



AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF PRICE AND PROMOTIONAL MARKETING FACTORS IN ALBANIAN FOOTBALL MARKET

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Abstract

Nowadays, markets and sports organizations aim through various marketing strategies to keep customers and their loyalty for guarantee the success which is a challenge in itself. Football clubs in Albania have recently started to embrace marketing strategies in particular the mix marketing and its variables. Two of the four mix marketing variables are price and promotion as the important part of this study. Through these variables, marketers continually try to influence the behavior of fans towards their team. This study purpose to examine price and promotion related marketing factors in the Albanian football market, using a national representative sample of football fans (N=800). We use exploratory factor analysis to analyze these factors and test constructs that define attendance behavior. The analysis results in three main factors, two of which are the typical price and promotion, and another factor identified as atmosphere, which combines context to promotional factors. Using MANOVA, we identify that only the atmosphere factor shows significant differences between age groups, and participation or not in an organized football group (ultras or normal fans). Further, there was no significant difference in the influence of these factors between different frequencies of attendance in the stadium.

Keywords: Albania, football, marketing, price, promotion



INTRODUCTION

In the sport industry and in particular in football, marketers and managers are under constant pressure from the challenges for increasing incomes of the organizations they represent (Mihai, 2013). To guarantee a successful football marketing, marketers are constantly conducting in-depth research for customers and clients by recognizing and understanding their needs, motivations and interests, which has to do with the product or service they want to promote (Attia et al., 2018).

A well-conceived sports marketing should usually be adapted with characteristics and factors of the 4Ps based on the specific market (Fullerton & Merz, 2008). The results of an effective marketing strategy are verified when the organization is involved in the satisfaction of their customers and aims to establish long-term relationship, so creating high income for the organization and stakeholders. Recently with the increase of investments in sport industry, the need to study and practice the tools of mix marketing has been materialized also in Albania, aiming to improve interaction with football fans. In Albania, two important tools of the mix marketing, price and promotion are playing an important role in the marketing strategies of the football clubs. The aim of this study is to understand how fans are influenced by these factors in the Albania league “Kategoria Superiore”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of mix marketing is the same as the job of a pastry chef in preparing a cake, using the right portions and ingredients according on the taste of the desert you want to prepare (Goi, 2009). According to the marketing theory, marketers are the mixers of ingredients that aim to create satisfaction and market demand (Meenaghan, 1983). To build trust and engagement to have a positive effect in organizations, they should evaluate mix marketing performance (Mintz & Currim, 2015). When business expectations are not in line with the objectives, marketers can adjust the strategy through the mix marketing variables.

In theory, traditional marketing does not differ from sports marketing, but in practice the difference between them is significant and from this perspective mix marketing is considered the “heart of the sport market” (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Mix marketing variables are used by sports marketers in the same way as in other businesses for two reasons: first to continue the permanence in the sector and secondly to be successful (Mihai, 2013). The price as the second variable in the mix marketing, which changes constantly must consider the changes that occur in different marketing environments, including football. The link between satisfaction and perceived value is a constant theme in the sport service and management literature in particular (Calabuig et al, 2014). The literature shows that consumers do not always remember the current

prices of products (Zeithaml, 1988) and the price awareness varies between demographic groups.

Sports and in particular football, have a wide range of products like the broadcasting rights, buying or selling players, tickets and subscriptions, sponsorship, stadiums services etc., where price determination is undoubtedly a challenge in itself. Marketers must implement fixed prices in order to maximize profits but their evaluation should take into account club's performance (Body & Boyd, 1998). In order to make it possible for as many people as possible to get acquainted with the product, it is necessary to invest on its promotion. One of the basic principles of a successful promotion is to improve everything related to the product. Promotion is the fourth variable of mix marketing, where through various activities promotes the value of the game of football. Indeed, well-chosen and professionally selected promotional activities, in line with the values and the club's brand, have a greater impact on the fans (Giroux et al., 2017). With the growing participation of fans in football activities, there is a need also to improve the infrastructure and complementary services in football stadiums in Albania. Recently, a considerable number of new construction sites are building football stadiums, which are also largely supported by the government. In this case, it would be interesting to understand the current situation among football clubs in regard to their marketing strategies, and in particular the price and promotion, thus trying to improve their future strategies. In addition, the capacity for offering a high-quality product at a fair price remains crucial for sports organizations (Biscaia et al, 2013). For this reason, we will try to briefly explain the two mix marketing variables, price and promotion as follows.

