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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEAM IDENTITY AND SPECTATOR SATISFACTION IN TRACTORSAZI TABRIZ FOOTBALL TEAM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between team identity and spectator satisfaction in Tractorsazi Tabriz football team. The research method is of a descriptive and correlation. The statistical population consisted of 39,000 Tractorsazi Tabriz fans above 21 years of age who gathered in the Yadegar Imam (RA) Stadium to watch a football game held in the 2013-14 Asian Championship League series. A sample of 225 spectators was selected randomly according to Morgan's table for determining sample size. For collecting data, two questionnaires of, Trail & James team identity and Oliver's satisfaction inventory were used. After data collection, data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient and one-sample T-test. The result showed that status of team identity according to Spectators of Tractorsazi football team has significantly an above the average level. Also the rate of satisfaction of spectator has significantly higher an above the average ($t=16.40$, $sig=0.001$). Analyzing correlation between variables showed that there is a significant positive relationship between team identity and spectator satisfaction ($r= 0.515$, $p < 0.001$).

Keywords: *Team Identity, Spectator Satisfaction, Football Team, Tractorsazi*

INTRODUCTION

As a most popular, most beautiful, and most widespread (regarding the number of spectators and football players) event, football has attracted more financial investments as well as media coverage than have other sports (Ahmadi, 2007). Football has in time turned into a lucrative sport business rather than merely a sports event; so much so that it is referred to as “the football industry” in trade and commercial circles (Rahbar, 2007).

Spectator participation in sports events provides a strong incentive for social behavior which in turn leads to emergence of loyal and even fanatical sports fans. This participation structure can also lead to a better understanding of the motives, incentives, and direct conditions of sports consumer behaviors (e.g. taking part in sports events and buying sports products) as well as attitude formation (e.g. fans loyalty and commitment) (Askarian *et al.*, 2005). Due to the effective part they play in the environment and excitement associated with different sports events, spectators are considered an important part of these events (Alimohammadi *et al.*, 2013). Given that gaining commercial success for clubs and sports teams in the sports industry is a long term process, team and club managers are, among other things, most concerned about their spectators and fans since they are the source of a club's sustainable income in the long run. Specifically focused on by researchers in the past few years, the concepts of team identity and fan-team identity can help these managers in this regard (Soltan *et al.*, 2004). Team identity plays a fundamental role for many fans. Fans strongly matched with a team would feel solidarity with that team and would like to express themselves in the circumstances surrounding their team (Underwood *et al.*, 2001). The stronger a team's identity, the more its fans would want to express their membership in the team (Chen, 2007), to demonstrate their personal commitment and emotional solidarity with the team (Underwood *et al.*, 2001), and to support the team (Fisher and Wakefield, 1998). From a behavioral perspective, researchers argue that team identity is an important factor in demonstrating behavior. Those in a sports team with a high level of knowledge and a stronger sense of identity are willing to spend more time and money for such normal and natural fan behaviors as accompanying their favorite team at various events (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Brewer, 1979). Normal and natural fan behavior include

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following/accompanying sports events closely, consuming sports products, using the media, consumption of sponsored products, etc. (Chen, 2007). From an attitudinal perspective, team identity refers to the strong psychological commitment of a person to a team or group, so much so that it might lead to minimizing the effect of team performance in the field or long term economic success (Sutton *et al.*, 1997). Today, customer satisfaction has been identified as a fundamental requirement in management systems and a highly strategic subject in the past decade. In today's global economy, an organization's survival depends on its customers. Wan and Branscombe (1993) found that team identity affected spectators' consumption behavior and argued that fans of the teams that have stronger identities participate more often in sports events at home and possibly international events as well. Their results also showed that fans of the teams with higher identity would spend more money to buy season, final games, and championship tickets. Moreover, high identity fans were more willing to wait in long queues for buying tickets as compared with fans of the teams with lower identity. In their study, Wan and Branscombe (2004) concluded that individuals with higher levels of team identity were more interested in attending the games as compared with those at lower team identity levels. In their study on team identity and satisfaction on watching the games again, Lee *et al.*, (2009) showed that identity as an important factor in affecting fan behavior played a direct role in satisfaction and watching sports events again. Van *et al.*, (2002) concluded in their research that club identity increases spectator satisfaction. In a study conducted on 1256 spectators in the Japanese professional football league titled "Direct and Indirect Effects of Team Identity and Satisfaction on Spectators' Intention to Return to Games", Matsuka *et al.*, (2003) concluded that team identity and satisfaction were significantly related to spectator's intention to attend the games again. They also concluded that the intention to return and watch the games again was interlocked with the fans' satisfaction and their identifying with their respective teams. In fact, identity creates the most variance in the intention to attend the games again as a result of satisfaction with the team's performance and the gaining competitive advantage by the team. In their research, Ko *et al.*, (2010) argued that identity and participation positively affected spectator satisfaction, and that fans with higher team identity obtained more satisfaction. Gray (2011) concluded in their research that team identity and satisfaction affected such consumer behaviors as fans' intention to participate. The results obtained by Bodet *et al.*, (2011) showed that satisfaction in reaction to team identity as well as the mean number of home games was a stronger indirect predictor of attitudinal loyalty on the part of customers. Also, team identity acted as a mediator between satisfaction, attending annual home and guest games, and certain attitudinal customer loyalties.

Due to the spectators' playing a direct determinant role in a team's income through buying tickets and their indirect role in buying other sports products, it is essential that managers of Tractorsazi Football Team attempt to understand spectator behavior in order to gain further knowledge as to why people attend sports events and why they are attached to their favorite team as fans. The collective result obtained from the existing literature shows that team identity is related to spectator satisfaction. For this reason, the author sought to investigate whether team identity and spectators' satisfaction were also interrelated in the particular case of Tractorsazi fans.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Research Methodology

This research is of a descriptive-correlation nature and data collection is carried out through a field research.

