Reasons the DartsFans Attending Live Events

Shaghayegh Hashemi Motlagh

Department of Physical Education, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran

*Corresponding Author: Shaghayegh Hashemi Motlagh

ABSTRACT: Sports organizations today operate in a complex leisure market, and must apply advanced marketing methods in order to survive. Sports fans are motivated to attend events for a variety of reasons, and understanding these motivations is important to sports managers and marketers. While much previous studies has focused on mainstream team sports, comparatively little is known about fans’ motives for attending less famous, individual sports. This research assessed the motives of fans of darts in Iran. A modified version of Wann’s (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Survey (SFMS) was used for collecting data. 83 respondents at a dart event were asked to answers of the questionnaire. Findings showed that darts fans are motivated by entertainment, self-esteem, group affiliation, eustress and appreciation of players' skills. Escape from everyday life and family bonding were shown to be relatively unimportant. These results differ from previous studies of fans of individual sports. Level of participation and identification with favorite sport is different by fans. Motives of fans with different levels of identification may differ. There were significant positive relationships between fan identification with the sport of darts and four motivational factors. It is suggested that sports marketers can use sports identification as a grouping variable in market segmentation. Few differences were found when fans were grouped by gender. The research has significant implications for sport marketers working in the field of competitive and recreational sports. Furthermore, the final result suggesting that the darts-related organizations must devise new marketing strategies to survive and develop.

Keywords: Sport Fan, Event Attendance, Live Events, Dart

INTRODUCTION

The current study was intended to extend previous research into sports fan motivation and identification through focusing on professional darts. The study offers a number of useful extensions to these fields by: (a) demonstrating that further augmentation of the SFMS is required to apply it to the study of darts fans, (b) elucidating the motivational profile of darts fans, (c) showing that identification has a significant impact on some motivational elements for darts fans and (d) highlighting that gender is significantly related to some motives. Each of these is addressed below:

The Sport Fan Motivation Scale

Although previous studies have shown the SFMS to be a reliable scale for measuring sports fan motivation, the analysis revealed three problems. Firstly, the wording of one of the questions relating to entertainment (“To me, darts is simply a form of recreation”) necessitated its removal from the analysis. The reasons that this question produced slightly erroneous results are unclear, but it may be that darts fans are more sensitive to any criticisms of the sport that it implies than fans of other, more established sports. It may be that the question is seen by fans of darts to imply that darts is not an important professional sport with a relevant subculture, but just a game or simply a form of recreation. Further investigation would be required to determine whether this is the case. Appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of a sport has been shown to be important to fans of individual sports. Unfortunately, internal reliability issues with the SFMS prevented accurate measurement of this motive. However, analysis of the responses revealed two interesting outcomes. Firstly, appreciation of the skill demonstrated by the players scored highly, suggesting that this is important to darts fans. Secondly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, questions relating to the grace and beauty of darts or whether darts could be considered a form of art received low scores. The latter of these two questions received the lowest possible score in the vast majority of cases and where this was not the case often received the highest possible score. Finally, although it was decided to include the family scale in the analysis, this produced a Cronbach's Alpha score that was slightly below the accepted rule of thumb for acceptable internal reliability.
Darts Fans’ Motives

Previous studies have shown that entertainment is consistently the most important motivational factor for fans of a wide variety of different sports (Wann et al., 2008; Daniels & Norman, 2005). This study shows that darts is no different in this respect; entertainment ranked significantly higher than all other motives. Furthermore, this motive was largely unaffected by identification and gender. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that the majority of darts fans are primarily motivated to seek entertainment when attending live events. However, differences between darts and other individual sports are revealed by the study. Wann et al. (2008) results show that fans of individual sports tend to regard group affiliation (mean = 3.96) as less important than other factors, such as eustress (mean = 5.03) or aesthetics (4.94). Darts fans’ high levels of group affiliation (mean = 5.84) is more similar (yet still higher) to those expressed by fans of highly social events, such as American college football (mean = 5.16), (Wann et al., 2008), mean = 5.20, (Robinson & Trail, 2005)) and college basketball (mean = 5.23, (Wann et al., 2008; Robinson & Trail, 2005)). This may be explained by the peculiar nature of darts. A sociable drinking culture is still evident in the sport (Waddell, 2007) and events are often set up to reflect this. Unlike other individual sports, the seating at many darts events is arranged around large tables, where groups of fans sit and drink together and areas, where fans congregate during breaks in play, are usually provided. The high score for eustress motives are also more similar to Wann et al.’s (2008) results for team sports (mean = 5.58) than individual sports (mean = 5.03). This may be due to the fact that darts fans reported high levels of identification and that this is positively related to eustress. Levels of escape motives showed remarkable similarity to previous studies. The results were exactly the same as Wann’s (2008) results for individual sports (mean = 3.65) and very similar to Daniels & Norman’s (2005) findings for highly identified horse racing fans (mean = 3.39). This suggests that for fans of many individual sports, this motive will be of similar importance. Furthermore, the results are consistent with previous studies insofar that they demonstrate that escape is of relatively low importance compared to other motives (Kim et al., 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007).

