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which you can use to change the world.
- Nelson Mandela

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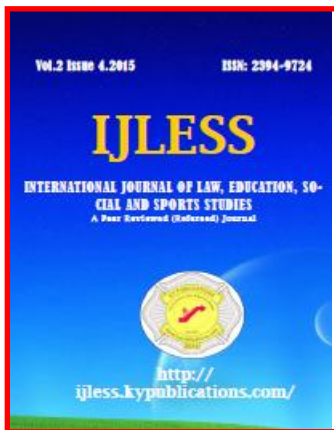
COST OF ATTENDANCE AND TEAM AFFILIATION- DRIVERS OR DRAWBACKS TO FANS ATTENDANCE TO STADIUM

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ABSTRACT

Fans attend football matches in pursuit of leisure and excitement. Fans follow the game of football with varying degree of passion. This study sought to find out the level of influence that cost of stadium attendance and team affiliation exerts on fans as they make decisions on stadium attendance. Quantitative approach was adopted culminating in the use of structured questionnaires to collect data from a relatively large sample of 110 respondents. Data was analyzed using SPSS. The study found that cost of attendance is a major factor which influences stadium attendance. Sports authorities should therefore set their sights on cost as they devise strategies to attract fans to fill stands in at stadiums during football matches.

Key words: Cost, team, affiliation, fans

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of happiness and healthy life styles has driven people to be more pre-occupied with engagement in leisure activities (Huang 2011). Sport engagements as forms of leisure is now widespread (Robinson, & Trail, 2005; Cohen, & Avrahami, 2005). Some people in pursuit of leisure watch sports whilst others actually participate in sporting activity as a pastime. Key actors in sport are fans. In a study of fans motivations, Borland and MacDonald (2003) described fans as persons with enormous interest in a sport discipline, a star player or a team. A fan is a zealot who associates with a player or team and derive joy when there is success and drops into melancholy when defeat stares.

The growing stature of sport as a socio-economic activity has been observed by scholars. Sports is now a dominant activity in all spheres of life and shapes the culture of some communities with some people closely following events around the world of sports (Ganal, Terial & Dean, 2003). One sport discipline that has captured the imagination of people with universal appeal is soccer. Countries that were considered minnows in soccer now have popularized the game of football resulting in a groundswell of fans (Jalilian and Kjabiri, 2005).

Quick (2000) scrutinized outcomes of works on football fans and concluded that fans are driven by different factors in their quest to derive satisfaction from watching football. Attempts have been made by professionals and researchers to develop interesting terminologies in connection with fans. One criterion that has been used to categorize fans is their level of interest in sports. This has led Madrigal (1995) to segment fans into 'theatre goers,' 'fair weather fans,' and "hard core fans." Madrigal explains that "theatre goers" and "fair weather fans" are less passionate about the game or teams they follow but "hardcore fans" exhibit deep emotional attachment to the team or sport they follow. Sport marketers usually delve into the varying motivations that underpin the interest of different

fans in an attempt to attract and retain fan attendance by leveraging the patronage of the fans across their useful life (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne's 1991). Consequently, Mahony et al (2000) advocated the use of a marketing strategy that will attract, retain and accentuate fans attendance to stadiums in order to rake in more revenue from continuous patronage of games.

Hardcore fans contribute considerably to revenue mobilization of teams. The revenue contribution of theatre goers has been found to be significant. In situations where there are scant options of entertainment, casual fans will repeatedly patronize soccer matches (Zhang, Smith, Pease, & Jambor 1997). Such casual fans need to be attracted through media hype of matches and provision of discounts on ticket cost (Ross, James and Vargas 2006; Allen, 2007).

Fan attendance is a major source of revenue used to meet ever increasing cost of team operation and administration (Howard 1999; Hill & Green 2000). Football teams should therefore devise plausible ways of increasing fans attendance in order to sustain revenue mobilization (Dietl & Hasan 2007). This comes against the backdrop of plummeting fans attendance in some countries

especially where matches are broadcasts live on television (Baimbridge, Cameron, & Dawson, 1996; Garcia & Rodrigues, 2002; Forest & Simmons, 2006; Allan & Roy, 2008). Fans attendance generates the kind of atmosphere which stimulates excitement and ignites the aura of charm that hypnotizes fans into repeat attendance. It is fan attendance with its revenue generation capacity that spurs media houses to sign lucrative broadcasting deals (Armstrong & Estrata, 2005). Beside, players tend to play at full force to attract the admiration of fans and Kelly (1996) ascribed scintillating performance of players to visibility of fans. Furthermore, the growing popularity of football and the vast media space it occupies is attributable to its numerous followers. Overall, sport develops when spectator rates expand (Chen g ,2007). Therefore, the significant role played by spectators in sports needs no further emphasis.

