Original Article

Investigating the effects of value on word of mouth and repurchase intentions in the sport spectators' context in soccer

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Abstract:

The scope of this research was to search the impact of value on spectator's future intentions and specifically in word of mouth and repurchase intention, in the sport spectator's contest in the area of Greek professional soccer. The sample were nine hundred and twenty-five (N=925) soccer fans in six different stadia. They were asked to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of two parts; the first part, apart from demographic data, measured football fan's future intentions using the SPORTSERVE scale (proposed by Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008), while the second part measured perceived value, using seven items from relevant researches (Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000; Murray & Howat 2002; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008), which were adapted for soccer spectators. For the second part regarding value, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted, which revealed two factors: a) sacrifices and b) value for money. The relations among all factors were investigated through Multiple Regression Analysis and the findings indicated that value had a significant impact and was important predictor of customers' future intentions. Academics and sport managers could use this information in order to better understand spectator's future intentions and design marketing strategies aiming at retaining their customers and attract new ones.

Key Words: Value, future intentions, repurchases intention, word-of-mouth

Introduction

After service quality and satisfaction, value was recognized as the third factor with significant impact in future intentions (Cronin, et al., 2000). As service quality and satisfaction were considered key factors for services organizations, they were investigated in depth for quite some time (Martínez, Ko & Martínez, 2010), while value attracted the interest of sport researchers during the 90's (Al Sabahy, Ekinci & Riley, 2004) and since then it has been recognized as one of the most successful and competitive strategies (Gronroos, 1994). According to Al Sabahy et al., (2004), value gained recognition because it does not only affect the customers' decision making process prior to the purchase of service but also their satisfaction and intention to repeat purchase in the future (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000). As it is vital for sport organizations to retain their customers and, if possible, predict their future behavior it is considered essential to investigate value in the sport spectators' area as well.

Undoubtedly, soccer is the most popular sport and attracts the interest of a huge number of fans who identify themselves with the sport, many of whom attend games regularly. In Greece, soccer, until recently, was funded by government recourses, while management and marketing were not as developed as they were internationally (Thamnopoulos & Anestos, 2003). Lack of management and marketing practices and unsafe conditions during the games, have led to a decreased number of fans attending football games year by year. So, the challenge for the Greek managers of sport facilities and by extension of professional soccer organizations is to identify factors which can significantly influence customers future intentions and behavior in order to retain their existing customers or even to attract new ones. Specifically, if the effect of factors that can mainly be controlled by management, such as value, can predict satisfactorily the repurchase intention and the word of mouth, then management need to move in this direction.

Review of Literature

Value

The notion of perceived value has gained interest among the researchers because of its mediating role to

satisfaction (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). The most common definitions of value referred to analogy (comparison) between quality and price (Monroe, 1990). Zeithaml (1988), proposed that value is a general evaluation of customers, regarding the usefulness of a product or a service based on what they take and what they give in order to obtain it. This model suggests that other factors apart from money (price) must be taken into account such as time spend, searching costs, emotional costs, etc. According to Ravald and Gronroos (1996), the ability of organizations to offer value is a precondition to establish long-term relationships with their customers. Value not only has an important impact after the purchase, but also affects the decision making process (Dodds Monroe, & Grewal 1991).

Future Intentions

The most common future intentions referred in bibliography are the intention to communicate the experience of the use by word of mouth and the intention to repurchase the product / service.

Word-of-Mouth Communication

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is probably the oldest means of exchanging opinions on products and services offered by various organisations (Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron, & Marticotte, 2010). WOM is usually defined as an exchange, flow of information, communication, or conversation between two individuals. Many authors agree that WOM is an informal and noncommercial conversation. In the early 1970's, studies suggested WOM was nine times as effective as advertising in converting unfavorable or neutral predispositions into positive attitudes (Day, 1971).

Studies on WOM have demonstrated that its effectiveness is based on the overwhelming influence that it has on consumer behavior. Researchers have shown that WOM was strongly and positively associated with service quality (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), satisfaction (Anderson, 1998), perceived value and with customer's repurchase intention (Hartline & Jones, 1996).

Repurchase Intention

According to Fornell (1992), "repurchase intention refers to the likelihood of using a service provider again in the future". Similarly, Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard (2003), defined repurchase intention as the process of purchasing a product or a service from the same company based on a previous experience, which undoubtedly was satisfying. Cronin et al., (2000), has treated "behavioral intentions" and "repurchase intention" as synonymous constructs and they consider repurchase intention as a key to Defensive Marketing strategies and business success in general (Cronin et al., 2000). Thus repurchase intention is very important as the cost of generating a new customer is believed to be approximately "six times", the cost of keeping an existing customer (Alexandris, Dimitriadis, & Markata, 2002).

