



Dimensions of general market demand associated with professional team sports: Development of a scale

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop the Scale of Market Demand to assess general market demand factors affecting the consumption of professional team sports, which was completed through the following five steps: (a) formulation of a theoretical framework, (b) development of a preliminary scale, (c) exploratory factor analysis (EFA), (d) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and (e) examination of predictive validity through conducting a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. Following a community intercept method, professional sport consumers ($N = 453$) in four southeastern metropolitan areas responded to the scale. Data were randomly split into two halves: one for EFA and the other for CFA. In the EFA with alpha extraction and promax rotation, six factors with 31 items emerged: opposing team, home team, game promotion, economic consideration, sport epitome, and schedule convenience. In the CFA with maximum likelihood estimation, five factors with 17 most pertinent items were retained, without the sport epitome factor. This five-factor model displayed good fit to the data, discriminant validity, and high reliability. The SEM revealed that home team, opposing team, and game promotion were predictive of game re-attendance behaviour.

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1. Introduction

According to Shank (2005), game attendance is the most traditional and important form of sport consumption behaviour. Chelladurai (1999) classified the sport industry into three segments: (a) sport economic activities, (b) spectator sports, and (c) participant sports. Of the three segments, spectator sports have been the fastest growing in terms of annual business transactions (Street & Smith's Sport Group, 2007). Other researchers have also recognised the continuous growth of spectator sports in North America and pointed out that spectator sports have become increasingly popular leisure behaviour for Americans (Ross & James, 2006; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). The rapid and vast growth of professional sport teams in

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North America correlates highly with the increased interest in spectator sports among American people. Masteralexis, Barr, and Hums (2008) indicated that as of 2007, a total of 149 franchise teams belong to the five major professional sport leagues: Major League Baseball (MLB), National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and Major League Soccer (MLS). This figure does not include teams in less-prominent professional sport leagues such as the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), National Lacrosse League (NLL), and many other major and minor leagues. The augmentation of spectator sports has also been confirmed through attendance and media viewership rates. The same phenomenon is also true in NCAA Division I men's basketball and football, which are considered to be the two main revenue producers for collegiate athletic departments (Fulks, 2003). In 2005, nearly 1.3 million people watched March Madness men's college basketball games online (Rein, Kotler, & Shields, 2006).

The increasing popularity of spectator sports has led to the establishments of new leagues (e.g., Women's Professional Soccer, National Lacrosse League), teams (e.g., Gold Coast Titans, San Jose Earthquakes, Oklahoma City Thunder), and multimedia outlets (e.g., NFL Sunday Ticket via Direct TV, ESPN 360), which have not only provided more spectating options for sport consumers but have also created greater competition among various leagues and teams for consumers. With such a crowded sport marketplace, sport consumers have many options in which to spend their leisure time and discretionary dollars. As a result, professional sport organizations face stiff competition in an effort to gain market share. Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton (2007) stated that "competition for sport dollar is growing at the pace of a full-court press" (p. 7) to describe the intensity of the competitive sport marketplace. According to Zhang, Smith, Pease, and Jambor (1997), market competition also comes from many other forms of leisure and entertainment options. As market competition becomes even more intense in professional sports, it is important for both researchers and practitioners to understand game consumption related variables in order to improve the quality of product offering and enhance competitiveness of the sport product (i.e., sport games). Also, marketers of professional sport teams need to develop strategic marketing plans that are based on an in-depth understanding of consumers. It is critical for them to identify those contributing variables that affect the consumption of spectators.

Following an extensive literature review on factors influencing game attendance variables, Schofield (1983) proposed four market demand categories including demographic variables, economic variables, game attractiveness, and residual preference. Greenstein and Marcum (1981) and Jones (1984) focused their studies on game production functions and found that team performance variables, such as winning/losing record and presence of star player(s) were related to game attendance. Synthesizing key game demand variables and production functions, Zhang, Pease, Hui, and Thomas (1995) proposed the systematic concept of market demand, which was defined as the spectators' expectations towards the main attributes of the core product (i.e., the game itself). Braunstein, Zhang, Trail, and Gibson (2005) further explained that market demand was a set of essential constructs associated with the game that a sport team could offer to its existing and prospective consumers. Essentially, it is a cluster of pull factors associated with the game that a professional sport team can offer to its prospective and returning spectators (Braunstein et al., 2005; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Schofield, 1983). In a sense, market demand variables are comprised of the attributes of core game quality variables that are directly related to athlete/team performance, game schedule, and/or ticket affordability.

Although market demand has consistently been found to be an important concept that influences sport consumption behaviour (Zhang, Lam, & Connaughton, 2003; Zhang et al., 1995), previous studies were usually conducted in the context of a specific sport (Braunstein et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2003; Zhang et al., 1995), lacking generalizability and application to a broader market environment of professional sports. To fill this void, the unique characteristics associated with general professional team sports were incorporated into the scale development in this study to inspire and enhance scientific inquiry into this topic area. It was anticipated that the developed Scale of Market Demand (SMD) would be frequently adopted by researchers and marketers to examine the target markets of professional team sports and their demands for the core attributes of game product.

1.1. Conceptual framework

A theoretical justification for the market demand studies can be partially attributed to the cognitive-oriented attitude models, including the Adequacy Importance Model by Mazis, Ahtola, and Klippel (1975), the Theory of Reasoned Action proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The Adequacy Importance Model is a multi-attribute model that predicts consumer behaviour and was developed to understand consumers' behaviour from a cognitive structure perspective. In this model, attitude was operationalized as an importance-weighted evaluation toward the attributes and dimensions of the products or services. Based on three studies, Mazis et al. (1975) found that this model explained consumer's behavioural intentions well. Mashiach (1980) supported the use of a multi-attribute model to predict sport consumers' attendance behaviour by arguing that behavioural intentions formed by sport consumers were not a function of a single attribute, such as winning; instead, they were influenced by multiple attributes.

In terms of predicting attitude in purchase behaviour, Oliver (1980) contended that attitude affects the purchase intentions of products and services. Consumers tend to form their attitude based on prior expectations regarding the performance of the product or service, which often results in ensuing behavioural intentions. The importance of attitude as a predictor of behavioural intentions was well explained by the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and its updated version, termed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). These theories postulate that human behaviour is a direct consequence of behavioural intentions, which are functions of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Several researchers have found that the attitude construct better explained behavioural intentions than subjective

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