The relative lack of importance of economic factors and family motives to darts fans also supports previous studies. Economic motivations have been shown to be the least important to fans of a variety of sports, including: baseball, boxing, auto-racing, and ice hockey (Wann et al., 2008).

Identification and Motives

The fans who were highly identified with the sport of darts also tended to be highly identified with individual players, which may explain the positive correlation between identification and self-esteem. This seems to suggest that highly identified darts fans feel a sense of vicarious achievement when their favorite player succeeds. These results are consistent with the findings of Hunt et al. (1999) and Kwon & Trail (2001). However, they differ insofar as they show high levels of identification with individual players, which has previously been claimed to be less strong than identification with sports teams, due to the fact that “individuals only compete for a few years, rather than for decades, as is the case with sports teams” (Wann et al., 2008).

In contrast to many individual sportspersons and women, darts players’ careers often span decades (Waddell, 2007). Players often continue to compete past the age of 60 years and players have won major tournaments in their early 20s (Waddell, 2007). Therefore, it is possible that player identification is more prevalent among darts fans, as long-term support of an individual player is possible. The positive correlation between identification and eustress was in many previous investigations (Wann & Branscombe, 1992; Daniels & Norman, 2005). Wann & Branscombe (1992) show that “those [fans] who were highly involved with a group or athlete showed elevated arousal during the competition”, and the same would appear to be true for fans of darts. Several have claimed that as identification increases, and self-esteem and eustress become more important, entertainment will become less so (McDonald et al., 2002; Kwon & Trail, 2001). However, the current study does not disprove the theory that highly identified fans will be more behaviorally loyal to their sport and therefore less sensitive to varied levels of entertainment than less identified fans (Tapp & Clowes, 2000). If events are poorly managed or contests of low quality, highly identified fans may still attend events because of the opportunity to see their favorite player win and the physiological stimulation associated with watching darts matches (Wann, 1995; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Tapp & Clowes, 2000). It has also been claimed that group affiliation will increase in importance as fans’ identification increases and they become more involved with a sport’s subculture (Wann et al., 2008; Tapp & Clowes, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The vast majority of previous studies into fan motivation have used self-administered surveys as the primary data collection instrument (Daniels & Norman, 2005; Wann, 1995; Kim et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2004). It was decided that this method would be used for the current study. Where possible, researchers
designing self-administered surveys should adopt previously used questionnaires that have been tested both for reliability and clarity (Borque & Fielder, 2003). Where questions used in previous studies are not directly applicable to the survey, they should be adapted if possible. This both maximizes the clarity of questions and allows for comparisons between studies (Borque & Fielder, 2003). Many questionnaires have previously been designed for the study of sports fan motivation and identification, so it was decided that one of these should be adopted for the study of darts fans. Due to the fact that it has been demonstrated that Wann’s SFMS “could be reliably modified to reflect a specific sport” (Daniels & Norman, 2005), it was modified to collect data specific to the sport of darts. As per Borque’s and Fielder’s recommendations, questions were adapted for the study, but retained much of their original language. The current study did not require the removal of any of the SFMS subscales. Therefore, all 23 Likert scale items were included in the version of the SFMS that was modified for darts fans. This meant that data for all eight of the motivational factors (eustress, self-esteem, escape from everyday life, entertainment, economic factors, aesthetics, group affiliation and family needs) identified by Wann could be captured. 83 darts fans who selected through convenience sampling, responded voluntarily to the questionnaire. The research was held in Tehran in 1392 and the Shahid Keshvaridarts Hall Stadium.

RESULTS

Internal Reliability of the SFMS

It has been recommended that a rule of thumb for internal reliability should be a Cronbach’s Alpha result of 0.70 or above (Kim et al., 2008; Funk et al., 2003). Initial tests revealed that six (Group affiliation, Escape, Eustress, Family, Entertainment and Self-Esteem) of the eight motivation scales were internally consistent. (See Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha - Internal Reliability Tests</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
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<td>Group Affiliation</td>
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<td>Escape</td>
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<td>Identification</td>
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Table 2. Correlation between Identification and Diverse Motives

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<th>GA</th>
<th>ESC</th>
<th>EUS</th>
<th>FAM</th>
<th>AES</th>
<th>EC</th>
<th>ENT</th>
<th>S-E</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig(2 tailed)</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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Aesthetics and Economic not considered due to lack of internal reliability.