Relations among value and future intentions

Perceived value positively influences customer's future intentions, either direct (Kuo, Wub & Deng 2009), or through its influence on service quality and satisfaction which are proved that have a strong impact on both WOM and repurchase intentions (Yoshida & James, 2010). More specifically, according to Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000, in the sport spectators' area, perceived value affects positively the perception for quality. Value is directly related to quality because improvement of quality increases value and vice versa. Some other researchers claim that value and satisfaction are complementary factors. Murray and Howat (2002), report that in order to form their perceptions for the service supplier customers can use value or satisfaction. Hence, value and satisfaction have similar meaning or they are close related. Value is an exclusively cognitive procedure; it exists before and after the purchase, and addresses not only existing, but also possible customers. Similarly, Woodruff (1997), stated that perceived value appears in various stages of the purchase process, included the stage prior to the purchase.

On the other hand, in terms of their interaction, many researchers point out that the role of perceived value is very important for the formation of satisfaction (Kuo et al., 2009; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Murray & Howat, 2002; Zeithaml, 1988). For instance, Zeithaml (1988), states that the clients who believe that they received value for their money are more satisfied compared to those who don't. Murray and Howat (2002), found that perceived value has an important role in the formation of satisfaction, which in turn leads to customer retention and repurchase intention. Although the relationships among service quality, satisfaction and future intentions, are well established in the services area, there is limited evidence regarding these relationships in the sport services area (Murray and Howat, 2002).

Purpose of the study

The present study aimed to investigate in the area of Greek professional soccer

- a) The levels of i) perceived value and ii) behavior intentions (repurchase intention and the WOM communication).
- b) The dimensional nature of value and
- c) The relationships among, value and future intentions for repurchasing the services and the WOM communication.

Research hypotheses

The research hypothesis is that in the area of professional soccer: a) value is multidimensional factor

and b) value has an important impact on spectators' future intentions to repurchase the services and be indulged in word of mouth communication.

Methods

Sample and Instrumentation

The main tool of the research was a questionnaire. Nine hundred and twenty five (N=925) soccer fans were the sample of the research. The research was conducted in six different stadiums of Greek Super League. A stratified sampling procedure was implemented in order for the sample to be as representative of the population measured as possible. The participants were randomly selected and completed the questionnaires voluntarily. The questionnaires were distributed and collected before the start of the game inside the stadia.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part asked for the demographic data and also measured WOM and repurchase intention. The instrument for this purpose was the SPORTSERVE scale, which is a modified version of SERVQUAL, proposed by Theodorakis & Alexandris (2008). In terms of future intentions three items were used to measure word-of-mouth and two items were used to measure repurchase intention. Spectators were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (extremely likely) their likelihood to continue watching football games and recommend the specific service to others. For measuring perceived value seven items were used that derived from relevant researches (Cronin et. al., 2000; Murray & Howat, 2002; Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008). All items were adapted for soccer spectators.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS 17 and AMOS were used for statistical analysis. The validity of the questionnaire was examined through Cronbach's analyses. An Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted for the part of questionnaire regarding value, which revealed two factors: a) "sacrifices" and b) "value for money". Then, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed to assess the factorial validity of the present measures. Reliability analyses (Cronbach's α) tested the internal consistency of repurchase intention and word-of-mouth communication in the context of the soccer spectators. Finally, the relations among all factors were examined through Multiple Regression Analyses.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The demographic data showed that the soccer fans in Greece were mostly male (80%), single (46.8%), young (29.9% aged between years old 26-35), working full time (52.3%), with a medium educational level (40.7% secondary education) and of low income (39.7% less than 12.000 € per year).

The general impression of spectators in professional soccer in Greece is that they had a rather positive perception for value for money and they also believed that they had not made so many sacrifices even though they believed that the ticket prices and the products inside the stadium were expensive. They also stated that they would rather come back again, however they were not so sure whether they were going to proceed on WOM communication or not. The internal consistency of value and future intentions (repurchase intention and WOM) was measured by Cronbach's α reliability (Table 1).

Table 1. Value and future intentions Means and Standard Deviations

Factor		<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	Items	Cronbach's α
Value	Sacrifices	4.28	1.32	7	.793
	Value for money	5.07	1.64	2	.893
Future Intentions	Repurchase intention	5.68	1.62	2	.873
	Word of mouth	4.61	1.73	3	.879

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Exploratory Factor Analysis for the second part of questionnaire that measured value, had an acceptable KMO level (.69) and showed that the Bartlett's test was significant (χ^2 (21) =2427,559, $p < .05$). Both tests indicated that the factor analysis was appropriate for these subjects and their internal connection was very good. The factor analysis for value revealed two factors with initial eigenvalues > 1 . The two factors were: a) sacrifices and b) value for money. The reliability analysis that followed, showed acceptable level ($\alpha = .79$) for the first factor and high level ($\alpha = .89$) for the second factor (table 2).

