

The Comparison of the Importance of the Factors Affecting Spectators' Attendance in Football Matches in Iranian Professional League Within Age Groups

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Abstract: Football is the most popular sport in the world as well as in Iran. This popularity and high revenue depend on spectators' attendance at stadiums. Iranian Football Pro-League has a low number of spectators per match as well as low revenue in the match day when compared to some countries with the same league. Moreover, a high percentage of football spectators in Iran are below 25 years old, but those over 35 years old have little attendance at stadiums. The main purpose of this study was to compare the importance of the factors affecting different age groups' attendance. This study adopted a comparative study method. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. The validity of the questionnaire was approved by nine senior experts and confirmed by explorative factor analysis. In addition, the internal reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha Test ($\alpha = 0.870$). Statistical sample of the research consisted of 486 participants (Cochran formula) who were distributed at 4 stadiums proportionally. Our sample was divided into three age groups (#21 years, 22-35 years and >35 years). Data were analyzed by k-s, factor analysis, Friedman, ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc tests. Financial reasons (ticket price, transportation) and stadium facilities (stadium beauty, stadium cleaning, stadium comfort, drink and food) were the most important factors. Considering the age variable, there were differences among different age groups in their team affiliation and incentives. Under-21-year group paid more attention to incentives than 22-35 and >35 groups and had more team affiliation than 22-35-year group.

Key words: Spectator Attendance % Age Group % Professional Football League % Stadium Facilities % Financial Reasons

INTRODUCTION

Spectators' high attendance at stadiums in domestic, national, international and worldwide football matches and a large number of audiences watching these matches on TV introduce football as the most popular sport in the world. In Iran, football is one of the most common sports which attract the biggest number of athletes and spectators when compared to other sports [1]. Sports marketing management is defined as prediction, management and satisfaction of customer's demands and requests via applying and utilizing marketing principles [2]. Likewise, sports event is regarded as a fundamental intellectual experience that athletes and spectators are a part and therefore its assessment is too difficult [3]. Therefore spectators' attendance at stadiums is one of the most important aspects of sport events. Many club managers formulate their plans in conditions that revenue resources reduce and operational costs increase [4].

Attracting spectators to stadiums is an appropriate solution for many clubs to increase their income and overtake other clubs [5]. So, the nature of sports marketing enforces firms and clubs to attain and apply information about consumers and understand their behavioral and attitudinal differences [6]. In order to increase the number of spectators coming to stadiums, it is significant for sports marketers to be aware of the factors that influence the spectators' attendance. Understanding these factors allows marketers to utilize effective marketing strategies to effectively target different audience groups [7].

Many researchers have studied and investigated the motivations and effective factors influencing spectators' attendance at stadiums. Individuals have very different motives for attending sports events. James and Ross (2004) found that in amateur sports, spectators mostly enjoy the entertainment, technique, drama and efforts strongly related to the game itself [8]. Hong *et al.* (2005)

studied baseball spectators' motives in Japan and identified interest in baseball, interest in players and match quality as three main motives [9]. Jung-uk Won and Kaoru Kitamura (2006) compared Japan and Korea leagues and showed that the escape from everyday life is the most powerful motive for spectator attendance in both Japanese and Korean Leagues. They suggested that entertaining aspects of games should increase to attract more spectators [10]. Also, Lee (2007) considered entertainment and game as the strongest motivations in men and women to attend Baseball League competitions [11]. James and Ridinger (2002) assessed the motivations of men and women who attended basketball stadiums for collegiate matches and the results showed that the most important factors for attracting male and female spectators to the stadium were competition and escape from everyday life [12]. People seldom attend events alone; therefore motivations such as companionship with friends and family members and other social motives have a role in increasing the number of people attending stadiums. Some researchers found that social identification/affiliation strongly influenced the decision to attend the sports events [8, 11 and 13]. One of the factors that were identified in Jung-uk Won and Kaoru Kitamura's (2006) research as the predictor of spectator attendance at the stadium was the social interaction [10]. Abel, Correia and Sandra, Esteves (2007) also found that the social variables especially variables that were related to the identity of the team, had special importance, but the material factors were the most determining factors [3].

