

MARKETING FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISION MAKING BEHAVIOR OF THAI PREMIER LEAGUE FOOTBALL CLUBS' FANS IN BANGKOK AND VICINITY

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ABSTRACT

Football is one of the most popular sports in Thailand. It should no longer be considered as just a pastime sport. However, operating a successful professional football club in Thailand requires much more than just playing and winning the matches. Sustainability of financial success forces teams to operate as professionals.

This research aimed to examine the demography characteristic, marketing factors and decision making behavior of Thai (Premier) League football clubs' fans. The primary objective was an attempt to identify which and how marketing factors affected purchasing decision making behavior of fans of football clubs competing in the top of Thai football league system. The statistical tools used were percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, F-test, and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA).

A total of 400 samples were selected from the population of fans of football clubs in Bangkok and Vicinity that were completing in Thai (Premier) League 2016 season. The majority of the respondents was single males, aged 25-35 years old, holding Bachelor's degree and earned a monthly income of 15,000-20,000 Baht. The findings provided different viewpoints towards the purchasing decision making behavior of professional football clubs' fans in Thailand. Their overall satisfaction on marketing mix factors are found to be at high level. The significance of marketing mix factors affecting purchasing decision making behavior was also in a high level. The results of hypothesis testing indicated that the marketing mix factors affected the purchasing decision making behavior of Thai Premier League Football Clubs' Fans in Bangkok and Vicinity at a significant level of 0.05.

Keywords: Purchasing Behavior, Decision Making Behavior, Marketing Mix Factors, Thai Premier League Football Clubs' Fans

INTRODUCTION

Football is arguably one of the most, if not the most, popular sport in the world. In Thailand, football has been our nation favorite game both for watching and playing (Kachonyot Chokthanaset, 2009). Although a game of football was first introduced to Thailand in 1897, the professional football leagues in Thailand seem to be something novelty especially when comparing to other countries in the west. The 1st professional league season in Thailand was officially known as the Johnnie Walker Thailand Soccer League and is actually started in 1996. Before that the highest level of club football was the KOR Royal Cup which was contested in a tournament format from 1916 to 1995.

The name of the league has been changed several times since 1996. The name "Thai Premier League" was acquired later in 2006. And recently, on February 11, 2016, after the controversial president's elections, Pol. Gen. Somyot Poompanmoung, the new president of the Football Association of Thailand, has announced the name change from "Thai Premier League" to "Thai League". Nonetheless, since the change is very subtle

and hardly noticeable, not many people outside Thailand carelessly recognized the name changed. Many international publishers were found to be using the old name when referring to the league in writing. Consequently, the word Thai Premier League and Thai League in this paper will be used interchangeably.

During the year 2009 to 2011, after Asian Football Confederation (AFC) declared the new regulations for the associations that have the intention to send the clubs to compete in AFC Champions League, there were several significant changes that lead to the new era of Thai professional football league. The new regulation had forced all football clubs in the league to complete AFC Club License Criteria which means many clubs were forced to separate themselves from the parent organizations and registered as the independent football authorities. Many clubs had to rebrand itself. Those organization based clubs had to start thinking about finding the new local supporters to support the clubs financially. There were many major changes occurred to the league during that period of times. Several organizations decided to sell the club. In addition, Football Association of Thailand (FAT) had to found a new company as a separate identity to professionally run the league.

There is strong evidence that Thai professional football industry has made huge progress in the past decade as it has moved from a Bangkok-based semi-professional league to a national professional league. Now, it is a big business that contributes significantly to Thai economy. It is multi-billion-baht industry (Saichol Panyachit, 2010). It is an example of how to convert popularity in one culture into profitable commodity in another. It can be involved in a number of industries such as advertising, media, beverage, clothing, toys, education, etc.

In theory, there is little reason why profession football clubs cannot be profitable. In England, Premier League clubs are proved to be cash cows with three strong sources of revenue –broadcasting rights, commercial activities and gate receipts. However, that is not the case in Thailand. Investing in Thailand professional football clubs is a super risky business. It is not an easy business to make a profit. It is very expensive. In reality, only a handful of football clubs in Thailand found to be profitable. Operating a successful and profitable professional football club requires much more than just playing and winning the football matches. In general, it should be no different than operating other types of business. For professional football clubs to be profitable they need not only be successful on the pitch but realize the importance of their fans as a revenue stream. Therefore, it is an inevitable fact that, professional football clubs should recognize the fans purchasing power.