To make the football product attractive to their fans, marketers must be able to set the right price. Ticket pricing is a vital issue for football fans, because providing a high-quality product at a fair price contributes to the profits of an organization (Bei & Chiao, 2001). Ticket pricing requires analysis and reflection so that the club-fan relationship will be as harmonious as possible, stimulating everyone to come to the stadium as often as possible to support their club. Generally, with the construction of new stadiums the club – fans balance has often been upset. This problem has increased significantly in the last years through the main football championship in European countries, taking also into account the economic situation, which has caused dissatisfaction among fans (Ceramani, 2016).

In an analysis of the initial ticket prices at the NFL, it was found that factors included the success of the team, organization's revenue, public relations and market tolerance have been used by individual team in pricing (Drayer et al, 2012). Also, last year's performance, income, moving to a new stadium and population numbers are important factors influencing the setting prices for professional sports leagues (Rishe & Modello, 2004). The same strategy is applied for

the subscriptions pricing sales, even their sales began before the season start officially. Recently, clubs are trying to segment their fans based on age and status, making it possible adjusting and offering discounts for students, unemployed, over 65 and family members (Nuef & Fiscer, 2013).

Promotion is the fourth element in mix marketing, were through various activities marketers promote the value of the product related with game of football. Also, football clubs are becoming more and more involved in various promotional strategies in an effort to increase the number of their fans and new partners. Football industry as the most popular sport in the world has a consolidated link in the industry of media and a detailed strategy for their promotional campaign. Through various channels marketers are constantly looking to communicate frequently and directly with fans considering the new technological changes. Broadcasting media continues to provide positives results for football clubs, communicating and advertising at the same time with a large audience, making the television the most important partner (Kozielski et al., 2017). Another important channel for promoting the sports event is the radio, where marketers can send the messages to the fans and listeners during all the day and week mainly in the metropolitan cities (Yan & Eckman, 2009).

Internet and social media have changed all the businesses activities and the way for communicating and promoting with consumers and their customers. Social media offers an advantage for sport marketers to increase the engagement and involvement of their fans by creating new interactive experiences such as live connections from the stadiums before and after the match, photos and videos from the training centers and the conversations between players and coaches, activities that have previously been impossible for fans (Meng et al, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct the study, a questionnaire was created based on the price and promotion marketing factors from the literature. The questionnaire was self-designed based on typical marketing variables found in the literature and based on the Albanian context of football (i.e. the football market is quite basic, and exist no such offers that combine the price of the ticket or subscription with consumption of other football related goods). Thus, the questionnaire includes questions that might represent factors which are more relevant to Albanian football fans. Questions capturing price and promotion marketing factors were composed in a five-point Likert scale (one = not important to five = very important). The questionnaire also included a section of demographic and general questions (such as favorite team etc.).

To have a full representation of all categories of football fans, the questionnaire conduction was distributed across 12 football matches. Pre-testing was conducted with some university students to make sure the questions were clear and captured the relevant factors.

The pre-testing included also several football club associates, working in managerial (preferably marketing department) position. Although this process included only associates of the capital city football clubs, their input was extremely valuable in adapting the questions, and deciding on the inclusion of the variables.

Further, the input of football club associates on the questionnaire logistics was essential to the timely conduction of the questionnaire. Typically, fans take their seat on the stadium about 30 minutes before the match, while on derbies they come sometime earlier. Observations during the piloting of the questionnaire showed that the timing was right. The piloting was conducted during a championship match. Although no important changes were made, small changes and fine-tunings resulted in an improved questionnaire and right after it was validated and ready for conduction.

The conduction of the questionnaire resulted in a sample of 800 interviews. Sadly enough, the presence of women in Albanian stadiums is particularly low, which also impacts the composition of the sample. About 96% of the sample is male and only 4% is female (32 observations). The absence of women is more evident in the regions, in many of which interviewers declared no women attended the match. To contextualize this, out of 32 women interviewed, 22 were interviewed in Tirana (capital) stadiums. The conditions of the stadiums, the vulgarity of the fans, and socio-economic factors that marginalize women in Albania are some of the factors that might very well contribute in this situation.

