Eco-Sustainability Practices or Team Performance in the NBA: Which Attracts Fans?

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An under-evaluated aspect of the sporting industry pertains to eco-sustainable practices of large multi-use facilities. According to the U.S. Travel Association, over 75% of adults in the U.S. believe they are eco-conscious (U.S. Travel Association, 2010). Due to the growing consumer awareness of eco-sustainability measures in the sport industry examination into the preferences of sports fans is merited. Specifically, this research will ascertain whether fans are solely motivated to attend games based on a team’s performance, or if eco-sustainability initiatives influence their decision to frequent these venues.

This study utilized an online survey containing 11 demographic questions and 61 pertaining to eco-sustainability practices. Questions concentrated on aspects of environmental preservation, protection, and concern. Of the major sports leagues, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has taken notice of the importance of eco-sustainability as three arenas have recently achieved LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (Brinkmann, 2009; Koch, 2010; Muret, 2009). To determine whether these practices are important to individuals outside of the organization, the respondents were presented with topics regarding current NBA eco-sustainability performance, personal motivations for eco-sustainability, and travel motivations. The survey was distributed electronically to residents residing in seven pre-determined cities: Salt Lake City, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Denver. The cities were selected based upon two characteristics: (a) each municipality is home to an NBA team and (b) geographic location, allowing for a general consensus the states were considered part of the southwest region of the U.S. Furthermore, these destinations were selected as they maintain the highest populations in their respective states. Due to the geographic size of Texas, three locations were selected in this state in an effort to achieve a more representative sample.

Data analysis incorporated ANOVA, Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), and mean variable calculation for demographic questions. ANOVA analysis allowed for the segmentation of respondents based upon independent variables, such as geographic location, age, and income. Independent variables were statistically analyzed in comparison with the dependent variables. The dependent variables included eco-sustainability related questions. The survey utilized a series of questions pertaining to areas of significant importance regarding eco-sustainability practices and the subsequent performance of these aspects in NBA arenas. Results from these questions allowed for comparison based on an Importance Performance Analysis (IPA).

Implications from this study were generated primarily through ANOVA analysis, and results garnered through the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA). ANOVA analysis demonstrated age groups were not influenced to attend based solely on the record of a team. For example, focusing marketing efforts on specific age segments during periods of high losses would not be beneficial in increasing attendance. However, the IPA demonstrated fans desire an incentive based recycling program. Implementing such an initiative may result in higher recycling rates at NBA arenas, and would provide financial benefits to the venue while preserving the environment. Respondents indicated a desire for more convenient placement of recycling bins, thus, managers should identify high foot traffic areas of arenas and provide ample containers for recyclable products. This information is valuable to sport marketers and promoters as it demonstrates that fans may be persuaded to attend a game if ancillary motivators such as eco-sustainable practice are practiced by the sport organization. Other pertinent results will be provided in this poster presentation.