Effects of Ticket Donation on the Consumer Behavior and Attitude of Sport Fans

Sarah Frazier, Cleveland State University
Eddie Lam, Cleveland State University

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Various studies have examined the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumer behavior for various businesses. CSR can be defined as the “integration of business operations and values whereby the interests of . . . investors, customers, employees, the community and the environment are reflected in the company’s policies and actions” (“Corporate Social,” 2015). Within professional sports, community relations departments are typically responsible for implementing CSR programs; however, very little is known about the economic benefits of community relations programs since many are considered services to benefit the population without seeking to make a profit. Cobourn (2014) studied four professional sport teams in Australia to determine the best types of outreach strategies. Results showed that understanding the community’s needs through involvement in planning is important.

It is also important to have a way to measure the effects of community programs so that there is an understanding of the purpose of the outreach initiatives (Cobourn, 2014). Babiak and Wolfe (2009) interviewed professionals from the four major leagues: baseball, basketball, football, and hockey. They found that the best way to create CSR initiatives was to evaluate the needs of stakeholders (e.g., community members) and determine the amount of resources available. The researchers proposed that CSR programs can benefit society while also contributing to an organization’s profit goals (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Irwin, Lachowetz, Cornwell, and Clark (2003) examined the attitudes and future behaviors based on those attitudes of people affected by cause-related marketing (a type of marketing that responds to the increasing desire of CSR fulfillment) mixed with sport sponsorship. The researchers found that cause-related marketing by FedEx via sports affected people’s attitudes and found that it could potentially affect their consumer behaviors (Irwin et al., 2003).

In Northeast Ohio, many professional sports teams have a community relations department. This department is designed to create outreach initiatives for athletes and employees, to provide opportunities for local community groups to fundraise, and to be a source of initiatives targeted at community growth and population improvement through social service. The purpose of this study was to develop a survey to quantify beliefs, attitudes, and consumer behavioral intent of people affected by community relations programs and to understand any differences that may exist in these areas among different groups of participants. Specifically, this study aimed at investigating the effects of CSR through a community relations department, and the effects of ticket donation on the consumer behavior and attitude of sport fans.

The professional team under investigation receives and fulfills ticket donation requests from various people and organizations in Northeast Ohio for fundraising purposes that are typically driven by a specific cause. All recipient information and donations are tracked through a computer system. By utilizing the database of recipients, a survey link accompanied by information regarding the study was emailed to all eligible participants. The database of donation recipients, who are the target population, exists within the team’s server. Delimitations of this study include individuals whose donation requests were rejected. For example, the team will not donate to an individual seeking to raise money for events not aligned with charitable efforts, and any entity that is outside of the state of Ohio. E-mails were sent out to 432 ticket donation recipients (TDR) in the database to invite them to participate in the study. One hundred and sixty respondents (37%) completed the survey. These participants included 23% males and 77% females. The majority of the participants (42.5%) were between 35 and 44 years old, and 88.7% of them had at least completed high school. Most of the respondents (95.5%) were Caucasians, and only 2.6% were African Americans, and the majority of them (78.8%) had an income of $50,000 or higher.

The 19-item measuring instrument used for this study was modified from Irwin et al. (2003), Walker and Kent (2009), and the Cleveland Cavaliers Fan Survey (Lam, 2009). Item responses are based on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree, 3 = Neutral, and 5 = Strongly Agree). The survey also included a section on demographic variables. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to examine the factor structure of the scale. The
number of factors was identified by the alpha extraction (Kaiser & Caffrey, 1965) and the promax rotation (Hendrickson & White, 1964). The criteria for retaining the factors were based on the eigenvalue equal to or greater than 1.0 (Guttman, 1954) while comparing to the outcome of the scree test (Cattell, 1966). Results of the EFA indicated that two items (“The donation to my cause improves my impression of the organization” and “I am more likely to tell my friends about the organization following their donation”) loaded on more than one factor and they were removed. Next, the same procedure in factor analysis was utilized to examine the 17-item scale. Without confining the number of factors, the alpha extraction identified three factors: Team Identification (6 items), Community Relations (7 items), and Donation Effect (4 items). All items were distributed across the three factors with a coefficient of .42 or higher without double loading. These factors explained 58.90% of the total variance. The alpha reliability coefficients of these three factors were .753, .926, and .874, respectively. This suggested that all items under each factor were reliable in estimating their respective construct (Cronbach, 1951).

A one-way MANOVA was used to examine the effects of the demographic variables on the combined mean vector of scores of the three dependent variables (i.e., Team Identification, Community Relations, and Donation Effect). Results of the MANOVA analyses showed no significant (p > .05) differences for gender (Wilks' Lambda = .984, p = .497), age (Wilks' Lambda = .913, p = .330), or household income (Wilks' Lambda = .875, p = .111). The purpose of the MANOVA analysis was to provide an overall assessment of the three aforementioned variables as a group; however, the interest of this study was more on each individual factor. In this regard, post hoc univariate ANOVAs revealed that there were significant differences in Donation Effect among participants with different household incomes (F = 3.661, p = .007). Specifically, the higher the income levels of the participants, the higher their scores in Donation Effect (i.e., families with higher income levels were more likely to connect to the team by attending more games and purchasing more team merchandise).

A majority of respondents (61.9%) reported that they would be more willing to purchase merchandise following their donation, which agrees with prior research that showed more favorable purchasing intentions after understanding the CSR level of the team or organization (Ross et al., 1992; Walker & Kent, 2009). For example, Walker and Kent (2009) found that people are more likely to spread positive information about an organization following a CSR program. The significant difference existed between income groups of individuals making less than $25,000 and $100,000 or greater. The factor involved several consumer behavior questions. It is reasonable to assume that there would be a difference in consumer behaviors between individuals with different income levels. The marketing department of the organization can use this information to form a basis for the economic effect of the ticket donations and to do further research to determine how best to market consumption items to different income groups. Nevertheless, this study included a small sample (N = 160) from a minor league team, further research is necessary to utilize a larger sample and to examine the effects of ticket donations from major league sports.