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Value

Value items	Factors	
	Sacrifices	Value for money
Ticket is expensive compared to the services that are being offered	,677	
It costs me a lot to watch my favorite team	,806	
The products inside the stadium are expensive	,679	
The time that I spent (searching time, buying time, time to go and leave the stadium) was too much	,773	
I've made many sacrifices in order to watch the game	,758	
The sacrifices I did (time, money, effort) worth the money that I spent		,956
I received the analogous value for the money that I spent		,945
Eigenvalues	2,929	1,628
% of Variance (R^2)	41,84%	23,25%
% Cumulative R^2		65.09%

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis for word-of-mouth prediction through value.

A regression analysis was conducted with the 2 dimensions of value as independent variables and the intention for word of mouth communication as the dependent variable. Both dimensions of value had a significant impact ($F=180,12$, $p<0,001$) and predicted a significant proportion (28,1%) of word of mouth communication intention. However, "value for money" seemed to have a much stronger impact than "sacrifices" (table 3).

Table 3. Regression analysis for WOM prediction through value

Value	B	t	p
Sacrifices	,-088	-3,100	,002
Value for money	,505	17,724	,000

Regression analysis for repurchase intention prediction through value.

A second regression analysis was conducted with the 2 dimensions of value as independent variables and the repurchase intention as dependent variable. Both dimensions of value had a significant impact ($F=254,898$, $p<0,001$) and predicted a significant proportion (35,6%) of repurchase intention. Again, "value for money" had a much bigger score than "sacrifices" (table 4).

Table 4. Regression analysis for repurchase intention prediction through value.

Value	B	t	p
Sacrifices	,-108	-4,001	,000
Value for money	,566	20,976	,000

In both regression analysis the relation of "sacrifices" with the dependent variable is negative.

Discussions and conclusions

The findings indicated that the participants in the study believed that they received some value for the money that they spent and they don't felt that the sacrifices were too much. On the other hand they stated that they rather repurchase the service again but they were not so sure that they will proceed in word of mouth communication. The statistical analyses resulted that value is a multidimensional factor consisted of "value for money" and sacrifices witch is in accordance to the findings from other researches (Zeithaml, 1988).

Regarding the relationships among value and future intentions, the results supported the research hypothesis, that value has an important impact and can predict both repurchase intention and word-of-mouth communication in professional soccer. Based on the results, it could be argued that value for money has a significant impact, especially regarding repurchase intentions. These results confirm the findings from other researchers in the services area (e.g. Cronin et. al., 2000; Oliver, 1997; Tsuji Bennett& Zhang 2007; Wang, Lo, & Yang, 2004).

Value is a critical factor that has a significant affection in both intentions with similar results as satisfaction that means that affects much more the repurchase intention than the word-of-mouth (Eggert, & Ulaga, 2002). However, from the two dimensions of value the one that has the significant impact is "value for

money". The relation of "sacrifices" with the WOM and repurchase intention is negative. That means that fewer sacrifices (money, time, effort) will lead to higher levels of WOM and repurchase intention and vice versa.

In summary, this paper has a theoretical value, as it confirms findings from researches in the services area (Ferrand, Robinson, Valette-Florence, 2010; Murray & Howat, 2002), and enhances the knowledge regarding the value and behavioral intentions in the area of sport spectators, particularly in professional soccer.

Applications in sport

The practical implications are also important, as the sport organizations are struggling to get a competitive advantage and gain a good position in the market. The results of the present study have practical implications, especially for sports managers in sport spectators' area who aim at encouraging their customers to attend more often. In this effort repurchase intention and word-of-mouth communications are considered as vital factors. So managers should bear in mind the contemporary needs of today's spectators in an effort to please them. In other words, sport managers should develop appropriate marketing strategies and invest in value along with other factors such as quality of services and satisfaction.

From a managerial point of view, since managers lack control of the core product, they should try to improve all the secondary services (service quality, satisfaction and value).

In terms of, Value it can be argued that is a very important factor with strong affection on spectators' intentions, so managers must find ways to improve spectator's perceptions for value. In order to reduce sacrifices, managers should find ways to make access to the stadium easier, to eliminate the times of entering and leaving the stadium, as well as the process of buying tickets (for example through the internet) as much as possible. On the other hand, they have to try to increase the perception for value for money by adding new services with low, or no cost, such as spectators' participation in team happenings beyond the games, connection with the players etc.

Concluding, in the context of professional soccer, the present study provided evidence that, value for money has a strong impact on both intentions especially on repurchase intention.

Limitations and future research

The present study collected data from Greece's professional soccer. As the cultural diversities might influence the conclusions of each study, it would be useful to have evidence from different countries. Thus, cross-cultural research should be conducted in the future and help practitioners and academics to better understand the similarities and differences in the behavioral patterns of soccer fans internationally.

Finally, along with service quality and satisfaction, future research should incorporate other factors and dimensions that have been shown to significantly predict the spectator's behavior, such as those of value, loyalty, motives and brand associations.

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