Statistical Population and Samples

The statistical population consisted of 39,000 Tractorsazi Tabriz fans above 21 years of age who gathered in the Yadegar Imam (RA) Stadium to watch a football game held in the 2013-14 Asian Championship League series. The simple random sampling method was used to collect information from 550 spectators sitting in a stadium platform. A sample of 225 spectators was selected randomly according to Morgan's

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table for determining sample size and subsequently, questionnaires were distributed among this population. Of these, 207 questionnaires were returned for further analysis.

Measuring Tool

For collecting data for determining the state of team identity, Trail & James questionnaire (1980) was used. This questionnaire involves 4 questions (attachment, caring for the team, supporting the team, and continued attendance) in a seven-point Likert scale. The reliability of the questionnaire in this study using Cronbach alpha was calculated at 0.77.

For collecting data for determining the state of satisfaction, Oliver’s questionnaire (1980) was used. This questionnaire involves three questions in a seven-point Likert scale. The reliability of the questionnaire in this study using Cronbach alpha was calculated at 0.76.

Data Collection Method

For gathering data, the questionnaires were given to the spectators. In total, out of 225 distributed questionnaires, 207 questionnaires were completely filled out and returned. In this study, descriptive statistics were used in order to summarize and classify the data and to calculate the mean, frequency, standard deviation and to draw diagrams and tables, and Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Pearson test and One sample t test were used for testing the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The descriptive results of the data demonstrate that the highest age range of the participants was between 31-40 years equal to 31.4 percent and the lowest age range of the participants was in > 40 years equal to 19.3 percent. The highest attendance frequency in Tractorsazi team play was obtained for the “more than 10 times of attendance” class (42%) and the lowest attendance frequency in Tractorsazi team play was obtained for the “7-10 times of attendance” class (16.4%). The highest attendance frequency in Tabriz Yaderar Imam Stadium was obtained for the “more than 10 times of attendance” class (60.4%) and the lowest attendance frequency in Tabriz Yaderar Imam Stadium was obtained for the “7-10 times of attendance” class (10.6%) (Table1).

Table 1: Description of the demographic characteristics of spectators

	Age (Year)				Attendance in Tractorsazi Team Play				Attendance in Tabriz Yaderar Imam Stadium			
	21-25	26-30	31-40	> 40	1-3	4-6	7-10	> 10	1-3	4-6	7-10	> 10
Frequency	52	50	65	40	49	37	34	87	31	29	22	125
Percentage	25.1	24.2	31.4	19.3	23.7	17.9	16.4	42	15	14	10.6	60.4

The One sample t-test was used to investigate the status of the team identity and spectator satisfaction. The results showed that the mean team identity variable was 5.25 and the level of test significance was 0.001. Therefore, the null hypothesis regarding team identity and the assumed mean (equal to 4) is rejected.

Based on this, we conclude that status of team identity in opinion of Tractorsazi spectator has significantly an above the average level. Also the mean spectator satisfaction variable was 5.30 and the level of test significance was 0.001. We conclude that status of spectator satisfaction in opinion of Tractorsazi spectator has significantly an above the average level (Table 2).

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Table 2: One-Sample T test for team identity and spectator satisfaction

Test Value = 4							
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Team Identity	207	5.25	1.05	17.161	206	0.001	1.25
Spectator Satisfaction	207	5.30	1.140	16.40	206	0.001	1.3040

Results obtained by this research indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between team identity and spectator satisfaction. Research hypothesis was confirmed regarding Pearson correlation coefficient ($r=0.515$, $Sig=0.001$) (Table 3).

Table 3: The relationship between team identity and spectators satisfaction

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	Pearson Correlation
Team identity	5.25	1.05	2.50	7.00	$r=0.515^{**}$
Spectators Satisfaction	5.30	1.14	2.33	7.00	$Sig= 0.001$

$N= 207$; $**P < 0.01$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between the team identity and spectator satisfaction. The results of this study are consistent with the previous research conducted by Wann *et al.*, (2004), Lee *et al.*, (2009), Van *et al.*, (2002), Matsuka *et al.*, (2003), KO *et al.*, (2010), Gray (2011) and Bodet *et al.*, (2011). Ko *et al.*, (2010) showed in their results that club identity was a factor which increased spectator satisfaction. In their research, Bodet *et al.*, (2011) showed that team identity would balance out the effects of customer satisfaction and the number of attendances in guest games. Researchers confirmed that there was a relation between group identity and satisfaction demonstrated via spectators supporting the team and team identity levels.

They found that as compared with low identity spectators, the high identity spectators attended games more frequently and bought more often the authorized products offered by the team. As an important influencing factor, identity has a direct effect on spectator behavior, repeated attendance, and environmental satisfaction. Spectator satisfaction is a most important factor in maintaining spectator loyalty and acts as a key factor in the formation of future intentions on the part of spectators.

Managers of professional sports must take into account spectators (in terms of team identity and attachment) and include activities in their long term planning towards increasing spectator satisfaction and positive behavioral intentions. For this purpose, sports organizations must, in an effort to maintain and strengthen their contact with the team fans, help to make team performance more competitive. Sports marketing experts must be employed to increase spectator satisfaction in future games.

Also, maintaining and subsequent increasing of team identity among spectators must be the main focus. For example, increasing the presence of players in social events, organizing games for collecting funds for the charity, forming fan clubs, and publishing newsletters are tactics that can be used for improving team identity.

These efforts are more aimed at enhancing team identity among young people. Therefore, the great enthusiasm and support exhibited by Tractorsazi fans at difficult times would be indicative of the high team identity of these spectators as a result of being satisfied with their team.

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