The sample is divided in six age categories: 18 – 24 y.o. (27%); 25 – 34 y.o. (24%); 35 – 44 y.o. (12%); 45 – 54 y.o. (16%); 55 – 64 y.o. (16%); 65 y.o. and over (5%) – which show younger group ages to be more present at football stadiums. Only 3% of the sample declared not being a football fan of a particular team, but rather enjoying the match just for the play. On the other hand, 25% of the sample were part of an organized football fan group (ultras). Looking further at attendance, 30% of the sample declare to attend every match (or almost every match); 33% to usually attend matches (2 - 3 times per month); 21% to sometimes attend matches (once a month); while 16% to rarely attend matches (once in two months or less).

Using exploratory factor analysis, the study aims to identify constructs which belong to price and promotion marketing factors. Through identifying such factors, the study will serve as a tool to improve attendance of football fans in the stadium, with the goal of developing and empowering the Albanian football market. The exploratory factor analysis serves as a method to summarize the information contained in a number of primary variables into composite dimensions which express and underline the original variables information (Hair et al., 2018). Precisely, in line with the literature, exploratory factor analysis will be used in analyzing the price and promotion marketing factors that influence fan's attendance.

To explore possible differences between age groups, organized and non-organized football fans, and different stadium attendance groups, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is employed. To ensure proper conduction of MANOVA Box test was conducted between groups, as in all cases the ration of the largest groups is more than 1.5. The test results concluded the equality of variance between groups selected.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the sample's descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of the variables used to test price and promotion marketing factors. To create a better understanding of the variable, additional hints were included in the questionnaire. I.e. "informal promotion of the match" includes the level of discussion of the match between friends and relatives, or other close circles; "the anthem, uniform, flag, logo" includes the fan's joy when singing the anthem, wearing the club's uniform, holding the flag or representing the logo; "entertainment in the stadium" includes songs before the star of the match, or during the break, and other entertainment activities; "condition of the stadium" includes the cleanness of the stadium, or the condition of the seat – in the Albanian context this is especially important because of the bad condition of many stadiums, so when authorities improve condition they promote this largely; "various extra promotional packages during the match" includes the possibility of having extra assortments when watching the match included in the ticket (such as drinks or air horns to cheer) – as the football club associates confirmed, this extra promotional packages even though popular in consolidated football markets, are rarely used in Albania; "price of tickets for special groups" includes the price of ticket for organized football fans (ultras) or other categories, such as students etc. Further, security is mostly a problem in Albanian stadiums, and due to budgetary issues not many stadiums provide full security, which has been of course a source of many unpleasant incidents – so when providing full security, clubs promote this quite heavily. In this case "level of security in the stadium" includes a promotional dimension besides the traditional facility dimension (as does the condition of the stadium).

Looking closely at the mean values of these variables, some primary trends are observed. The highest value is "the anthem, uniform, flag, logo" (4.00), closely followed by "level of security in the stadium" (3.95), and "condition of the stadium" (3.93). The first one is very much related to the atmosphere and the sense of belonging to the team, while the other two relate to the condition of the facility, and as described above, due to the Albanian context, seem quite important promotional characteristics.

The lowest values are "price of annual subscription" (1.55), closely followed by "club sponsors" (1.71) and "price of ticket for special groups" (1.75). These low scores are a result of

the football market reality. Albanian football fans rarely buy annual subscriptions to matches, and on the supply side there is not much promotion going on (such as little information of little incentives to why fans should buy an annual subscription. In the general question section two questions were asked to provide an understanding of the buying behaviors of fans: the first one asked about the time when they bought the ticket; the second asked about the place they bought the ticket. About 80% of the sample bought the ticket the very same day the match was scheduled (18% bought it 2-3 days before and only 2% bought it 4 or more days before the match); while 88% of the sample bought the tickets in the stadium (only 2% bought tickets online). Keeping this in mind, the occurrence of these low values makes quite some sense.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev</i>
Promotion of the match in TV	2.42	1.42
Promotion of the match in Radio	1.80	1.16
Promotion of the match in internet	2.46	1.49
Newsfeeds about the match	2.92	1.47
Informal promotion of the match	2.97	1.48
The anthem, uniform, flag, logo	4.00	1.39
Entertainment in the stadium	3.58	1.54
Condition of the stadium	3.93	1.48
Level of security in the stadium	3.95	1.50
Price of the ticket	2.53	1.59
Price of the annual subscription	1.55	1.14
Price of the ticket for special groups	1.75	1.31
Various extra promotional packages during the match	1.81	1.32

Using the Kaiser's criteria, only the factors having latent roots or eigenvalues greater than 1 are considered significant. The results based on this criterion yield three factors. The total variance explained by these three factors is 55.61%. According to Hair et al. (2018) is not uncommon to consider a solution that accounts for 60 percent of the total variance as satisfactory, and in some instances even less. Considering also the percentage each factor explains (the first factor explains 21.31%, the second 17.42% and the third 16.88%) being at quite adequate level, three factors will be analyzed during the study.

