

## **ON-FIELD SPORTS SPECTATORSHIP AND PATRONAGE: A SOCIOLOGICAL X-RAY OF ITS DETERMINANTS FOR EFFECTIVE SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The critical and sociological insight on the on-field sports spectatorship and patronage in any society is important in sport studies especially for effective sports management. The on-field sports spectatorship and patronage can be influenced by diverse societal forces or determinants such as spectator's level of interest, motivation and involvement in sports; type of sports involved; type/level of sports participants; safety and security in and around sports venues; ticket, ticketing and ticket dynamics for sports; finance and income level of sports consumers; publicity and media coverage of sports; crowd control mechanism at sports venues; social influencers and significant others in sports; means and distance to sports venues; purpose of sports meet; level and type of officials and officiating; composition of spectators or sports crowd; sponsors of sports events; stage of the sports competition; level and quality of sports organization; spectators' past sports experience; establishing social contacts with sports personalities at sports venues; servicescape and sportscape of the sports facility; location of the sports venue; sports history of players, teams or clubs; sports schedule in terms of day and time; sports violence and hooliganism; intrinsic quest for sports entertainment; weather condition; sports culture of the society, and demographic characteristics of sports consumers. It was suggested among others that Ministry of Sports and sports organizations should boost the sports interest of spectators, motivate and sensitize them on the need for on-field sports spectatorship and to patronize sports. Sports organizers should consider the type of sports programme to package for spectators.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sports Spectatorship, Patronage, Determinants, Developing Countries, Sports Management.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Sport is a huge and pure business that needs the fans and spectators to survive. Schwarz and Hunter (2008) noted that without the fans and consistent attendance, it is impossible to operate the business. Sport consumption and viewership is now between the artificial or mediated means aided by television and the natural or on-field sporting experience at the sports venues. With modernization and globalization of sports which partly resulted to mediated sports, characterized with exposure to television and other technological means, most spectators are physically passive as they watch sports on their television from home without the on-field sporting experiences. Sport especially competitive sport is a social event with uncertainty of outcomes as its distinguishing characteristics for both sports producers and consumers like spectators. A spectator is an individual who observes a performance such as sporting event (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Spectators are stadium attendees, television viewers, radio listeners, and newspaper or magazine readers (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). In this context, emphasis is on sports venue attendees who are regarded as on-field spectators. In

this paper, on-field spectatorship refers to a situation where a spectator is present at the sporting venue, watches and observes a sporting event as it takes place in a natural sport setting. The presence of spectators gives more value, consumption and revenue to sports.

Event organizers can attract spectators and participants through the staging of sport events (Funk, 2008). Sports spectatorship with access fees payment is a sustainable source of revenue to sports events. In developed countries such as United States of America, DeSchrive and Jensen (2002) noted that millions of spectators attend American intercollegiate sporting events each year. This is a sharp contrast of the reality of spectatorship of sports event by attendees at sports venues in developing countries such as Nigeria. Most spectators in developing countries such as Nigeria are not seen in on-field viewership of sports events, while some rely mostly on mediated or televised sports, leaving the stadium (i.e. for football) and other sports facility almost empty. The focus of this paper is to examine the forces that serve as determinants of sports spectatorship and attendance to on-field sports events for effective sports management in developing countries.

### **Determinants of On-field Sports Spectatorship and Patronage**

The determinants of on-field sports spectatorship and patronage include spectator's level of interest and involvement in sports; type of sports involved; type/level of sports participants, and safety and security in and around sports venues. Other determinants are ticket, ticketing and ticket dynamics, finance and income level of sports consumers; publicity and media coverage of sports; crowd control mechanism at sports venues; social influencers and significant others in sports; means and distance to sports venues; purpose of sports meet; level and type of officials and officiating, and composition of spectators or sports crowd. Part of the determinants of on-field sports spectatorship and patronage include sponsors of sports events; stage of the sports competition; level and quality of sports organization; spectators' past sports experience, and establishing social contacts with sports personalities at sports venues. Again, servicescape/sportscape of the sports facility; location of the sports venue; sports history of a player, team or club; sports schedule in terms of day and time; sports violence and hooliganism; intrinsic quest for sports entertainment; weather condition, and sports culture of the society are determinants of on-field sports spectatorship and patronage.