Decline in fan attendance is assuming disturbing proportions as evidenced in some scholarly works (Matheson,2003; Binjwaied, Richards & O'Keeffe 2015). This phenomenon has gripped soccer attendance in Ghana to a point where a final match in the Ghanaian top flight was opened to soccer fans free of charge in order to draw crowds (Daily Graphic, 10th September, 2015). . On the evidence of the sparse crowd the match witnessed, it dawned on the soccer authorities that the singular strategy of opening the gates to fans without charge was a failure. This has sparked off debates as to whether cost of stadium attendance is a key variable in the decision making equation of football fans per stadium attendance. In the heat of the debate, some soccer pundits put the low level of attendance to lack of fan affiliation to the said teams engaged in the match. These viewpoints suffer from lack of empirical underpinnings. This study therefore seeks to find out how cost of attendance and team affiliation influences fans attendance to stadium during matches.

Literature review

Every sports discipline enjoys some following. Followers of sports display different motivations for attending games. This has spurred researchers into action intent on unearthing the drivers of fans attendance (Wann, Grieve, Zapalac & Pease, 2008; Won & Kitamura, 2007; Correia & Esteves, 2007; Robinson and Trail, 2005; Funk, Ridinger & Moorman, 2004; Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James & Gladden, 2002; Kahle, Kambara & Rose, 1996; Sloan, 1989). However, these studies were generic and lacked focus. This study will adopt two factors and delve deep into how influential they are in shaping levels of spectating at stadiums during matches.

Economic factors have a part to play when fans contemplate attendance to watch matches. Fans have to finance the cost of tickets and possibly transportation cost and to come full cycle, pay for food (Swanson, Gwinner , Larson, & Janda, 2009; Torksaluye, Shabankareh , Fatemi & Rastgari 2013). In the opinion of Shank (2001), fans are driven to watch matches by a host of factors including cost of attendance. Hardcore fans have a deep infatuation for the game and do not find cost of attendance as a disincentive (Brokaw 2000).

Game of football has been described as a normal good and therefore susceptible to the laws of demand and supply. In this regard, when price of tickets are deemed to be high, it will diminish the quantum of stadium attendance (Dehghani, Mehdipour & Azmshah, 2015). Indeed, some scholars such as Terry, Corland & Houghey, (2004) placed high premium on the influence of economic factors on levels of spectating. Some experts have posited opposite views. Some football pundits believe that majority of fans are not deterred by the cost they incur to fill the stands at stadiums. Fans possessed by the game will move mountains to attend football matches regardless of cost (Isabirye

and Surujlal, 2012). However, fans without gainful employment will find high cost of tickets a hard nut to crack (Isabirye and Surujlal, 2012).

Feehan (2006) gave a comprehensive break down of attendance costs comprising ticket charges, cost of transportation, parking expenses, food and refreshment cost and purchase of team souvenirs stressing that the broad cost of stadium attendance should guide discourse on whether the game of football is a normal or inferior product. Higher ticket cost can deter fans away from stadiums whilst relatively lower cost of tickets will bait fans to throng to stadiums to watch matches. Feehan, Forrest and Simmons (2003) and Brokaw, Stone and Jones (2012) posit that fan numbers to stadiums will be low when tickets at the gates are on the high side with fans thronging football stadiums when price of tickets are affordable. This backs their view that soccer is a normal good and is dictated by principles of demand. They however reckon that soccer crazy fans are not scared of high ticket cost. To such fervent fans, soccer is akin to religion and attendance cannot be compromised on the altar of gate charges.

Spending power of fans links positively with stadium attendance. Simmons (1996) displayed strong connection between stadium attendees and wage levels in a country but some researchers downplay the influence of income on stadium attendance describing income as a weak determinant of fans attendance (Dobson & Goddard, 2011).