One of the factors that influence spectator attendance at stadiums is stadium facilities. Stadium facility has been studied in many researches. Greenwell *et al.* (2002) investigated the influence of physical sports facilities on customers' satisfaction and focused on physical facilities of stadiums [14]. Aminuddin and Lee (2008) studied spectators' perceptions of physical facility and team quality in Malaysian Super League and mentioned that team quality and sports escape significantly predicted spectators' satisfaction and significantly predicted spectators' intention to attend future soccer games [5]. Spectators that enjoy being at stadium more probability attend further matches [15, 16]. Aminuddin and Lee (2008) know the importance of stadium facilities such as parking, comfortable seats and quality of the scoreboard as equal as the presence of star players [5]. Factors related to stadium facilities include: stadium safety, the comfort of the stadium, stadium beauty, stadium cleanness, drink and food, easy parking and scoreboard quality.

Team quality is one of the main factors that affect spectators' attendance [5, 17-19]. Team quality is presented with factors such as winning percentage of the participating teams [20], number of star players [21] and the level of rivalry [22]. One of the most complete team quality scales is Zhang *et al.*'s (1995) scale which includes home team quality, star players, win-loss record, team stance, team history, quality of the opponent and whether opponent team has star players [17]. When the quality of the team competition satisfies a spectator, he/she most likely will attend the future games of team [5]. Zhang *et al.* (1995) mentioned team quality and star players as the main effective factors [17]. Finally, team quality is associated with the following factors: your team's quality, good team performance, players' loyalty to the team, star players, watching favorite players, your team's traditions, player physique, evaluation of trainer's decision, evaluation of players' performance, result uncertainty and opponent team's quality and tradition.

Finally, some other studies were carried out on the impact of economic factors, promotion, demographic variables, game program and weather conditions on the spectators' attendance at stadiums [16, 17, 23]. Rodney *et al.* (2007) studied the influence of performance, demographic variables and promotions on attracting spectators to Collegiate Baseball League and found that spectators inclined to teams with highest winning percentages and when common promotions such as concerts, exhibitions and merchandises exist, these leagues will have the most presence [24]. Shonk (2006) regards environmental factors, weather conditions and stadium facilities as the main factors influencing spectators' attendance [25]. Terry Macpherson *et al.* (2004) noted economic factors, as one of the most important factors influencing the presence of spectators [26].

Age differences: Desbordes, Ohl and Tribou (1999) mentioned that attending sports events is an activity that decreases in line with the aging process [27]. Sports spectators are clearly from a wide age range. In fact, football spectators are from age groups, young or old. Clearly, factors that affect a 10-year-old spectator are different from those affecting a 65-year-old person. A high percentage of football spectators in Iran are below 25. Those above 35 years old have a very low attendance at stadiums. Approximately 88% of Iranian pro-league spectators are below 35 years old and are mostly students [1]. Although a lot of researches have been carried out on the spectators' motivations, however, age group differences have rarely been studied. Abel, Correia and

Sandra, Esteves (2007) studied football matches in Portugal in order to find the underlying motives of the Portuguese spectators for attending football matches and found significant differences between age groups in extras and facilities, material reasons and star players [3]. Age group of < 21 attached more importance to material reasons and extras and facilities than age group of 36-49. Material incentives and easy conditions were more important to younger spectators. Younger spectators valued star players more than the adults did [3].

The presence of spectators at stadiums is essential for each sport to survive. Football spectators are from a wide age range and each age group may have different motivations. A considerable part of the football clubs' revenue is obtained on the day of the match through ticketing and selling club goods. 44% of the English football clubs' revenue in 2006/2007 season was obtained in the match day [28].

Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to identify important factors for each age group and compare the importance of these factors based on different age groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive-comparative study method was used in this study. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 47 questions was used for data collection. For questionnaire designing, the research literature reviewed and all factors and variables studied in the researches were identified as effective factors for the attendance of spectators at the stadiums. Thus, the first part of the questionnaire included 45 variables. Respondents were asked to determine the importance of the mentioned factors on a four-point Likert scale (1=not important to 4=very important). The second part of the questionnaire included two demographic questions.

Questionnaire's face validity was confirmed by nine senior experts and its content validity approved by explorative factor analyses. In a pretest, 30 questionnaires were distributed during one of the league matches (Esteghlal Tehran-Foulad Khuzestan). Respondents did not report any problems in understanding questions. Questionnaire reliability was examined by Cronbach Alpha ($\alpha=0.870$).