The KMO values is 0.75, above the cut-off point of 0.5, showing sampling adequacy and suitability for EFA. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows significance at $p < .01$, which confirms that our sample has patterned relationships. To extract the factors, varimax rotation method is used. Table 2 displays the rotated factor loadings. Testing for internal consistency of the factor, the Cronbach's alpha for the first factor is 0.79, for the second factor is 0.70 and for the third factor is 0.59. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 displays an adequate level of internal consistency, thus only the third factor being less than 0.7 shows moderate internal inconsistency. The 3 resulted factors were labeled as: Promotion (Factor 1), Atmosphere (Factor 2), Price (Factor 3).

The *promotion* factor is composed of variables consisting in types of marketing communication used to inform football fans about the football match – increasing awareness and creating general interest in the event. The *atmosphere* factor is composed of indirect promotional variables and environmental variables (as explained in the beginning of the section, having promotional impact). The atmosphere is one of the most important promotional factors in football marketing, which disseminated properly creates the most interest in a football match, especially in Albania. The *price* factor is composed not only of the traditional payment per ticket, but also annual subscription fees, price of ticket for special groups and additional extras included in the tickets.

Table 2: Rotated factor loading matrix

	<i>Factor 1</i> <i>Promotion</i>	<i>Factor 2</i> <i>Atmosphere</i>	<i>Factor 3</i> <i>Price</i>
Promotion of the match in TV	0.779		
Promotion of the match in Radio	0.600		
Promotion of the math in internet	0.716		
Newsfeeds about the match	0.719		
Informal promotion of the match	0.711		
The anthem, uniform, flag, logo		0.599	
Entertainment in the stadium		0.619	
Condition of the stadium		0.804	
Level of security in the stadium		0.771	
Price of the ticket			0.546
Price of the annual subscription			0.782
Price of the ticket for special groups			0.806
Various extra promotional packages during the match			0.528

The results show no particular pattern of dominance of one factor – no one factor displays significantly higher loadings than the other. Out of promotional factors influencing attendance (Factor 1), promotion of the match in TV displays the highest coefficient, hence the strongest effect, followed closely by the newsfeeds about the match (which mostly occur in TV). Although other variables have a high loading as well (except the promotion of the match in the Radio), it is quite unexpected to detect a strong promotional influence of traditional media, such as TV, in a time when the internet (especially social media) is having the lead in the promoting events. Promotion through internet (including websites and social media) has a slightly lower coefficient than newsfeeds about the match. One possible explanation is the ever-growing trend of individuals consuming news from social media, which as Bergström and Belfrage (2018) show, social network sites are becoming essential to how people experience news. Thus, most consider social media as a news channel.

Out of atmosphere factors influencing attendance, condition of the stadium is the most important one, followed by level of security in the stadium. As previously outlined and assumed, these factors are very important in the attendance of the stadiums, and if they don't become a norm they will continue to be, especially in the regions of Albania. Composed also of entertainment promotional characteristics, the atmosphere factor is important in influencing the fan's attendance, one might even claim even essential in the current situation of the football market in Albania.

The price marketing factor influencing attendance shows an interesting pattern. The price of the ticket has a low coefficient, being not the most important of the variables, while price of the ticket for special groups is the most important. There are some possible claims to these results. Initially, the ticket price is quite low and does not constitute of a key factor in the decision-making of attending a match. As explained, about 80% of the sample bought the ticket the very same day the match was scheduled; while 88% of the sample bought the tickets in the stadium. This pattern shows a clear *casual* buying behavior of tickets and explains the low influence of the ticket price. In this case, fans are mostly influenced by other aspects of the pricing strategy, such as prices for special group (i.e. ultras) or annual subscription. The variable coefficient supports this particular finding, the pricing strategies should be focused on annual subscriptions and prices for special groups rather than the individual price ticket. Extras to the ticket, not being really available are not very well perceived by fans, loading the lowest coefficient.

