

ENHANCING LOYALTY: IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE QUALITY OF INDONESIAN FOOTBALL CLUB FANS

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Abstract: The high income generated by the sports industry, making this industry one of the industries that had a high level of competition. The sports industry uniqueness is the high participation of supporters in creating value services that are thought to satisfy and increase the loyalty of supporters. This research was conducted with the aim to analyze how the influence of the quality of the experience of the results of the participation of supporters in sports activities, especially football on the loyalty of these supporters. Two hundred fifty samples were collected using purposive sampling technique. The data obtained is then processed using the SmartPLS 3.0 application. The results showed that to increase the loyalty of sports club supporters, need to pay attention to the club's image and supporter satisfaction because both of these variables have a mediating role to the relationship between the quality of the supporter's experience and supporter loyalty. Based on the results of the study, in addition to improving the quality of sports team management experience, it is also necessary to maintain the club's image and supporter satisfaction to increase supporter loyalty.

Keywords: Experience Quality, Club Image, Satisfaction, Supporter Loyalty

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Sport industry is growing rapidly in the last few decades. This industry is unique because of the relationship between sports clubs and supporters (as consumers) (Mason, S.D., 1999). Its uniqueness has inspired several studies that analyze factors which can influence the behavior of supporters in the sports industry (Bauer et al., 2008; Clemes et al., 2011; and Biscaia, et al., 2013).

Bauer et al. (2008) stated that one of the important factors that influence the development of clubs is the number of supporters.

An increase in the number of supporters indicates the development of sports clubs. More supporters will attract sponsors to work with sports clubs. Sponsor is one of the financial sources of sports clubs (for operational cost) besides the sales of ticket and club attributes. Clemes et al. (2011) explained the importance of providing a quality experience to club supporters during a match. Pleasant experience while watching at match indicates that they are loyal supporters, such as: watching the next match; talking about good things about the club, and

inviting their colleagues to support the club. This phenomenon indicates that the quality of experience influences the loyalty of supporters.

Jacob Jacoby (2002) states that there are quite complex processes in consumer behavior when processing stimuli to produce a response. The complexity of the process then forms a paradigm known as Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR). SOR paradigm explains that as living things, humans can process different information or stimuli; therefore, the responses will be different too. In general, for consumers who have the same characteristics, information processing into a response tends to be the same. This study identified that the quality of experience is information and stimulus, which is then converted into a response (in the form of loyalty). Through the SOR paradigm, the researchers tried to identify organisms factors in sports fans.

Biscaia et al. (2013) found that the image of a sports club influence supporter loyalty. Supporters assume that some elements club such as attributes, facilities, coaches, and players can represent the image of a sports club. A club that has a good image can convince supporters to be loyal to the club (Mason, 1999; Bauer et al., 2008; Biscaia et al., 2013).

The next uniqueness of sports industry lies in two entities that act as producers. The first entity is a competition organizer, and the second identity is the individual or team which compete. One of the main goals of producers is to satisfy consumers. Lambrecht et al. (2009) explained that the concept of satisfaction to supporters is quite similar to the concept of customer satisfaction, which is a comparison between expectations and expectation fulfillment made by producers. Based on this explanation, building supporter satisfaction is one of the goals to be achieved by the competition organizer and the individual or sports club involved.

The last uniqueness of the sports industry is that producer cannot control certain factors such as weather, opponents to be faced, and the final results of the match (Mullin et al., 2000). In spite of being difficult to control, those factors also have an important role in supporter satisfaction. In individual sports, the competition organizer is fully responsible for the satisfaction of supporters attending the com-

petition. In team sports, where the participants are a team or sports club, responsibility for supporter satisfaction can be divided according to the priorities (Lambrecht et al. (2009).

Football is a type of sport with the most fans. In Indonesia, the number of supporters who attend and watch football matches of his favorite club continues to increase from year to year. Increased number of supporters also leads to increased income obtained by the competition organizers and clubs. In 2017, PT. Liga Indonesia Baru (PT. LIB) released the number of profits obtained in League 1 (reaching 6 billion rupiahs). The number of spectators attending the match in 2017 increased from 2.6 million to 3.1 million in 2018.