### **Spectator's level of interest, motivation and involvement in sports**

Lera-Lopez, Ollo-Lopez and Rapun-Garate (2012) reported that attendance at professional sporting events is positively associated with fan motivation. An individual engages in activity that is of interest to him or her. Some people have sports apathy, and this affects their interest and sports consumption behaviour. They find it difficult to see something good in sports that attract them to be attached to it and pay allegiance to it even when they have some level of awareness of the sports. The level of interest in sports and attendance to sports venues is not encouraging. Some persons still view sports as a waste of time, and an activity for the never-do-well people. Hence, they see it as nothing interesting. Nigerians' passion and interest in sports is low. They are not fully actively or passively involved in sports. Until Nigerians see sports as worthwhile activity, and also be ready to patronize it with full interest, the stadium will continue to experience near-emptiness syndrome whereby players are on the field with almost nobody at the spectators' stand to consume the services and thrills of the games.

**Type of sports involved**

Different sports have different historical backgrounds that made them popular over other sports. Sports interest, patronage and consumption of individuals go with the type of sports that is mostly played within the society. Some countries are known for a particular sport. Certain sports are preferred over other sporting activity. Some sports are popular and drive the emotions of the citizens in that geographical area. There are sporting activities that are crowd-pulling. In Nigeria, some team sports like football pulls crowd to stadium compared to other sports. Football is more patronized and consumed than any other sports in Nigeria.

**Type/level of sports participants**

The type or level of sports participants especially active sports participants in the form of players, coaches and officiating officials can contribute to match attendance. Players are of two categories namely, amateur and professional/elite players. Spectators and fans are mostly likely to attend matches between professional or elite players than that of amateurs. They see on-field match attendance as an opportunity to associate and interact with professional players or coaches whom they have not seen face-to-face but have been hearing much about their astonishing and outstanding performances. People may consider going to watch amateurs as a waste of time and resources. They want to get value for their financial commitments in every sporting event.

**Safety and security in and around sports venues**

Sports venues have become one of the areas for anti-social elements like terrorists to attack. Terrorists usually launch their attack to attract cheap global recognition because of the global convergence and recognition of sports. Safety and security of lives and properties are important aspect of any sports organization and management. People are conscious of where they go and what they do. Some sportspersons will want to know the security arrangements and assurance of the sports venue before they can attend the sporting event. There is likelihood of people not attending sports for on-field viewership or spectatorship especially when there is security threat. Some spectators prefer to watch the game as a televised sport at home with safety and security assurance than going to the stadium to risk their lives and properties.

**Ticket, ticketing and ticket dynamics for sports**

Tickets are the lifeline of every player, team, club, and sport. The ticket dynamics, design, production and distribution practice (i.e. ticketing) can affect spectators' attendance to any sports event. The packaging dynamics of the ticket comprising routes/directions to match venue, services available at the match venue, match time, colour quality of the ticket, points and means of issuing ticket, ticket price, among others can attract spectators to attend and watch on-field sports events. Sports managers usually fix entry/access fee in form of gate fee or ticket fee for sports consumers to have access to sports products and services in the sports facility such as stadium. Some of the spectators may have difficulty paying the gate fee to have access to the sporting venue.

**Finance and income level of sports consumers**

Attendance at professional sporting events is positively associated with regional income and individual socio-economic characteristics (Lera-Lopez, Ollo-Lopez, & Rapun-Garate, 2012).

Almost all the spectators are living outside the sports facility, with many of them to travel far distance before arriving to the sports facility. Sports spectators who do not have finance and are of low income may find it difficult to transport themselves to the sports venue. Due to low income or finance, most spectators may prefer to stay at home and watch the game if televised.