The main purpose of this research, therefore, was to investigate purchasing decision making behavior of Thai Premier League football clubs' fans in Bangkok and Vicinity. It aimed to examine the demography characteristic, marketing factors and decision making behavior of fans of football clubs competing in the top of Thai football league system. Financial success may be achieved through the implementation of effective marketing strategy. Hopefully, the finding from this study can help moving Thai football clubs to the profitable side of their balance sheet.

LITERATURE & THEORY

Thai Premier League or Thai League is a Thai professional football league for men's association football clubs in Thailand. It is Thailand's primary football competition and it is at the top of Thai football league system. It operates on a system of promotion and relegation with Thai Division One League. There are a total of 18 teams, including top 15 teams from last year season and three new teams which will be promoted from Thai Division one League. Season normally will run from March to October. Teams play 34 matches each (playing each team in the league twice, home and away), totaling 306 matches in the season. Most games are played on Saturday and Sunday, with only a few games played during weekday. It is run by the Football Association of Thailand (FAT).

Purchasing decision making behavior patterns of consumers are well documented in many marketing literature. Even though it is somewhat determined in sports marketing literature, there is a lack of studies on behavior and purchasing patterns of sports fans related to licensed merchandise (Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End and Jacquemotte, 2000; Wann and Hamlet, 1995). In addition to that consumer behavior is unarguably an important topic in marketing field. This is because the knowledge can help those marketers and researchers explaining what consumers think and why customers make their decision to purchase a particular product or service. In theory, there are countless factors that can influence purchasing decision making behavior, including but not limited to friends, family, social factors, cultural, personal experience and many psychological factors (Brosekhan, Velayutham and Phill, 2002).

A marketing activity normally comprises 4 elements which are also known as the 4P of marketing mix. Stanton (2001) described marketing as an overall system which defines a business activity comprising the planning, determining price, promoting and distributing products and services, in order to satisfy existing customer and potential consumer needs. Siriwan Sereerat and the other (2003) confirmed that mix marketing factors such as product, price, channel to sale and promotion must be used together in a proper formula if fulfilling customers demand is priority.

Furthermore, professional football match spectating activity is gaining more popularity in Thailand in the last decades. Most of the currently available studies relating to consumption behavior of the football match spectators are on attendance to the events. There are only a few studies that directly investigated spectators' purchasing behaviors of goods, especially merchandising goods related to the professional football clubs in Thailand. Because of the different behaviors spectators have, compared to general product purchasers, behaviors are also different in purchasing decisions making behavior. Football match spectators obviously have different behavioral intentions to buy. This is important for companies' profits because the main factors are quality, satisfaction and loyalty (Trail et al., 2005). Oliver et al. (1997) supported this argument in their study by emphasizing the correlation between positive effect and satisfaction. These factors will differ according to the differences of customers. While licenses have positive impact on buying behavior, it is also easier to create or gaining more brand loyalty using club merchandise.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data. The study carried on 400 fans of Thai (Premier) League football clubs who attending any of the 8 randomly selected Thai (Premier) League football matches held in a stadium located in Bangkok or vicinity during the month of March 2016. The questionnaires were distributed and collected until completing 50 sets per match.

In order to complete the questionnaire, researcher approached to the attendances, introduced themselves and asked to speak with football fans. A screening query, "Are you considered yourself to be a fans of any football clubs currently completing in Thai (Premiere) League 2016?", was then used. If the sample replies to be "Yes", the researcher will explained the purpose of the study and administered questionnaire to those who agreed to participate. Participation to questionnaire was voluntary. The time to explain the study and complete the questionnaire was approximately 15 minutes.

The validity of the questions was evaluated by using IOC technique with three experts. Each questions in the questionnaire were tested and passed the Cronbach Alpha criteria with at least 0.7. The population was the Fans of football clubs completing in 2016 Thai (Premier) League season. As the certain number of population has been unknown, the samples size for data collection was calculated using the formula of W.G. Cochran (Boonchom Srisaard. 2011: 41). And at 95% of confidence level, the size of samples getting from the calculation was 385. However, for error prevention, the additional 15 sets of questionnaires were added, totaling to 400.

