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Study of the Role of Stadiums Service Quality in Spectators Attracting and Keeping of Country Soccer League One

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Abstract

Today, attracting and retaining the spectators in the stadium is one of the main concerns in professional football and sport industry that could create the high potential for clubs' monetization. The aim of this study was to investigate the spectators' ideas about relationship between service quality in the stadiums and factors affecting attracting and retaining of spectators. The study method was cross-sectional and correlational and the study population included 20,900 people from all spectators of first league of football in the city of Shiraz, Bushehr, Kerman, Rafsanjan, Sirjan, Masjed Soleiman, Abadan and Isfahan in 1394-95. According to Cochran formula, 377 individuals were randomly selected. Measurement tool includes 36-item questionnaire by Sadeghi et al. (2011) that its reliability coefficient was 0.95 and based on Kendall test, content reliability of questionnaire was driven 0/78. To analyze the data, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Pearson correlation and multivariate analysis using multiple regression were used. Results of the study indicate that there is a positive significant relationship between providing services based on the needs and spectators' expectations, improving services, comfort factors and economic factors with attracting and retaining fans(05/0>P). The coefficient of attained relations of the needs and expectations 0/38, service improvement 0/47, social factors 0/44 and economic factors 0/35 was observed respectively. Also, the results of multiple regression for factors affecting attracting and retaining fans indicated that among components, the services improvement with beta coefficient 0/47 and social factors with beta coefficient 0/26have the greatest impact on attracting and retaining fans. Thus, if there are quality of service and comfort factors in the stadium, these factors can lead to attract and retain fans.

Keywords: Quality of Service, Needs and Expectations, Comfort Factors, Economic Factors, the Football Spectators

Introduction:

Sport is one of the most important institutions of modern industrial societies, which most of the population of each country deal with in various forms. Sports in today's changing world have become an internationally motivated industry. Professional clubs around the world use different methods to attract sponsors, advertise merchandise, sell players, sell tickets and sports products, and provide additional services and facilities to provide their resources and expenses. It is clear that improving services to attract and retain spectators is one of the most important sectors of the sports industry. The availability of the most desirable services is the most important part for earning in most of the professional leagues and clubs around the world. In addition to tickets purchase and income generation for clubs and professional league, spectators have indirectly a major contribute to income generation through the attraction of sponsors and the sale of television broadcasting and related services.

Since increasing the number of spectators in the stadiums increase the income level of the clubs, it is important for club officials and football leagues to address the spectators' behaviors, needs and views as one of the most important financial supporters and effective factors for their presence in the stadiums in professional football. In order to attract more spectators, club officials and the league must specify factors such as customer behavior (here the spectators) that may affect the decision of the fans to attend a particular event. Reducing the number of spectators will reduce the club's revenues through ticket sales and they can't afford to pay more for their clubs, and league leaders will have to spend without returning investments. It should also be noted that sport is an exception in the world trade, because it has customers who pay money for watching a product instead of buying or consuming it.

In the field of championship sports, football is undoubtedly the most popular, most spectacular and exciting sport. Football, like any other social phenomenon, has its own particular characteristics and is as influential and effective as other social phenomena. While football has only spread among a small section of the youth of big cities in the past, but today it has become a social phenomenon that male, female, old and young show interest and sensitivity about it all over the world. In our county, football is also the most popular sport. Currently, ticket sales provide little revenue from clubs' revenues, and so the clubs financial burden is more dependent on the government. However, this situation can not last forever, and the major policies of the physical education organization and the football federation are such that the clubs become self-sufficient financially. On the other hand, the great presence of spectators is limited only to important national matches or to the matches of prominent teams of Esteghlal and Perspolis. Many factors such as old stadiums, worn out equipment and facilities, difficult access to transportation, etc. are effective in this situation. Recognizing the factors that affect to football fans attendance will make the clubs and officials of the country to play a comprehensive plan in order to increase fans presence in the stadiums and thus increase the income of the clubs, the football federation and ultimately prosperity for the football of our country.

A greater awareness of why spectators attend a football match provides strategic planning to attract and retain for managers and officials. Spectators are considered to be the most important sports capitals all over the world. Hence, advanced countries use several approaches to sustain and attract spectators. In our county, one of the competitions that enhances the presence of spectators and motivates players, is the national football league. Therefore, practical and effective solutions should be considered to attract many spectators. The present study aims to improve the various aspects of the services provided at the stadium,

which will affect the presence of the spectators. Research shows that here are many factors, such as old stadiums, worn out equipment and facilities, difficult access to transportation, lack of adequate advertising, inappropriate time to play, non-sensitive games, lack of good skills by players and inappropriate planning that affect in reducing the number of spectators. There are many factors such as parking facilities, buffets and shopping malls, proper sanitary facilities, online ticket shopping, proper behavior of security forces, easy transportation, churches in the spectators' area, numerous ticket sales centers, emergency rooms, enough advertising, stadium light, sanitary situation of spectators area, entertainment programs in the stadium before and after the game and between the two halves are considered as services that may be effective in the presence of spectators to the stadium.

