Differentiation of Market Demand of Division II Intercollegiate Women Soccer with Respect to Socialdemographics

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Soccer is a very popular sport among American youth and college students today. Over 1,000 colleges or universities have a varsity soccer program. Among these programs, there are more female teams than males, and the trend of women’s soccer teams on college campuses is still increasing. However, women’s teams usually receive less recognition, have smaller audiences, and obtain fewer perks than men’s teams. Most of these teams are struggling financially due to the lack of income generated from game attendance, which is particularly the case in NCAA Division II and III institutions. Ticket sales are not only the major income producer for intercollegiate sport teams, but also closely related to secondary revenue sources, such as parking, concessions, game programs, and media productions. Thus, it is necessary for athletic administrators to identify target market and understand those variables that directly affect spectator decision to attend game events. Of various game promotion variables, the concept of market demand has received much research attention, which is related to consumer expectations towards the attributes of the core product (Zhang, Lam, & Connaughton, 2003). Fundamentally, market demand is a cluster of pull factors associated with a sport product that an organization can offer to its new and returning consumers (Braunstein, Zhang, Trail, & Gibson, 2005; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Zhang, Pease, Hui, & Michaud, 1995). Although previous market demand studies have primarily focused on professional sports (e.g., Greenstein & Marcum, 1981; Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Zhang et al, 1995; Zhang, Lam, Bennett, & Connaughton, 2003), a conceptual framework of market demand for studying consumer behavior of intercollegiate women’s soccer games was recently developed by Zhang et al. (2009). Seven factors were proposed, tested, and found to be predictive of game attendance: Game Attractiveness, Economic Consideration, Event Promotion, Event Convenience, Family Activity, Institution Affiliation, and Soccer Epitome.

Segmenting spectators according to sociodemographics (i.e., state of being) is another commonly adopted approach to study consumers in clusters. Acknowledging the differences in consumer’s backgrounds and consumption frequencies, and grouping consumers accordingly into market segments are primary steps in the marketing process. Previous studies revealed that to a varying extent, sociodemographic backgrounds of spectators were related to their game consumption levels although the relationships between sociodemographic variables and game attendance were usually examined by calculating correlation coefficients or comparing the means directly (Baade & Tiehen, 1990; Noll, 1991; Simmons Market Research Bureau, 2000). However, to retain current spectators and attract new consumers through targeting population segments, studying sociodemographic variables alone are inadequate and they need to be studied with other marketing variables on how they function together to elevate attendance frequencies (Williamson, Zhang, Pease, & Gaa, 2003). More vital information, such as where, why, and how this relationships exist were consistently missing in previous studies. It is necessary to examine the possibility that there are some controllable marketing variables, such as market demand factors, that mediate the relationship between sociodemographic variables and game consumption (Zhang et al., 1995; Zhang, Smith, Pease, & Mahar, 1996).

According to Mullin Hardy, and Sutton (2007) and Pitts and Stotlar (2002), sociodemographics and psychographics are two of the most constructive segmentation approaches in sport marketing studies. Thus, understanding the relationships between sociodemographic variables and market demand factors is necessary.

The purpose of this study was to differentiate market demand factors of Division II intercollegiate women soccer events with respect to socialdemographic variables. A questionnaire was formulated that contained sociodemographic variables and the Scale of Market Demand for Soccer (SMDs) with seven factors (Game Attractiveness, Economic Consideration, Event Promotion, Event Convenience, Family Activity, Institution Affiliation, and Soccer Epitome), which was adopted from Zhang et al. (2009). Research participants (N = 255) were spectators at six NCAA Division II women’s soccer game events that took place on three college/university campuses. The questionnaire was administered before the start of each game. MANOVA and discriminant function analyses revealed
that market demand factors were significantly related to gender ($\Lambda = .914; p = .019$), ethnicity ($\Lambda = .763; p = .008$), marital status ($\Lambda = .528; p = .000$), and occupation ($\Lambda = .552; p = .000$). Regression analyses further revealed that to a varying extent, market demand factors were significantly ($p < .05$) related to age, household size, income level, and number of female children in the family. Among the market demand factors, Family Activity and Event Promotion were two of the most noticeable factors that were differentiated by sociodemographic variables.

These research findings indicated that when promoting Division II women’s soccer game events, athletic administrators need to focus on these market demand factors, particularly those variables related to Family Activity and Event Promotion. To do so, differences in consumer demands due to their socialdemographic backgrounds should be taken into consideration in an effort to attain greater marketing effectiveness in attracting and retaining spectators. Findings of this study have also provided athletic administrators and marketers with useful marketing information to determine target markets of women’s soccer events, analyze market situation and environment, and develop an effectual marketing mix, namely product, place, price, and promotion.