The sample consisted of 486 participants (Cochrane formula for big and uncountable populations) and proportionate stratified random sampling was used. Sample was divided among 4 stadiums proportionally (Tehran Azadi complex, Rajai Qazvin, Qods Hamadan,

Fouladshahr Esfahan). Questionnaires were distributed during 4 pro-league matches at the stands one hour before matches started and at half time and recollected by distributors. Participants were divided into three age groups (14-21, 22-35 and above 35 years).

Exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation was utilized to attain main components of the questionnaire. After identifying the main factors of the questionnaire, internal correlation of each subscale was reported by Cronbach's alpha test. Due to the study exploratory nature, factors with Cronbach's alpha value of greater than 0.643 were accepted to explain sample behavior. Friedman test was used to prioritize effective factors. After examining the normality factor distribution by k-s test, ANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests were used to compare the age groups.

RESULTS

The age of 57% of the spectators ranged from 14 to 21 (n=277), 31.8% from 22 to 35 (n=154) and 11.2% above 35 (n=54). To obtain the main factors of the questionnaire, factor analysis (Varimax rotation) was used. The KMO test result (P = 0.806) showed that sampling was appropriate. Bartlett test was significant (P = 0.00).

Generally, pretests showed that factor analysis was consistent with the questionnaire cases because internal consistency of items was significantly high. Internal correlation in each subscale was reported by the Cronbach's alpha test. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, factors with an internal correlation greater than 0.643 were used to explain sample behavior in spite of the fact that recommended alpha coefficient was higher than 0.70 (Table 1). After factor analysis of 44 studied variables, 29 variables remained and seven factors were attained to describe the sample's behavior including:

- ⊆ Factor (1), team affiliation
- ⊆ Factor (2), stadium facilities
- ⊆ Factor (3), aggressiveness
- ⊆ Factor (4), financial reasons
- ⊆ Factor (5), entertainment
- ⊆ Factor (6), opponent team
- ⊆ Factor (7), incentives

Table 1 shows the seven factors influencing the spectators' attendance in football matches. *Financial factors* and *stadium facilities* were strong predictors of the spectators' attendance. These seven factors totally predicted 41.4% of variance in spectators' attendance at stadiums.

Table 1: Factors influencing spectators' attendance in football matches

Factors	Factor and % of Variance	Items	Loading	Cronbach Alpha
Factor (1)	<i>Team affiliation 9.50</i>	To watch your Favorite Players	0.500	0.710
		To Support your Team	0.591	
		Player's Loyalty To the Team	0.560	
		Evaluation Players' performance	0.612	
		Evaluation Trainer's decision	0.541	
		To Taste Victory	0.492	
		Good Team Performance	0.510	
Factor (2)	<i>Stadium Facility 8.40</i>	Stadium Beauty	0.735	0.798
		Stadium Safety	0.670	
		The Comfort of the Stadium	0.710	
		Drink and Food	0.670	
		Stadium Cleanness	0.747	
		Refreshment	0.466	
Factor (3)	<i>Aggression 6.00</i>	To Insult the Referee	0.743	0.680
		To Humiliate the Opposition	0.731	
		On-pitch Aggressively	0.749	
Factor (4)	<i>Financial reasons 4.70</i>	Little Expense to access the stadium	0.795	0.790
		Cheap Tickets	0.798	
		Easy Ticket acquisition	0.681	
Factor (5)	<i>Entertainment 4.60</i>	Entertainment	0.677	0.739
		Pre-Match Atmosphere	0.789	
		Family	0.634	
		Friends	0.442	
		Release Of tension	0.694	
		Escape from everyday Life	0.681	
Factor (6)	<i>Opponent team 4.20</i>	Opponent team quality	0.702	0.713
		Opponent team tradition	0.769	
Factor (7)	<i>Incentives 4.00</i>	Free Gifts	0.692	0.643
		Ticket Promotions	0.591	

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and mean rank of studied factors