It is assumed that these factors have a relative effect on the decision of the spectators to attend to the stadium and watch the football matches. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the views of the spectators about the relationship between the quality of services in the stadiums and the factors affecting the attraction and maintenance of football spectators in the first league of the county.

Methodology

This research is descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of the present study was the spectators of the first league football championship in Fars, Isfahan, Bushehr, Kerman and Khuzestan provinces in 2015-2016. Since the total number was very variable and unreachable, a sample of societies came to the provincial football association and, based on the ticket sales for the last five games of the first group football teams in these provinces, it was found that a total of 20,900 people viewed the matches. The Cochran formula was used in order to choose the sample size and the sample size of spectators based on the Cochran formula with statistical population of 20900 was 377. According to the number of samples of each province, 42 people from the oil industry of Abadan, 45 people from the Masjed Soleiman Petroleum team, 75 people from Fajr Team Fars Province, 4 people from Giti Pasand team, Isfahan Province, 36 people from Iran Javan team, Bushehr province and finally in Kerman province, 72 people from Mes Kerman, 49 people from Mes Rafsanjan and 54 people from Golgohar Sirjan team, were selected.

The tool for gathering and measurement of the present study was a questionnaire with 36 questions from Sadeghi et al. (2011). This questionnaire was closed and answered with a 5-option (I totally agree, I agree, to some extent, I disagree, totally disagree) which 5-4-3-2-1 scores are given to them. This questionnaire examines the factors affecting the attraction of spectators in terms of needs and expectations, service improvement, welfare factors, and economic factors.

One of the items that requires attention and vigilance is the time to distribute and collect the questionnaire. In Iran, the vast majority of fans of a team, watch the matches of their favorite team only when this team hosts in their own city. So the distribution of the questionnaire is related to the hosting conditions. On the other hand, after the end of the game because of the tensions for lost or badly played from a favorite team or a great joy and victory of the favorite team, it's not a good time to distribute questionnaires, since the majority of spectators at the end of the game want to leave the stadium in a hurry, so the

questionnaires were distributed at the time of the arrival of the spectators to the stadium (one to two hours before the start of the match) and there were collected after being answered at the same time. Another issue that was controlled as much as possible was that those spectators who must answer questions should

be from the main fans of the same team or at least those who have had a history of participation in the stadium. While describing briefly the research objectives, the questionnaire was delivered to them and then was collected after completion. The distribution of the questionnaire took place from the 29thweek to the 30th week of the tournament.

In the present study, descriptive statistics indices of tables and charts were used to describe the information. In order to test the hypothesis, Pearson correlation coefficient and stepwise regression were used. The minimum level of significance was P <0.05 and all tests were analyzed by SPSS software version 17.

Results

Table 1 shows the number of respondents according to age variable. The highest frequency of respondents was in the age range of 21 to 30 years with 36.3% and the lowest was in the age range of over 60 years with frequency less than 1%.

Table 1- Distribution of respondents by age variable

Cumulative percent	Percent	Frequency	age category
100%	11%	53	Lower 20
36.3%	36.3%	175	21-30
63.5%	27.2%	131	31-40
78.6%	15.1%	73	41-50
88.4%	9.8%	47	51-60
89%	0.6%	3	Upper 60
100%	100%	482	Total

Since the independent and dependent variables of the present study are at the distance measurement level and the distribution of data is normal, parametric tests have been used to test the hypotheses of the research.The proper test for testing the hypotheses of this research is Pearson correlation. As shown in Table (2), there is a positive and significant correlation between the services provided in the hospitals in line with their needs and expectations, improvement of services, welfare factors, economic factors, and attracting and retaining spectators from the first league of football.

Table 2- Pearson correlation analysis between variables and attracting and maintaining spectators

Variable	Attract and retain spectators	
	Pearson coefficient	Significance
Needs and expectation	0.387*	0.0001
Improvement of services	0.477*	0.0001
Welfare factors	0.445*	0.0001
Economic factors	0.352*	0.0001

*significant relationship at P<0.01

In this section, multiple variable regression analysis is used to explain the effects of independent variables on dependent variables from multi-variable analysis. Correlation between variables does not necessarily mean causal relationship in which no statistical control is performed. Therefore, in order to understand relationship between independent variables on dependent variables casually, statistical control and neutralization of the effects of interruptible and intrusive variables is necessary. In this section, in order to better understand how the dependent variable varies according to the independent variables of multiple regression, in 5 steps, changes in each step are shown in Table (3) for spectators.