Team loyalty has been found to be a potent driver of stadium attendance. Wann and Branscombe (1993) describe team affiliation as psychological connection a fan has to a team which makes the fan invest time and resources to follow the team's exploits. Loyal fans are not dissuaded by the winning ratio of their teams but exhibit unwavering support in the face of losing streak. Team affiliation is a formidable factor that propels fans to stadiums (Williamson, 2000). Support for teams breed loyalty which in turn impels fans to re- patronize matches (Bitner, 1992; Wakefield, Blodgett & Sloan, 1996). Researchers have established sturdy links between team affiliation and repeat patronage of matches. Fans attachment to teams satisfies their esteem needs which drive them to watch matches. Dhurup, Dubihlela and Surujlal (2010) rated team affiliation as a dominant factor in fans quest to attend football matches. Ardent fans of teams appreciate the idea that they have regularly been described as the number 12 player on the pitch of play and their voices provide energy and atmosphere that makes their team players exert sweat to chalk victories. In recognition of loyal fans role in galvanizing superb displays by their players, Fallahi, Asadi, and Khabiri (2011), as corroborated by Brokaw et al (2012) opine that fans attendance impacts positively on team quality displays. Team affiliation is therefore considered a force that prompts fans to head for the stadium whenever their teams are in action and are part of a contingent of travelling fans when their idol teams are playing away from home- an expenditure prone undertaking but inspired by the desire to attend to cheer their favorite team to success.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

According to Babbie (2002), research design is the process of focusing your perspective for the purposes of particular study. Research design involves a set of decisions regarding what topic is to be studied among what population with what research methods for that purpose.

The Research method employed for this study was descriptive survey. According to Aggarwal (2008) descriptive survey research involves collecting data regarding behaviors and conditions about a subject with the view of description and interpretation. The main informants of this research were football fans, coaches and the players within the football industry.

Questionnaire was used for the study. The rationale for using questionnaire was that, it provided an efficient means for obtaining raw data; moreover many respondents could be reached within a short span of time.

3.2 The Study Population

The study population represents a collection of persons displaying one or common attributes which is the focus of a researcher (Best, 2007). The study population constituted the main source of selecting the sample for this study. The study population comprised of football fans, coaches and players in the football industry. Undoubtedly, this population was too large to be covered in its entirety. In line with research work, a fraction or a sample of the population was carefully chosen as the representative sample of the study population.

3.5 Sampling Plan

A sampling plan is a detailed outline of which measurements will be taken at what times, on which material, in what manner, and by whom (Dodge 1943). Sampling plans are devised in a manner to ensure representation so that shades of responses reflecting views of different respondents can be captured (Mason's, 1953). The sampling plan should be composed of three elements namely sampling unit, sampling size and the sampling procedure. The survey method was adopted so that a set of facts and opinions from a representative selection of the population can be collected to enable the researchers present findings as a true representation of the population of football fans using a carefully prepared set of questionnaires. Survey research is often used to assess thoughts, opinion, and feelings of the population of the research.

3.5.1 Sampling Size

The sampling size of a research is the number of element, set of individuals or scores that constitute it (Lwanga, 1991). Fink (2003) describes sample as a sub set of a larger constituency. Basically, large samples are associated with surveys because of representation and replication of research findings and recommendations. The sample size for this study is hundred and ten (110) participants. This consists of football fans, coaches and players of the football industry.

3.5.2 Sampling Procedure

Sampling is taken to be any portion of a population or universe as a representative of that population or universe (Osuala, 2005). There are two main types of sampling. These are probability sampling method and non-probability sampling method.

Non-probability sampling method: It is a technique of sampling whereby the chance of selection for each member in a population is unknown and for some elements is zero (Osuala, 2005).

Probability sampling method: Probability sampling is where each element or unit in a population has an even chance of being part of a study (Pandey, 2005). This is commonly used for large scale surveys. The basic idea behind probability sampling is to provide useful description of the total population; hence a sample of individuals from a population must contain essentially the same variations that exist in the population. This method boost the chances of achieving or selecting representative samples from large known populations. The probability method minimizes the challenges associated with conscious and non-conscious sampling bias by providing each ingredient of the population a known (non-zero) probability. The sample of this research was chosen from football fans, coaches and the players of the football industry using convenience (judgment) sampling. This method is suitable because it allowed the researcher to involve respondents who are readily available and less time consuming. The down side of using the convenience sampling method is its susceptibility to bias.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher utilized original data from primary sources. The primary data for this work were obtained through questionnaires. Structured questions which are close ended were used as instruments for data collection in this research.