### **Publicity and media coverage of sports**

Media plays vital role in sports consumption. Attendance to sports events largely depends on the awareness created for such events. People may attend to a sporting event if it is well publicized through the media. The media could be of assistance in ensuring that sports events are taken to door-steps of sports consumers through print and electronic sensitization of members of the society.

### **Crowd control mechanism at sports venues**

A well-attended sports event manifests in crowd with different sociological characteristics like physical ability (normal and special need persons), sex, different age groups, religion, marital status, race, ethnicity, and political affiliation. Convergence of these sportspersons for sports events may produce crowd that needs to be controlled. An uncontrolled crowd often results to stampede leading to injuries, loss of lives and properties. Many persons are scared of stampedes at sports venues and may prefer to stay away from the sports venues. It is the responsibility of the sports facility manager to ensure proper crowd control mechanisms at sports venues.

### **Social influencers and significant others in sports**

Sport is consumed in the presence of others (Funk, 2008). There are persons in the society that either encourage or discourage one's involvement in sports. These persons among other social variables act as positive or negative social influencers (e.g. peers, friends, parents, coaches, teachers, etc.) to sports consumers. Some parents can support their children and wards financially by providing money for transport to sports venue and purchase of ticket for access to sport venue. Some parents do not encourage their children or wards to attend sports events for on-field spectatorship. Some friends and peers are not interested in sports and may not encourage the sports consumer to attend or patronage sports products and services at the stadium during sports outings.

### **Means and distance to sports venues**

Sports consumers or spectators can access the sporting venues through the air, land/road, and sea with varying distance depending on the time of departure, means of transportation, residence. The sports consumer could be said to be staying far or near from the sports venues. There should be varieties and alternatives to transportation to and fro the sports venues. A sports venue that has only one route or means of access will be difficult for sports consumers to attend matches. Proximity to sports venues may influence spectators' attendance to sports events. The distance of the sports venue from the homes of spectators will either encourage or discourage attendance, and on-field viewership of the sports programme.

**Purpose of sports meet**

Sports officials, athletes, coaches and other technical crew members meet at sports venues for sports programmes. Sports programmes that take place in sports venue ranges from camping, training to competition. Spectators are mostly present at each of the sporting programmes. The level of attendance and spectatorship at each these programmes are not the same. People tend to watch sports competitions than training programmes. There is usually restriction of spectators at sports camps.

**Level and type of officials and officiating**

Sports officiating have the capacity to encourage or discourage sports consumption. Many spectators become interested in a match once they know the uncompromising official that will handle to game. Some match officials with integrity and honour are role models to some spectators who watch a match not because of the players or game itself but because of the officiating official for the game. They have confidence and interest in that particular sport as a consumer or spectator. Poor officiating has marred many matches and killed the enthusiastic spirit of some spectators who predict and conclude that a match official will unlawfully award a match to a particular team or player and it will come to pass.

**Composition of spectators or sports crowd**

Sports take place in a social setting thereby fostering social interaction. Sports consumers from all spheres of life with different tribes, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds gather for the sake of sports. Some presidents of countries, ministers, commissioners, and other political office holders sometimes go to stadium to watch sports especially football. Spectators are likely to attend sports events that will bring together people from different political and economic backgrounds. Sports offers opportunities to initiate or establish lifetime relationships and contacts to some sports consumers.

**Sponsors of sports events**

Sponsors offer financial and material assistance to sports. Sometimes the type of company or companies that sponsor a particular sports competition can influence the patronage of the event. For instance, Nike or Adidas sponsoring sports such as football may influence the lovers of Nike or Adidas products to attend the matches. Sports consumers may link Nike or Adidas to quality sports events since the companies are manufacturers of quality sports products.