As shown in this table, the age of spectators as a control variable is first introduced into the regression equation to neutralize its effect on the dependent variable, i.e., to attract and retain spectators. This variable does not have a meaningful relationship with attracting and retaining spectators. In the second step, the service improvement variable entered the regression equation. This variable has a significant relationship with the attraction and maintenance variable of the spectators. The beta value (standardized regression coefficient) for this variable is 0.47, which indicates that the better the service provided will lead to more attraction and maintenance of the spectators. By entering this variable, more than 22% has been added to the rate of determination (R^2), which indicates that 22% of the changes in the attraction and maintenance of spectators can be explained by this variable. In the third step, the welfare factors variable is introduced into the regression equation. This variable has a meaningful relationship with attracting and retaining the spectators. The beta value (standard regression coefficient) for this variable is 0.26 which shows that as the welfare factors increase in the stadiums, they will affect to the attraction and maintenance of the spectators. By adding this variable, 5% has been added to the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates that 5% of the changes in attraction and maintenance of the spectators can be explained by this variable.

In the fourth step, the economic factors added into the regression equation. This variable does not have a meaningful relationship with attracting and retaining spectators. By adding this variable, no significant change has occurred in the coefficient of determination or corrected coefficient of correlation. Therefore, this variable has no effect on attracting and retaining spectators.

In the fifth step, the services provided in line with the needs and expectations are added to the regression equation. By adding this variable, no significant change has occurred in the coefficient of determination or corrected coefficient of correlation. Therefore, this variable has no effect on attracting and retaining spectators.

Table 3- Multivariate analysis of attracting and maintaining spectators

Model	1		2		3		4		5	
	Beta	**Sig**	**Beta**	**Sig**	**Beta**	**Sig**	**Beta**	**sig**	**Beta**	**sig**
Age	-0.07	0.08	-0.02	0/55	-0.01	0.65	-0.01	0.67	-0.01	0.75
Improving services			0.47	0.0001	0.33	0.0001	0.29	0.0001	0.32	0.0001
Welfare factors					0.26	0.0001	0.26	0.0001	0.25	0.0001
Economic factors							0.08	0.12	0.10	0.06
Needs and expectations									-0.07	0.19
R	0.07		0.48		0.53		0.53		0.53	
Adjusted R Square	0.005		0.23		0.27		0.27		0.28	
F	3.07		70.98		61.02		46.49		37.58	
Sig	0.08		0.0001		0.0001		0.0001		0.0001	

Conclusion and Discussion

Today, football is considered as one of the most popular sports in Iran that because of the presence of spectators in stadiums, it makes a huge income for clubs. In fact, the presence of spectators is one of the key sources of revenue for teams, and clubs are seeking ways to attract more spectators. Based on the fact that the spectators can improve the prosperity in football, the aim of this study is to examine the role of the quality of services in attracting and retaining spectators from the first football league of Iran from the spectators' perspectives. Therefore, the views and ideas of 482 footballs fans in Shiraz, Bushehr, Kerman, Sirjan, Rafsanjan, Masjed Soleiman, Abadan and Isfahan cities were examined by a questionnaire of 36 questions.

The overall findings about the correspondence of the services provided in the stadiums in line with the spectators needs and expectations with attracting and retaining them to the stadiums shows that the average result (3.95) is higher than the average level of 3, so from the perspective of the people surveyed, the services provided, if they are in line with their needs and expectations, can attract more spectators in the stadium. In other words, in the stadiums there are such issues as the presence of a buffet at the stadium, the quality of food and drink, the presence of various stores in the stadium, stimulating the positive emotions of the spectators by the fans leaders, organizing regular and planned competitions, performing competitions in the holidays, tournament playback via television that can attract more spectators to the stadiums. Therefore, if the organizers of the competition and the management of the stadiums provide more facilities for the spectators in the stadiums so that they feel comfortable in the stadium and can enjoy 90 minutes with their comfort to watch their favorite team match, then it is possible to see more spectators in the stadium. One of the important issues that the spectators noted, is the easy and convenient purchase of tickets that this process is conducted in most advanced countries by

purchasing tickets through the internet, and people can easily get a ticket at home without going to the stadiums. In many studies, the issue of easy and convenient ticket purchasing is considered as a major factor in the presence of spectators in the stadiums. This issue was considered by Hansen and Gottir (1989), Marcum and Greenstone (1995), Sherriver and Thymoni (1996), McPherson et al (2000), Lee (200) and Matthias (2001) as one of the most important factors that fans are attracted to football matches and is consistent with the results of this research. Therefore, given the consistency of the research findings with these studies, competition managers should provide conditions for ticket purchases via the internet so that spectators can easily attend stadiums. Won and Whitamura (2006) also consider ticket purchase through the internet as a simple way to buy tickets by spectators, and believe that the spectators spend very little time to purchase tickets so that more spectators go to the stadium (11,12,13,15,17,21).