The questionnaires were structured carefully to ensure clarity. Simple words were used so that respondents could easily understand as well as answer questions appropriately. Most of the questions required binary (Yes/No) responses. In all, a total of hundred and ten (110) questionnaires were distributed as follows, 10 to coaches, 30 to players, 60 to football fans and 10 to football journalist.

3.7 Data Analysis

The research questions were broken down into various sets of questions in the questionnaires. The questionnaires were coded according to the available response sets to generate tables and graphs for analysis.

The study used descriptive statistics for the data analysis using Microsoft Excel. The descriptive statistics were mainly tables and charts to explore the pattern of the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This section revealed the outcomes or the results of the study. The outcomes were expressed in the form of tables, graphs and charts.

In all a total of 110 respondents were contacted out of which 10 were coaches, 30 players, 60 football fans and 10 football journalist.. The survey spanned across the football industry with the following responses from the respondents.

4.1 Are you affiliated to a domestic team?

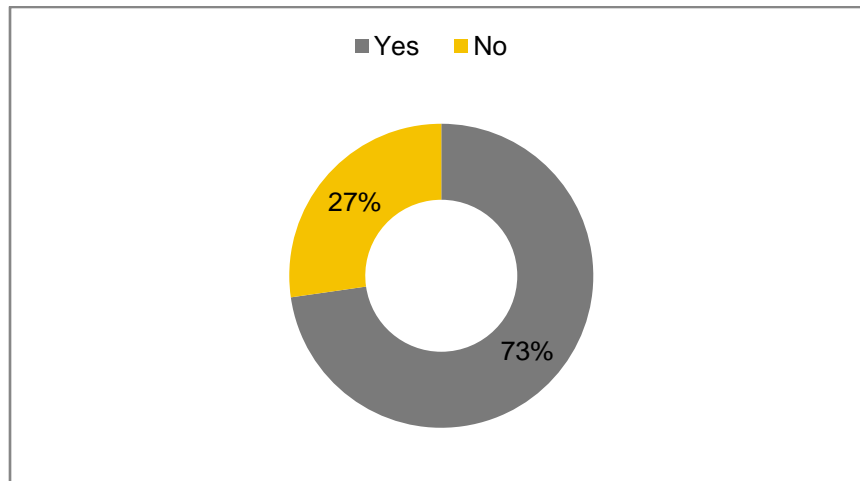


Figure 4.1

A number of people were asked whether there were affiliated to a domestic team. There were mixed response from the respondents. Out of the total number of respondents, 73% indicated that there are affiliated to a domestic team and 27% responded no.

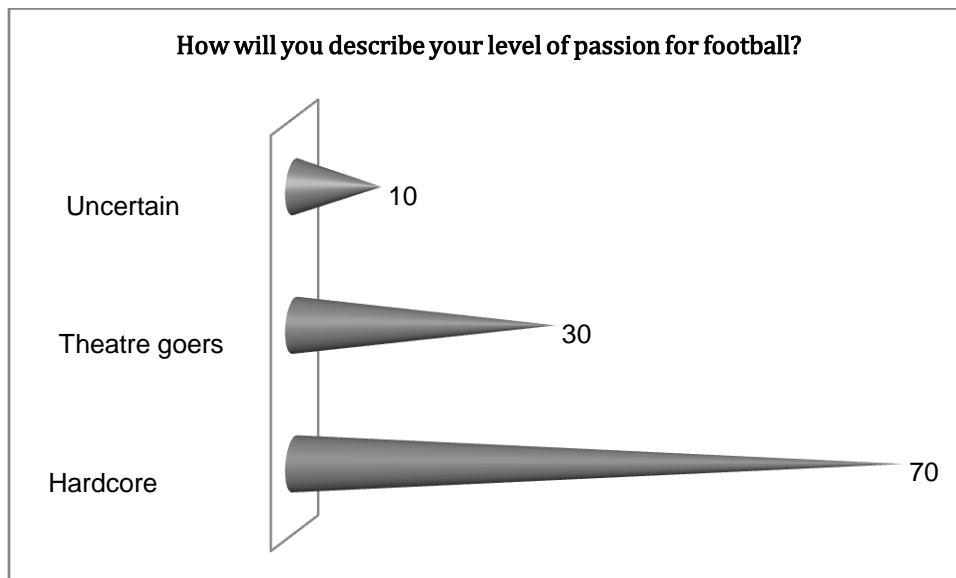


Figure 4.2 How will you describe your level of passion for football?