Table 2 shows that statistically significant linear correlations were observed between identification and six of the motivation scales. Moderate, positive relationships were found between identification and Eustress ($r = 0.56, p = 0.001$), identification and Economic ($r = 0.53, p = 0.02$) and identification and self-esteem ($r = 0.59, p = 0.001$). Relatively weak, positive relationships were observed between identification and Escape ($r = 0.35, p = 0.013$), identification and family motives ($r = 0.27, p = 0.014$) and identification and entertainment ($r = 0.31, p = 0.016$). It was also shown that there is no significant relationship between identification and group affiliation on the one hand and identification and aesthetics on the other hand.
The purpose of this research was to identify the factors that motivate darts fans to attend live darts events. Internal reliability problems with a modified version of the SFMS used to collect data were found, but the study reliably managed eight different motivational factors. The relationships between these motives and identification with both the sport of darts and darts players and gender were assessed. The current study provides a number of suggestions for marketers working in the field of darts. In particular, it highlights the importance of entertainment and group affiliation to darts fans regardless of gender. Therefore, marketing campaigns should communicate the social aspect and entertainment value of live darts events.

The results suggest that darts marketers should base their segmentation strategies upon fans’ level of identification with the sport and its professional players. Several authors have previously claimed that identification is an ideal variable on which to base market segmentation decisions (Robinson & Trail, 2005; Sutton et al., 1997; Hunt et al., 1999). It has been demonstrated that highly identified fans tend to attend more events and spend more money when they do so (Daniels & Norman, 2005; Tapp & Clowes, 2000). Therefore, it is important that darts events not only continue to appeal to highly identified fans, but also that marketers attempt to develop strategies aimed at increasing identification with the sport for weakly or moderately identified fans. Marketing strategies designed for fans with different levels of identification may be required to communicate different benefits of attending darts events. Marketers should be aware of the relatively high levels of self-esteem and eustress motives of highly identified fans elucidated by this study. Although entertainment and group affiliation were shown to be important to highly identified fans, research has shown that people become less likely to substitute going to watch sporting events for other leisure pursuits as they become more identified with a sport. Therefore, focusing on promoting the eustress and self-esteem benefits may be the most productive means of continuing to attract this audience. Campaigns that focus on rivalries between popular players, the intensity and competitiveness of the tournament and how prestigious a particular title is may be successful for this segment. These would be less important to less identified fans and, for them, darts events may be one of a number of leisure options that provide entertainment and the opportunity to spend time with groups of friends (Tapp & Clowes, 2000; Wann 1995). Marketers may have to position darts in terms of these segments’ needs, focusing more on providing a high quality leisure experience, as for these fans, darts may be competing with attending a public house, cinema or other sporting events (Beech & Chadwick, 2006).

Despite producing useful results, not all of these can yet be generalized and a completely comprehensive view of darts fans’ motives was not provided. The reasons for this are that post-hoc analysis of both the data collection tool and the results of the questionnaire highlighted two problems.

Firstly, due to time constraints, the SFMS was not subjected to rigorous testing prior to the data collection process. Previous researchers have used focus groups to obtain qualitative feedback from sports fans prior to distributing questionnaires (Funk et al., 2003; Funk et al., 2004). This may have revealed the internal reliability issues that were identified prior to its use. The SFMS could then have been adapted to reflect the opinions of the focus group before it was distributed. It may then have been possible to accurately measure aesthetic motives and develop a subscale to measure the importance of player skills. Furthermore, any issues associated with the entertainment subscale would have become apparent before administering the survey. Researchers wishing to extend the current study of darts fans should note the limitations of the modified SFMS. The study highlighted the importance of player skill, which had not been fully considered prior to conducting the survey, and future studies should include this factor. It has also been demonstrated that the aesthetic subscale was fundamentally flawed. As such, despite the questions relating to aesthetics receiving low scores, no conclusive results could be obtained from analyzing this scale. The development of a more specific aesthetic subscale more particular to the sport of darts may be required to accurately measure this factor. Alternatively, marketers and academics may wish to eliminate this from future studies, due to darts not having inherently aesthetic characteristics. Focus groups could be used to clarify this issue.

Whereas this study provides motivational profiles for darts fans attending events in Iran, future work investigating darts fans should expand the work to research fans at a number of events and in a number of different countries. This research may also provide a useful starting point for researchers wishing to study consumer satisfaction, which is “associated with numerous positive business outcomes and is recognized as an important field of study”, van Leeuwen et al. (2005). Finally, the current research highlights the importance of studying fan motivation on a sport-by-sport basis and adapting existing tools to reflect the specific nature of the sport in question. Further research into developing methodologies for adapting tools such as the SFMS to reflect the unique characteristics of different sports is required.
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