**Stage of the sports competition**

The number and caliber of sports consumers for on-field sports spectatorship and patronage can be influenced by the stage of the sports competition. The number of sports consumers at opening matches, most times are not the same during semi-finals and finals of the sports competition. Sports competitions at final stage always pull or attract more crowd to the sports venue.

**Level and quality of sports organization**

Sports consumers can view sports events as poorly organized or highly organized. The pattern of organization of sports competition either encourages or discourages sports consumers to on-field spectatorship and patronage. Sport participants and spectators raise

their expectations for more benefits from participation in sport and for quality in sport product and services (Mawson, 1993).

### **Spectators' past sports experience**

The spectator's past sporting experiences are likely to influence his or her on-field spectatorship and patronage. Interesting and friendly experiences will encourage the person for on-field spectatorship but if the past sporting experience is displeasing with harassment and other forms of violence, it may certainly discourage the sports consumer from on-field sports spectatorship.

### **Establishing social contacts with sports personalities at sports venues**

Sports are social events for convergence of diverse sports participants with different sociological characteristics. Sport is a social ground to make new acquaintances and re-unite with new friends and peers. For on-field spectatorship, some sports consumers may attend and patronize sports for the sake of establishing relationships and contacts with sports personalities. It is an opportunity for sports consumers to meet elite athletes with sports records. Some of the elite athletes are role models to some of the sports consumers.

### **Servicescape and sportscape of the sports facility**

Bitner (1992) coined the term "servicescape" to mean the physical surroundings of a service encounter. They maintained that it is a "built environment" of man-made or physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment. In the sport industry, Wakefield and Sloan (1995) coined the term "sportscape" which they noted that stadium design and stadium services directly influence spectators' desire to stay and attend games at stadium. The sportscape may influence sports consumers. In sports, sportscape covers the physical appearance, aesthetics and design of the sports facility and environment. For instance, in football, the stadium qualities (parking space, sports products and non-sports products merchandise, seating capacity and arrangement, cleanliness, comfort, convenience/restrooms, reserved/concession areas, scoreboards, clear view, lightning, etc.) may either encourage or discourage on-field spectatorship and patronage. Some sports consumers may just want to be present in or around a highly aesthetic sports facility for historic purposes. Sports consumers sometimes like taking photo shots with sports facility. Some on-field sports consumers may be at the sports venue for this singular purpose of associating with the sports facility due to its aestheticism and services rendered. Poor sportscape has been found to be a constraint to sports attendance (Douvis, 2007).

### **Location of the sports venue**

Stadium location negatively influences attendance (Hansen & Gauthier, 1987). The level of on-field spectatorship and patronage of sports competition organized in cities or urban areas cannot be equated with the one organized in the rural areas. There tend to be more sports-conscious persons in the cities or urban areas compared to rural areas. Again, standard sports facilities are mostly located in cities as most of the matches are organized in areas where there are sports fans.

### **Sports history of players, teams or clubs**

In sports fandom, there are sport fans (e.g football fan, basketball fan, etc), club fan, athlete's or player's fan, among others. A player's fan is likely to go out to patronize a particular sports competition because he or she is a fan to a particular player who will feature in a match. The sports history of players or teams, for instance, well-known sports clubs and elite players featuring in a match can influence on-field spectatorship and patronage. Although sports fans are attracted to winning teams, the certainty of victory can reduce spectator interest (Jennett, 1984).

### **Sports schedule in terms of day and time**

Sports organizers should consider the day and time of scheduling sports competitions. Sports competitions scheduled in a working day, morning, or afternoon hours may definitely deny some workers the opportunity of on-field spectatorship and patronage. People may equally find it difficult to attend night matches. There may be attendance and patronage of sports events organized during weekends, evening periods or holidays.

### **Sports violence and hooliganism**

Violence and hooliganism are social problems in sports. Violence and hooliganism at sports venues or during events which can result to damage, loss of lives, properties or both can discourage sports consumers from attending on-field spectatorship. There is no average sports consumer that would want to lose his or her life or property as a result of violence and hooliganism. Violence and hooliganism negatively impact on-field spectatorship and patronage of sports.