Based on the phenomenon above, previous research, and a general description of the object of research, this study aims to analyze the influence of the quality of supporters' experiences on loyalty. The analysis was carried out using SOR paradigm, which then used the image of sports clubs and supporter satisfaction as a variable of Organism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Supporter Experience Quality

Chen and Chen (2012) described the experience as a result of one's interaction or participation in an activity. Clemes et al. (2011) describe supporters as individuals who enjoy sports in general, certain sports clubs, or other individuals and groups involved in sports activities. Based on the explanation above, the quality of the supporter experience can be defined as the result of interaction or participation between supporters and sports clubs or individuals and other groups in certain sports activities.

Quality of supporter experience in this study was measured using a reference from Clemes et al. (2011). These measurements include the quality of interaction in the stadium, the quality of service in the stadium, the experience of attending matches, and the quality of stadium access.

Image of Sports Club

Biscaia et al. (2013) explained a concept known as spectator-based brand equity (SBBE). SBBE describes the importance of brand equity manage-

ment in the sports industry, especially for sports club managers. How the supporters perceive the attributes, facilities, players, and the condition of club management reflects the image of the club in the fans themselves. Kotler and Keller (2012) state that consumer perceptions of a brand can be formed by the interaction between consumer and brand beforehand. Based on the explanation above, the image of a sports club lead by the perception of fans towards the club.

The measurement of the sports club image in this study refers to SBBE indicator formulated by Biscaia et al. (2013). The measurements include sports club logo, club background, players, coaches, and stadiums managed by the club.

Supporter Satisfaction

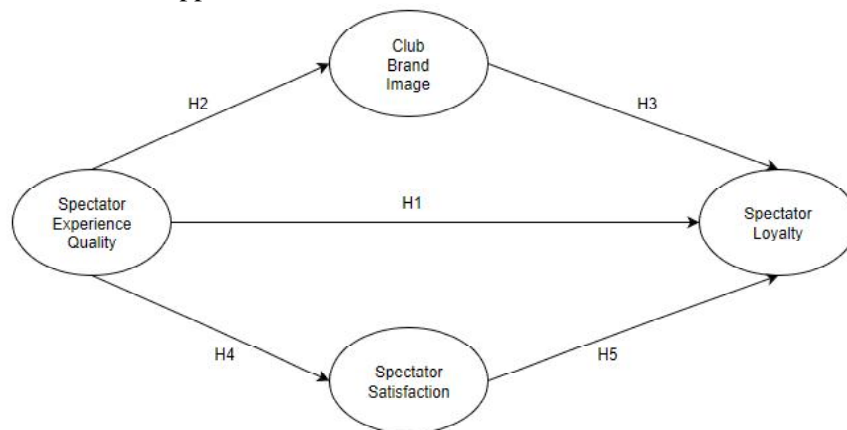
Lusch and Vargo (2006) stated that in service, product value creation is included in the product transaction process from producers to consumers. It indicates that consumers can create high production value as well. Laverie and Arnett (2000) said that supporters could support their favorite club by attending matches in the stadium. When attending a match, the club can increase supporter satisfaction by creating product value, which is in accordance with the expectations of supporters.

Clemes et al. (2011) formulated several items that can be used to measure the satisfaction of supporters after attending a club match. These measurements include satisfaction after attending a match at the stadium, feeling satisfied with the decision (to watch the match at the stadium), and enjoy watching the match at the stadium.

Supporter Loyalty

Bauer et al. (2008) described two types of spectators in sports competitions. The first type is a sports lover, and the second one is a fan. Based on their characteristics, supporters are sports lovers who also consider themselves to have a strong connection to the clubs they support, while ordinary sports lovers only attend the match because they like certain types of sports. Supporters' behavior is different from sports lovers. Someone who thinks of themselves as a supporter of a particular sports club will show the following behaviors: the desire to attend every match of their favorite clubs at the stadium, the desire to keep them updated on the news about their favorite club, and the desire to buy products and attributes of their favorite club.