The overall findings on improving the services of the stadium in attracting and retaining spectators into the stadiums showed that the average score (4.28) is higher than the average (3), so based on the opinions of football spectators, if the services provided at the football stadiums is desirable, this will attract more spectators. In other words, if there are appropriate facilities such as equate parking space, inappropriate quality of entrance doors, auditorium corridors, comfortable seats for the fans, observance of cleanliness of seats, clean and sufficient sanitary facilities, adequate and accessible water cooler, appropriate sound system at the stadiums, scorcher in the stadium, subtle control systems and the presence of a camera system to control, the presence of security agents, the presence of sign and incentive gifts to spectators, then more spectators go to the stadiums. Of course, providing favorable service and beautification of sports stadiums is one of the important things that have attracted most of the richest clubs in the world over the last few years and in many countries they have either rebuilt their old stadiums or established a new stadium.

It is clear that a stadium with advanced equipment and facilities will attract more audiences and more revenue for the clubs. Won and Kitamura (2006) reported that beautiful and well equipped stadiums are important factors in attracting spectators and believe that clubs should have well equipped stadiums or advanced facilities to attract more spectators and improve their economic situation. For example, although the Arsenal Club had a beautiful stadium and facilities, the managers of this club decided to build a new stadium (Emirates Stadium) with more capacities and facilities to attract more spectators and gain more money and finally they reached to their destination.

Therefore, the impact of the stadium with advanced facilities on attracting spectators in most researches such as BabaPour (1998), Khofat Pajouhi (2002), Marcoum and Greenstone (1985), Hansen and Gutier (1989), Zhang and Piz (1995), Shriver and Timothy (1996), Westbury and Shilby (1991), McPeerson and colleagues (2000), Lee (2000), Paeton and Burlington (2004), Koe and Pasteur (2004), Won and Kitamura(2006), On Biscay et al. (2013), Nicholas Theodorakis et al. (2013), Raul Sarano et al. (2015), Foroughi et al. (2016) was confirmed and they reported the existence of advanced equipment at the stadiums to attract more fans, so that most of the world's major clubs have equipped their stadiums to provide more comfort for spectators in the stadium. Therefore, the findings of this study coincide with the results of above researches, which indicate that there is need to provide advanced facilities at the stadiums that managers and officials should pay special attention.

The general findings about the welfare factors presented at the stadium in attracting and retaining spectators into the stadiums show that the average result (4.43) is higher than the average level of 3, so from the perspective of the individuals, there are some welfare factors such as parking, easy-to-buy

tickets, comfortable walking to the stadium, appropriate entry to the stadium, comfortable seats and public transport for the round trip which make the spectators more comfortable and will increase their interest to go to the stadiumsand these have also been reported in some studies such as Zheng et al. (1996), McPreson et al.(2000) and Resid and Stad (2001) and Won and Whitamura (2006). Therefore, the presence of parking and convenient ticket purchase and the availability of comfortable seats and public transportation for round trips can increase the attraction of spectators to the competitions and create more satisfaction for them (12,15, 21, 23).

The general findings about the economic factors presented at the stadium in attracting and retaining spectators into the stadiums show that the average result (4.33) is higher than the average level of 3, so from the perspective of the individuals studied, there are some economic factors such as ticket pricing based on the quality and quantity of the stadium, ticket pricing by considering the household economic problems, ticket pricing based on the type enthusiasts (students, collegians), ticket pricing based on the location of the seat, ticket pricing based on the membership record in the fan club that influence on the attendance of spectators in football matches. Since there is financial crisis that causes economic vulnerability for families, it should be considered in the price of the ticket.

The results of multiple regression analysis show that factors affecting to the attraction and maintenance of spectators at the stadiums, factors of improving services and welfare factors have the greatest impact. Therefore, the better the service provided, the more attracting and retaining the spectators. By entering this variable, more than 22% has been added to the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates that 22% of the changes in the attraction and maintenance of spectators can be explained by this variable. In relation to the welfare factor variable, it was shown that providing more welfare factors at the stadiums would attract and retain more spectators. By adding this variable, 5% has been added to the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates that 5% of the changes in absorption and maintenance of the audience can be explained by this variable.

Therefore, in is necessary to improve the stadiums of the country and to build more equipped stadiums with more advanced facilities to attract more spectators to the stadiums and improve the football situation in the country and in order to reach to spectatorship competitions and increase the attractiveness of the league, stadium deficiencies are needed to be addressed by providing facilities and equipment. Thus, the private sector would have more interest to participate in the clubs and thus it increases the country's football growth and in the near future there will be an advanced football that will be able to rank as the first in Asian football like in previous years.

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