### **Intrinsic quest for sports entertainment**

Sport is an entertainment activity in an entertainment industry. Athletes entertain members of the society with exhibition of sports skills and talents. Many people have the quest for an avenue for entertainment. These sports consumers visit sports venues for entertainment purposes and to patronize sports as on-field spectators. This internal drive for sports entertainment is responsible for sports patronage.

### **Weather condition**

Hansen and Gauthier (1987) reported that weather had negative influence on spectators' decision to go to a sport event. The weather is an environmental condition that can affect on-field sports spectatorship and patronage. Some persons react to extreme weather condition (e.g. rain, snow, cold, heat, etc.) and may not engage in sporting behaviours such as on-field sports spectatorship that will endanger their health. Rain or snow may affect attendance or turn out of spectators for sports events. Cold weather may constrain asthmatic sports consumers from patronizing and serving as on-field sports spectators. Also extreme heat weather can discourage people from on-field sports spectatorship and patronage.

### **Sports culture of the society**

The issue of spectatorship is related to both the level of purchasing power and the level of sport culture (Erten, 2004). Culture is the way of life of a society. A sub-unit of the society has its sub-culture. Sport being a microcosm of the society has its own culture and sub-cultures. The appreciation and patronage of sports depends on the sports culture and sub-

culture of the society. Sports culture and sub-culture of a society could be seen in the values, beliefs, philosophy, ideology and norms of sports and sub-units/sub-groups in sports in the society. Members of a society that does not value sports or are not convinced of the philosophy of any sports event may find it difficult to be involved in on-field sports spectatorship and patronage of that sports event.

### **Demographic characteristics of sports consumers**

The demographic characteristics of sports consumers (e.g. gender, age, level of education, location, etc.) in the society determine their attendance to on-field sports events. Generally males attend on-field sports events than females. Studies have shown that age and level of education is positively related to sports spectatorship (Wilson, 2002); occupation has little relationship with sports spectatorship (Fernandez & Prieto, 2001); urbanization is positively related to sports spectatorship (Falter & Perignon, 2000); size of household is inversely related to sports spectatorship (Zhang, Lam, & Connaughton, 2003); income is positively related to sports spectatorship (Wilson, 2002). It could be deduced that for any sports spectatorship intervention programme to be developed, the demographic characteristic of the potential spectators must be considered.

### **CONCLUSION**

Sport as a product cum service-oriented business as well as entertainment sector is expected to be patronized by sports consumers. The on-field sports spectatorship and patronage can be determined by certain societal factors which need to be understood by sports managers, sports sociologists, and others sports professionals.

### **Suggestions**

1. There is need for Ministry of Sports and sports organizations to boost the sports interest of spectators, motivate and sensitize them on the need for on-field sports spectatorship and to patronize sports.
2. Sports organizers should consider the type of sports programme to package for spectators.
3. The safety and security in and around sports venues must be insured and guaranteed by sports organizers.
4. The access/gate fees into the sports venue should be made affordable to sports consumers in the society by the sports organizers.
5. There should be a wide publicity and media coverage of sports to create awareness of the sports events by sports organizers.
6. Proper crowd control mechanism at sports venues should be provided by the sports organizers.
7. A proper arrangement on affordable means of transportation to the sports venue(s) should be made by sports organizers.

8. The sports organizers should monitor the officials and how the officiating is conducted during sports events.
9. Sports organizers should go for dependable and reliable sponsors of sports events.
10. The sports organizers should ensure that sports events are well organized and administered.
11. Every form of unsportsmanship and violent behaviour in and around sports venues on any sports participants should be discouraged and penalized.
12. The sports organizers should ensure good sportscape of sports venues.
13. The sports organizers should consider the location of sports venue; sports culture, and weather condition while scheduling sports competitions.

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