Descriptive statistics utilized in this research including percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The Analytical statistics used in this study were t-test, F-test, and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA).

RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS

Firstly, the demographic finding indicated that most of the respondents were male, with age between 25-35 years old and single status. The bachelor or equivalent degree was reported as the majority; whereas most of the respondents were self-employed with the average monthly income between 15,000 - 20,000 baht. The majority of respondents reported their purchasing frequency pattern as once a month and 500-100 baht per time as their purchase spending amount. The respondents with different gender, age, occupation and monthly income were found to have different purchasing decision making behavior both in term of purchase frequency and purchase spending amount at .05 and .01 of statistical significance level, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that customers with different gender, age, educational level and occupation have had different purchase behaviors. This finding has been consistent with the research of Kornpin Klinkesorn (2010) that studied on the title of Behavior and Factors Causing Purchase Decision of Frozen Convenience Food Products for Consumers in Bangkok Zone.

Secondly, the results from marketing factors show that product was the most important factor that affects the respondents purchasing decision making behavior followed by place, promotion and price respectively. Their overall satisfaction on marketing mix factors are found to be at high level. In term of product, product variety and product customization ability were the most important factor when respondents making their purchasing decision on their favorite football clubs' merchandize, followed by product design and product uniqueness. In term of place, stadium point of purchase was the most important factor, followed by online store. In term of promotion, discount campaign was the most important, followed closely by free gift campaign. In term of price, good value for money was more important to the respondents than economical/low price.

Thirdly, the significance of marketing mix factors affecting purchasing decision making behavior was also found to be in a high level. The results from hypothesis testing revealed that marketing mix factors could influence the purchasing decision making behavior of Thai Premier League Football Clubs' fans with significance level of 0.05. This coincided with the research finding from Thanin Tairak (2011) which concurred that product factor had relation with behavior to buy merchandise from Manchester United Shop with Statistical significance of 0.05. The finding also suggest that Product (product variety, product customization ability, product uniqueness and product design), Price (economically/low-price and good value for money), Place (online store and stadium point of purchase), and Promotion (discount and free gift campaign) can increase Thai Premier League Football Clubs' Fan' purchase frequency and spending amount per time on clubs' products. The results support argument of Chinnabhat Phapattanasankul and Chuta Tingsabhat (2010) that the sampling has opinion about decision to buy Toyota Thai Premier League products, both with holistic and each factor separately, which are product, price, distribution channel and promotion, are all in high level. Additionally, this finding seem to consistent with the research result from Ongart Korsinkha, Thakarn Phantumlertluhee & Thanasuwit Tabhiranrak (2015) which indicated that Recognition of marketing communications, which are promotion, public relation, advertisement and direct marketing, are in the highest level.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, this study provides insights into Thai Premiere League football clubs' fans' perception on marketing mix elements and how these factors influence their purchasing decision making behavior. The

multiple regression analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between marketing mix variables and Thai Premier League football clubs' fans' actual purchase. Specifically, the results show that product is the most important factor that affects their purchase decision followed by place, promotion and price respectively. Regarding product attributes, Thai Premier League football clubs' fans pay a great attention to product variety and product customization. This has been consistent with the research of Pramsuk Huanprapai, Natcha Phasook and Thanasuwit Tabhiranrak (2015) that studied on the title of Mixed Marketing Factors that Affected to the Royalty of Thai Premier League Football Clubs' Fan.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study has produced significant results it is not without limitations. Notably, the research focused only on demographics characteristics and several marketing variables. Future research should incorporate some other factors such as competition result, club ranking, famousness of the club and a macro environment stimuli. Doing so will help explaining Thai Premier League football clubs' fans regarding purchasing behavior in both broader and deeper perspectives. Also, this study was administered to a relatively limited number of respondents; therefore there would be a need for larger sample size. Lastly, data collection in different geographic areas would greatly be useful for increasing sample representativeness and clarifying regional differences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank the Research and Development Institute along with Graduate School of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for financial support.

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