The fans were asked to describe their level of passion for football. Out of the total respondents, 70 of them revealed that there are passion is of hardcore, 30 of them describe their passion as being Theater goers and 10 of them said their uncertain.

4.2 How regular do you attend football matches?

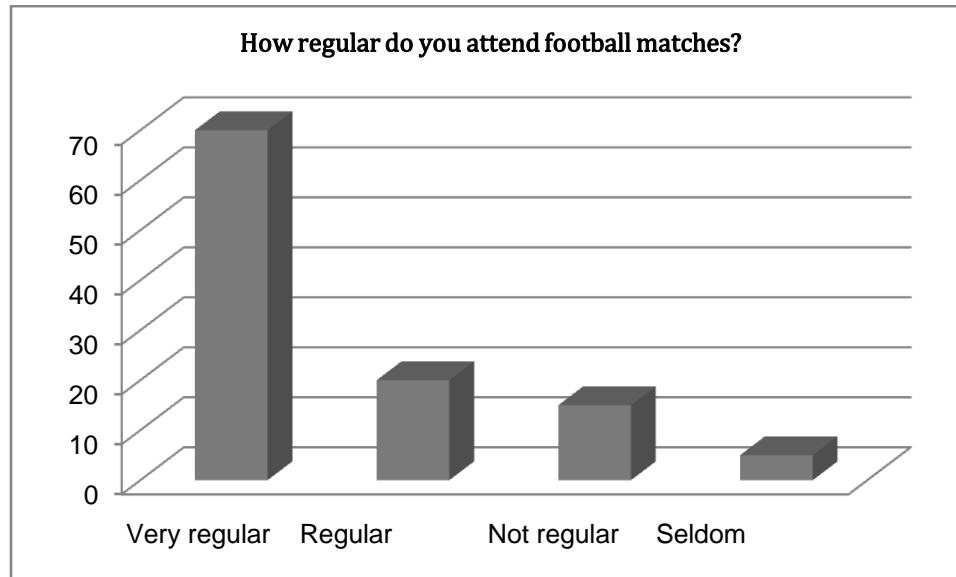


Figure 4.4

The respondents were again asked to mention their patronage level in football matches. 70 of them stated that they are very regular, 20 indicated that they are regular, 15 said they are not regular and 5 of them stated that they seldom attend football matches.