Research Model



H1: spectator experience quality has a significant effect on spectator loyalty

Clemes et al. (2011) found a strong influence between the quality of supporters' experience on the loyalty of supporters. Supporters who get good quality experience tend to be loyal. The loyalty of

supporters is shown by their desire to watch again, tell positive things about the club, buy products and attributes sold by the club, keep updated on news and information about the club. Clemes, et al. (2011)

are also supported by other studies such as Theodorakis et al. (2013); Wu, H.C., (2014); and Funk (2017).

H2:spectator experience quality has a significant effect on club brand image

Biscaia et al. (2013) stated that the interaction between supporters and their favorite club could lead to the club image. This opinion is supported by Kotler and Keller (2012), which explains that consumers' perceptions of brands can be generated by the interaction between a consumer with the brand previously. Other studies that also support this hypothesis include Biscaia et al., (2015) and Biscaia et al. (2016).

H3:club brand image has a significant effect on spectator loyalty

Biscaia et al. (2016) found that the image of a sports club has a significant influence on supporter loyalty. Sports clubs which have good image have more supporters compared to sports clubs with a bad image. The results of this study are supported by other studies such as Koronios et al. (2016); Wang and Tang (2018); and Koenig-Lewis et al. (2018).

H4:spectator experience quality has a significant effect on spectator satisfaction

Clemes et al. (2011) found a significant effect of the quality of supporter experience on supporter satisfaction. Supporters who get a pleasant experience while attending a sports match will feel satisfied with their decision to attend the match. The influence of the quality of experience on supporter

satisfaction was also found in the research conducted by Howat and Assaker (2013) and Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014).

H5:spectator satisfaction has a significant effect on spectator loyalty

Bauer et al. (2008) said that supporters are sports lovers who have a strong connection with their favorite teams. Sports lovers who claim to be supporters are those who are satisfied with the performance of their favorite club. The influence of supporter satisfaction on supporter loyalty was also found in the research conducted by Theodorakis, et al. (2015); Moreno et al. (2015); Biscaia, R. (2016); and Wakefield, K. (2016).

METHOD

This research was conducted using a quantitative approach with explanatory research methods. Data collection was performed using a questionnaire instrument that is Self-Administered Questionnaire (SAQ). The number of samples used in this study was 250 people. The research objects used were the supporters of Arema Football Club who have been supporters for more than five years. The collected data was then analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0 analysis tool.

RESULTS

Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis testing in this study was obtained using SmartPLS 3.0 analysis tool. The results were shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Hypothesis Test Results

Relationship between variables		Path Coefficient	t-statistics	p-value	Relationship
Independent Variable	Dependent Variable				
Supporter Experience Quality	Supporter Loyalty	0.124	1.823	0.069	Not significant
Supporter Experience Quality	Club Brand Image	0.559	12.589	0.000	Significant
Supporter Experience Quality	Supporter Satisfaction	0.637	10.953	0.000	Significant
Club Brand Image	Supporter Loyalty	0.174	2.357	0.019	Significant
Supporter Satisfaction	Supporter Loyalty	0.466	6.060	0.000	Significant

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 bootstrapping results (2019)

Of the five hypotheses tested, there was one relationship that was not significant, namely H1 (t-statistic value was lower than 1.96, and the p-value was higher than 0.05). Four other hypotheses were accepted because they meet the requirements.

Indirect Effect Results

This study also examined the role of sports club image and supporter satisfaction in mediating the

relationship between the quality of supporter experience and supporter loyalty. The indirect effect test was conducted using SmartPLS 3.0 analysis tool. The results are shown in Table 2.

Indirect effect test was done by comparing the t-statistic value. Both images of sports clubs and supporter satisfaction have a mediating role because they have t-statistic value above 1.96.

Table 2 Indirect Effect Results

Relationship	Path coefficient	t-statistic	Relationship
Supporter Experience Quality → Club Image → Supporter Loyalty	0.097	2.306	Indirectly significant
Supporter Experience Quality → Supporter Satisfaction → Supporter Loyalty	0.296	5.384	Indirectly significant

Source: SmartPLS 3.0 bootstrapping results (2019)

DISCUSSION

Relationship Between the Quality of Supporter Experience and Supporter Loyalty

The quality of supporters experience is described as the result of interaction or participation between supporters and the club that they support in certain sports activities. Clemes, et al. (2011); Theodorakis et al. (2013) and Wu, H.C., (2014) found a strong influence between the quality of supporter experience and supporter loyalty. The results of this study are not in accordance with those findings; the results of the hypothesis test (H1) show that there was no significant effect between the quality of experience on the loyalty of supporters.