Further analysis includes between groups differences of factors, considering three important variables: age, participation in an organized fan club (ultras) and frequency of attendance in the stadium. Performing MANOVA between age groups, the results show strong

statistical significance (Wilks' lambda 0.902, F 5.574) at the .00 level on all criteria, indicating that the yielded factors differ across age groups. ANOVA is then used to explore these differences. The results presented in Table 3 show that age-differences are significant for the *atmosphere* ($p < 0.05$) and *price* ($p < 0.038$) factors, while there appear no significant differences for *promotional* factors.

From the existing differences it is quite interesting to notice that older ages are more influenced by the atmosphere (mostly by the condition of the stadium and the security). This result, somehow obvious, might be much valuable in attracting even older ages in Albanian stadiums. Although there are statistically significant differences in the price factor, looking through the means between age groups, no particular pattern can be observed, while some isolated groups are more influenced than others.

Table 3: Univariate comparisons of factors by age groups

	Overall	18 - 24 yr	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65+	F	P
Promotion	2.51	2.53	2.47	2.43	2.56	2.51	2.67	0.469	0.800
Atmosphere	3.86	3.65	3.53	3.93	4.22	4.19	4.28	13.097	0.000
Price	1.91	1.95	2.01	1.74	1.74	2.01	1.87	2.367	0.038

Further, we explore differences between fans that are part of an organized group (ultras) and those who are not. Performing MANOVA between groups, the results show strong statistical significance (Wilks' lambda 0.944, F 15.836) at the .00 level on all criteria, indicating that the factors differ across groups. Performing ANOVA to discover these differences, results are presented in Table 4. Actually, the results show that only in one out of three factors there are significant differences between these groups – the *atmosphere* has less influence on those fans who are part of group. This is quite normal, as ultras groups are careless of security, rather they strive in unsecure stadiums, while they don't care much (relatively to the other group) about the condition of the stadium.

Table 4: Univariate comparisons of factors by participation in an organized fan club

	Overall	Part of a group	Not part of a group	F	p
Promotion	2.51	2.55	2.50	0.267	0.606
Atmosphere	3.86	3.46	4.00	38.566	0.000
Price	1.91	1.99	1.88	2.249	0.134

Lastly, we explore differences between attendance frequency. As described we included four groups. MANOVA between groups, the results show weak statistical significance (Wilks' lambda 0.983, F 1.503) at the .141 level on all criteria, indicating that the factors do not differ across these group. Therefore, there are no significant differences of marketing factors in between groups attending matches at different frequencies (always, often, occasionally and rarely). This result is quite surprising, given the assumption that fans who attend matches more often are expected to be more influenced by promotion, atmosphere and price.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the price and promotion marketing factors in the Albanian football market is essential at this (still) early stage of the market. Football clubs are attempting to develop and acquire a more market-oriented business approach, rather than a basic semi-private and semi-public approach. Of course, to do this they need to understand the factors that influence the market. Through an exploratory factor analysis, 13 items resulted in measuring three factors, namely: price, atmosphere and promotion. Out of the three, there is no clear factor that prevails as the most important, however there is a certain inclination of the atmosphere items as influencing factors.

The price of Albanian tickets is quite low (considering of course average income), and the decision to buy a ticket appears quite a spontaneous one. Considering the results of the price factor, targeting special groups and endorsing annual subscriptions would provide a good strategy for Albanian football clubs. The atmosphere appears as an influential factor for football attendance. As explained, the situation of stadiums in Albania is fairly dramatic, and promoting good atmosphere, specifically immaculate condition of the stadium and security, will consist in a robust strategy for increasing football attendance. Further, all channels of promotion show influence in attendance, however it is evident that classic TV and social media news are slightly more effective.

The analysis also considered differences between certain relevant groups. Different effects on age groups was only evident for the atmosphere factor, as older ages are more concerned (rightfully so) with a good stadium ambiance, and most likely a secure one. Following age groups, the same difference was only found in the atmosphere factor even for two groups, namely ultras and regular fans. In this case, the atmosphere has more effect on regular fans. No significant differences were found between groups attending matches at different frequencies, as the factors have the same impact event on those who always attend a match and those who rarely do so.

As outlined in the methodology section, this study includes active football fans – those fans who attend their team matches from the stadium. Despite the frequency of attendance, their consumption behavior differs from those who do not attend matches at all, but rather watch them on TV or other devices. The limitation of this study is that it does not include the fans who do not attend stadiums at all, thus not accounting for their sporting consumption and behavior. We are cognizant that further studies should aim to assess marketing factors in the segment of fans who do not attend stadiums, as they are also an important part to draw robust conclusions on the overall situation.

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