Football Fans and Finances: How Fan Passion Influences Price Sensitivity

Blake Gardner, Samford University
Brooks Hanrahan, Samford University
Caroline Novkov, Samford University
Darin W. White (Advisor), Samford University

The global sports industry is in a constant state of evolution. As consumer interests and preferences change, sports properties must find new and innovative ways to reach and retain fans that will be passionate and provide support, financially and otherwise. Furthermore, within any given fan base, people show varying levels of support for their team by purchasing tickets and merchandise, engaging with other fans on social media and other online forums, and following team news. Understanding the stratified nature of a fan group’s various levels of fan engagement is key to a sports property’s development of a promotion, marketing, and pricing strategy. It stands to reason that highly engaged fans will be more inclined to purchase tickets, jerseys, and other merchandise no matter the cost, assuming a relatively reasonable cost range for the object. However, there is lack of research that discusses the quantifiable effect that fan engagement, either high or low, has on an individual’s price sensitivity as it relates to these objects. In pursuing this object of study, this study strives to lay a foundation for research related to this particular relationship and give preliminary answers to these questions. Specifically, the objective of this study is to determine to what extent, if any, fan engagement affects the price sensitivity of fans as it relates to ticket pricing.

This study’s central hypothesis was that there exists an inverse relationship between fan engagement and price sensitivity. Furthermore, this study delves deeper into the nature of fan engagement and how price sensitivity affects various aspects of the former. The three subcategories discussed specifically are performance tolerance, pro-social behavior, and management cooperation. Initial thought was that each separate aspect of fan engagement is engaged in an inverse relationship with price sensitivity as well and, additionally, that performance tolerance would demonstrate the strongest negative correlation to price sensitivity. The methodology was rather straightforward. The primary means of data collection was survey with questions designed to measure each participant’s level of fan engagement as it related to his/her favorite college or professional football team. Over the course of several weeks in November and December of 2014, 921 credible responses were gathered, which formed the basis for data collection and hypothesis verification.

The data revealed an inverse correlation between total fan engagement and price sensitivity, supporting the primary hypothesis. While each of the subcategories additionally demonstrated this negative relationship, pro-social behavior had a stronger impact on price sensitivity than did performance tolerance, which was contrary to that specific initial hypothesis. Regardless, the results of this study provide a positive initial framework for research on the relationship between fan engagement and price sensitivity, which could have a notable impact on sports properties’ marketing and pricing strategies.