Factor	Group1 (14-21)			Group2 (22-35)			Group3 (35<)		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank
To Taste Victory	3.69	.75	18.13	3.70	.71	18.54	3.68	.69	18.20
Easy Ticket acquisition	3.68	.63	17.79	3.66	.67	18.07	3.62	.80	17.40
Stadium Safety	3.56	.83	17.06	3.62	.77	17.91	3.77	.60	18.87
The Comfort of Stadium	3.55	.83	16.95	3.68	.73	18.39	3.64	.75	17.68
Stadium Beauty	3.56	.83	17.09	3.65	.75	17.98	3.59	.71	17.01
Good Team Performance	3.59	.78	17.10	3.61	.69	17.53	3.74	.52	18.21
To Support your Team	3.62	.67	17.16	3.55	.75	17.07	3.64	.61	17.63
Stadium Celanese	3.52	.81	16.61	3.57	.83	17.36	3.85	.35	19.17
Player's Loyalty To Team	3.64	.68	17.37	3.34	.95	15.29	3.57	.60	16.63
Ticket Promotion	3.50	.86	16.47	3.35	.93	15.83	3.29	1.05	14.62
Drink and Food	3.41	.93	15.85	3.35	.99	15.77	3.50	.90	16.46
Cheap Tickets	3.46	.86	16.09	3.42	.83	16.03	3.20	.97	13.96
Favorite Players	3.53	.84	16.80	3.22	1.00	14.49	3.27	.94	14.42
Friends	3.34	.92	15.13	3.52	.66	16.65	3.31	.82	15.20
Refreshment	3.36	.93	15.40	3.20	.97	14.44	3.51	.72	16.60
Evaluation of trainer's performance	3.30	.89	14.49	3.27	.89	14.60	3.24	.98	14.30
Factor	Group1 (14-21)			Group2 (22-35)			Group3 (35<)		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank
Free Gifts	3.28	1.05	14.38	3.18	1.05	14.26	2.87	1.18	11.76
Evaluation of player's performance	3.30	.85	15.07	3.27	.88	14.76	3.05	1.05	12.94
Pre Match Atmosphere	3.07	1.02	13.03	3.05	.98	12.98	3.11	.98	13.34
Entertainment	2.97	1.09	12.51	3.02	.92	12.52	3.18	.87	13.43
Opponent Team Quality	2.86	1.05	11.73	3.09	.99	13.44	3.14	.87	13.40
Family	2.79	1.18	11.33	2.82	1.15	11.68	3.05	1.08	12.69
Opponent Team Tradition	2.85	1.09	11.38	2.84	1.04	11.79	3.00	.93	12.11
Release of Tension	2.86	1.05	11.67	2.76	1.15	11.12	2.94	1.07	11.89
Escape from Everyday Life	2.83	1.09	11.34	2.80	1.09	11.46	2.85	1.01	11.44
Humiliate Opposition	2.63	1.21	10.64	2.35	1.24	9.35	2.35	1.36	10.02
On Pitch Aggressively	2.44	1.23	9.61	2.26	1.21	8.74	2.01	1.22	6.94
Insult Referee	2.14	1.21	7.83	2.08	1.27	7.95	2.31	1.46	9.68

Table 3: Mean, std. deviation and mean rank of factors attained by factor analysis

Factor	Group1 (14-21)			Group2 (22-35)			Group3 (35<)		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank
<i>Financial reasons</i>	3.54	.59	5.01	3.54	.61	5.19	3.42	.71	4.82
<i>Stadium facility</i>	3.49	.61	4.89	3.51	.60	5.07	3.64	.45	5.38
<i>Team affiliation</i>	3.51	.47	4.75	3.39	.56	4.53	3.41	.51	4.40
<i>Promotions</i>	3.39	.82	4.80	3.27	.85	4.25	3.08	.97	3.91
<i>Entertainment</i>	2.98	.60	3.02	3.00	.55	3.19	3.07	.59	3.53
<i>Opponent team</i>	2.85	.87	3.16	2.96	.87	3.60	3.07	.77	3.33
<i>Aggression</i>	2.40	.91	2.38	2.23	.99	2.17	2.22	1.14	2.63

Table 4: ANOVA test for age groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<i>Team affiliation</i>	Between Groups	1.649	2	.825	3.139	.044
	Within Groups	126.344	481	.263		
	Total	127.993	483			
<i>Incentives</i>	Between Groups	4.991	2	2.496	3.447	.033
	Within Groups	348.228	481	.724		
	Total	353.219	483			

Friedman test was used to prioritize 29 remaining variables. This test result was significant ($p < 0.01$). For each variable, mean, standard deviation and mean rank is mentioned in Table 2 for age groups.

Maximum mean was achieved by “*to taste victory*” in 14-21 and 22-35 groups. Above-35-year group’s maximum mean was attained by *stadium cleaning*. *On Pitch Aggressively* and *Insult Referee* had the least importance for all age groups and gained the least mean (Table 2).