The difference may be due to differences in the process of information and stimuli in each individual. Jacob Jacoby (2002) explains Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm; as living things (organisms), humans can process the same stimuli into different responses. In this study, the stimuli processed by supporters are experiencing quality, and the expected response is supporter loyalty. The results showed that even though the supporter get to experience while attending a match, they will not be necessarily loyal to the sports club.

This finding strengthens the argument of Jacob Jacoby (2002) that to describe consumer behavior, researchers need to clarify the process of stimuli into responses. In this study, the researcher identified two variables that can clarify the process, namely: sports club image and supporter satisfaction.

Relationship Between Supporter Experience Quality, Sports Club Image, and Supporter Loyalty

Sports club image is supporters' perception of the attributes, facilities, training staff, and players owned by a sports club. Clubs that have good attributes will have a better image compared to other clubs with a poor image. In this study, the sports club image is used as one of the variables connecting the quality of supporter experience and supporter loyalty. H2 shows that the quality of supporter experience has a significant influence on the image of sports clubs. H3 shows that the image of sports clubs also has a significant effect on the loyalty of supporters.

The results of this study support several previous studies, Biscaia et al. (2013); Wang and Tang

(2018); and Koenig-Lewis et al. (2018). This result also reinforces the argument of Jacob Jacoby (2002) related to the different processes in each consumer, which affects how stimuli turn into responses. In this study, the image of a sports club was found to have a fully mediating role in the relationship between the quality of supporter experience and supporter loyalty.

The results of the previous studies indicate that the quality of supporter experience can increase the loyalty of supporters, but the experience quality should build a good club image.

Relationship Between the Quality of Supporter Experience, Supporter Satisfaction, and Supporter Loyalty

Supporters' satisfaction is a comparison between the expectations by supporters when attending a match and what they perceive. In the sports industry, satisfying supporters is a difficult task because there are many factors which cannot be controlled by a sports club or match organizer. Ensuring that supporters get a good quality of experience during matches is one approach that can be taken by sports clubs or match organizers.

The results of this study indicate that the quality of supporter experience has a significant influence on supporter satisfaction (H4). Supporter satisfaction also has a significant effect on supporter loyalty (H5). These findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies: Howat and Assaker (2013); Avourdiadou and Theodorakis (2014); Calabuig et al. (2014) and Moreno, et al. (2015). This result is also consistent with the SOR paradigm by Jacob Jacoby (2002). Supporter satisfaction has a fully mediating role in the relationship between the quality of the supporter experience and supporter loyalty. Lusch and Vargo (2006) explained that creating the value of service will involve consumers directly. Thus consumer expectations can be met if they have good experience in product value transactions.

Research results and the previous studies indicate that the quality of supporter experience has an important role in building supporter satisfaction. Supporter satisfaction can generate and increase

supporter loyalty; therefore, it has a fully mediating role. The value of supporter satisfaction as a mediator is higher than sports club image.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The results of this study reinforce Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) paradigm, which describes that as living things (organisms), humans have different ways of processing stimuli into responses. Supporters are consumers in the sports industry; sports clubs or competition organizers play a role as producer. In service, product value is created through customer interaction and participation; therefore, the quality experience can improve the company's image and customer satisfaction. This study found that the quality of supporter experience had a significant influence on sports club image and supporter satisfaction; however, there is no influence on supporter loyalty. This study also found that sports club image and supporter satisfaction can be a mediation between experience quality and supporter loyalty.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researcher can provide academic and managerial recommendations. Future researches can explore the factors that can mediate the relationship between experience quality and supporter loyalty; therefore, the behavior of sports fans can be seen clearly. Sports club managers should pay more attention to club image and supporter satisfaction. The importance of the role of these two variables in increasing supporter loyalty can be a serious consideration due to increasing competition in the sports industry from time to time.

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