwallader, & Dotzel, 2006; Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005). Previous research has ignored other important innovation points in a

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³ The stadium is currently named MetLife Stadium after MetLife Inc. bought the naming rights.

sport context, including player performance and sport fans' relational activities (e.g., fan community and loyalty program). Additional research is merited that focuses on innovativeness in a sport context.

To better understand what aspects of sporting events must be innovative in order to provide superior value and increase consumer satisfaction, two key research questions must be addressed:

- (1) What is innovative at sporting events?
- (2) What impact do innovative sporting events have on consumer behavior?

The two-fold purpose of this study was to contribute to a managerial understanding of innovative sporting events. Building from the literature on innovation types, product innovativeness, and services marketing, the first purpose of this study was to generate a conceptual model of sport event innovativeness and to empirically test the conceptualization. Second, we sought to (1) provide additional evidence for the construct validity of the proposed scale, (2) test a theoretical model relating sport event innovativeness to consumer outcomes (i.e., satisfaction, brand equity, and behavioral intentions), and (3) conduct a moderator analysis that identifies who is more effective or less effective in the management of innovative sporting events.

In a new product setting, the relationships between product innovativeness and consumer adoption is not equally positive and significant for all consumers. More specifically, past research indicates that age can influence consumer adoption of new products (Burke, 2002; Porter & Donthu, 2006; Weijters, Rangarajan, Falk, & Schillewaert, 2007). The results from empirical research have shown that innovative products are more highly evaluated by younger consumers than by older consumers in terms of both hedonic (Burke, 2002) and utilitarian values (Porter & Donthu, 2006; Weijters et al., 2008). In the context of sporting events, we expect such a moderating effect will be evident in the relationships between specific innovation points and consumer adoption.

This study contributes to the sport management literature by (1) introducing the conceptual base of sport event innovativeness with specific innovation points and (2) providing more holistic information pertaining to the factors connecting consumers to sport organizations through innovative sporting event experiences. Specifically, we conceptualize and empirically test new dimensions of player performance and fans' relational activities (i.e., fan community and loyalty program) which have not been captured in previous product and service innovation research.

1. Conceptual background

1.1. Innovation types

There are three main research streams in the literature regarding product innovation: (1) adoption of a new idea among consumers (Holak & Lehmann, 1990; Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005), (2) diffusion of a new idea among consumers (Bass, 1969; Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1990), and (3) adoption of a new idea within the adopting organization (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998). In order to explain why and how the introduction of innovative sporting event experiences impacts sport consumers, the major focus of this work is on the first research stream of product innovation: adoption of a new idea among sport consumers. We organize the remainder of this section as follows: The definitions and types of product innovation (i.e., product innovation, product innovativeness, and sport event innovativeness) are presented, building from the marketing management and consumer behavior literature.

Product Innovation versus Product Innovativeness. Product innovation refers to the development of both new physical goods and intangible services introduced to meet an external market need (Damanpour, 1991). The meaning of product innovation for firms is different from that for consumers (Danneels & Kleinschmidt, 2001; Rogers, 2003). For firms, product innovation refers to the number of radical innovations and the percent of total sales accounted for by these innovations (Chandy & Tellis, 1998). In the minds of consumers, product innovation depends on the newness of a product to the consumer and usage pattern changes (Garcia & Calantone, 2002; Holak & Lehmann, 1990; Rogers, 2003), and is better captured by their perceptions of the innovativeness of a product (Ali, Krapfel, & LaBahn, 1995; Danneels & Kleinschmidt, 2001; Moreau, Lehmann, & Markman, 2001). Therefore, product innovation can be differentiated from product innovativeness. Product innovation refers to the development and implementation of a new product in the adopting organization or markets (Van de Ven, 1986), whereas product innovativeness is defined as the novelty and uniqueness of a new product to the consumer (Ali et al., 1995). In order to examine the psychological processes underlying consumers' perceptions of product innovativeness, the innovation characteristics of newness, uniqueness, differentiation, innovativeness, and change in the utility of a product are used in previous research (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001). We highlight the importance to extend the literature by examining the innovativeness of sporting events that has not been previously studied from the consumer's perspective.

Sport Event Innovativeness. Many sport organization-consumer transactions involve not only the transfer of physical goods, but also the performance of services and the experience of sporting events. The sport product should be continuously innovative in order to provide superior value for sport consumers. From the consumer's perspective, this study focuses on the innovativeness of sporting events, including tangible stadium environments and intangible sporting event performances, services, and experiences. For capturing the radical attributes of sporting events from the consumer's perspective, the current study defines sport event innovativeness as consumers' perceptions of the newness and uniqueness of a sporting event (Ali et al., 1995; Moreau et al., 2001). In order to address more specific innovation points, this study identifies four

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