Friedman test showed that mean differences of factors attained by factor analyses were significant ($p < 0.01$). These factors were prioritized according to their mean. Mean, standard deviation and mean rank of each factor were shown according to age groups in Table 3.

The maximum mean values were attained by *financial factors* and *stadium facilities* and minimum mean values were achieved by *Aggression* in all age groups (Table 3).

As Table 4 shows, among seven studied factors, differences were significant among age groups in *team affiliation* ($p < 0.05$) and *incentives* ($p < 0.05$).

Tukey post hoc test showed that the difference observed in *incentives* (free gifts and ticket promotions) was among 14-21 age category and 22-35 and over 35 years ($p < 0.05$). The difference observed in *team affiliation* (to watch your favorite players, to support your team, players’ loyalty to the team, to evaluate players’ performance, to evaluate trainers’ decisions, to taste victory and good team performance) was between the 14-21 and 22-35 groups. 14-21-year group was more sensitive about *incentives* than 22-35 and over 35 years groups and *team affiliation* had more importance for 14-21-year group when compared to 22-35 group.

DISCUSSION

The main question to be answered in this research is that what factors are significant for spectators from the viewpoints of different age groups and for their attendance at football matches in Iranian professional league. On the other hand, age categories have been compared based on these factors. After exploratory factor analysis, seven factors were recognized as the main components of our questionnaire. Results of the study showed that financial factors and stadium facilities were the most important factors for all three age groups (=21 years, 22-35 years and =35 years) and aggressiveness was the least important factor.

Wakefield and Sloan (1995) and Aminnudini and Lee (2008) expressed the importance of stadium facilities for spectators’ decision to remain at the stadium and their future attendance [5, 16]. Ellahi (2008) mentioned that stadiums in which pro-league matches are held are below the minimum standards required by AFC [29]. Considering the importance of stadium facilities, perhaps one of the reasons why spectators have a low level of attendance in pro-league football matches in Iran is the low quality of stadiums. However, improving stadium facilities is a concern for managers today. Therefore, improving the existent stadium situation may lead to increased number of spectators.

Also, age groups were compared based on the seven factors attained by factor analysis. Results showed no differences in stadium facilities, aggressiveness, financial factors, entertainment, opponent team and team quality among the age groups. Significant differences were found in team affiliation and incentives.

There was more incentive to team affiliation for the spectators below 21 than other age groups. Correia and Esteves (2007) noted that younger spectators value star players (the fantasy of being one of the players, to watch your favorite player) more than the adults do [3]. Loyalty and team affiliation had a prominent role in increasing the attendance of spectators at the stadium [29]. Aminudini and Lee (2008) noted that one of the strongest predictors of spectators' attendance is team quality which is associated with the number of star players, the level of rivalry and the quality of team competition [5]. Prominent players and coaches and clubs' mutual communication with the spectators can lead to increasing team affiliation. Creating a kind of loyalty and a high level of dependence on team is important for managers and marketers. Among 29 variables, 'To taste victory' gained the maximum mean. An unexpected victory may make spectators happy and an unexpected loss may also be very upsetting. Therefore, managers must inform spectators appropriately and keep their expectations of the team at a reasonable level.

Age categories had significant differences in incentives. Under-21-year-old category showed more concern for incentives than other categories. Correia and Esteves (2007) concluded that material incentives and easy conditions are more important to younger spectators who access football [3]. Matthew *et al.* (2003) noted that spectators of minor baseball league showed more importance to cases such as promotion, awards and music. Rodney *et al.* (2007) revealed that promotions such as fireworks, merchandise, club goods, gifts, concerts and side events can be most important to attract spectators [24]. They mentioned that promotions like ticket, beverage and food price discount are not common.

Factors affecting football spectators' attendance in Iran are somewhat similar to other countries. Financial reasons were the major factors influencing the presence of spectators. This shows that financial factors (little expense to access the stadium, cheap tickets and easy ticket acquisition) and stadium facilities (stadium beauty, stadium safety, the comfort of the stadium, drink and food, stadium cleaning and refreshment) were the most important factors for spectators and affected their decision to attend the stadium. With regard to the average income, the cost of a ticket and the cost of access are lower in Iran than other countries. However, spectators showed most sensitivity to financial reasons probably because of the low perceived value of products due to low-quality facilities and low-quality teams. Correia and Esteves (2007) concluded that material reasons were the most determining factors in gaining access to match attendance [3].

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