4.3. Is cost a factor that influences your stadium attendance

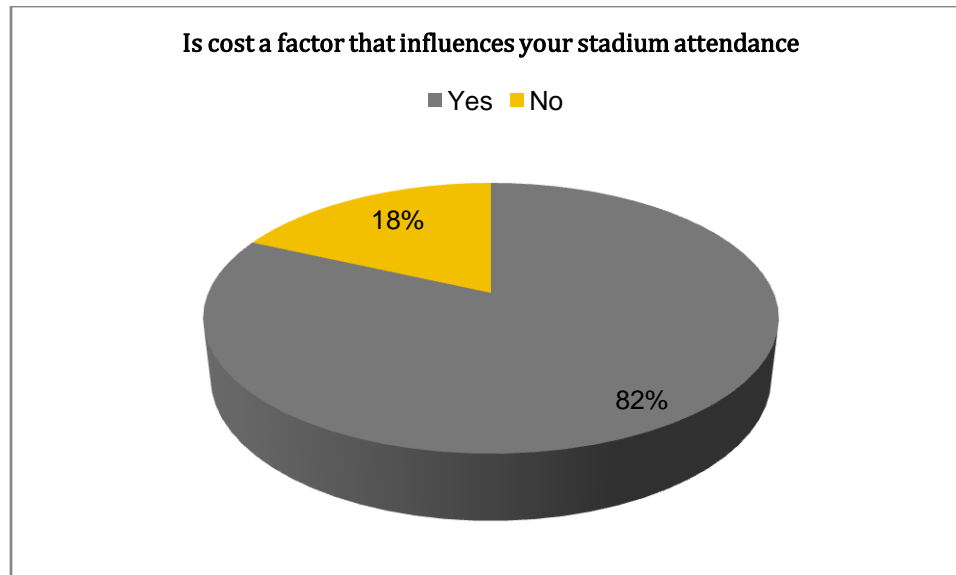


Figure 4.3

The respondents were asked whether they think cost is a factor that influence their stadium attendance. 82% of respondents revealed that cost is indeed a factor that influence their attendance and 18% responded revealed that cost is not a factor at all.

4.4. If cost of attendance increases, will it affect your attendance

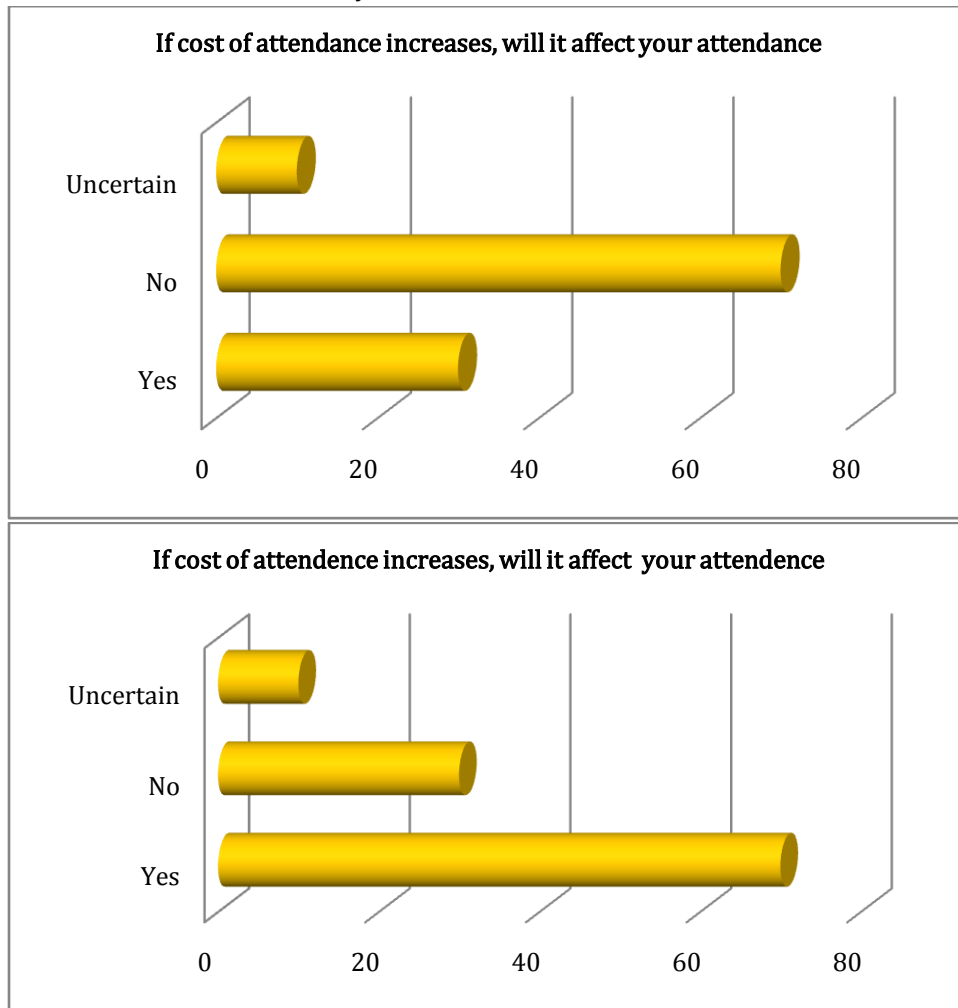


Figure 4.4

The participants were further probed as to whether if cost of attendance increases, it will affect their attendance. 70 of them said Yes, 30 said No and 10 of them said there are not sure. This goes a long way to establish the fact that cost of attendance indeed is not a major influencer in football attendance.

4.5 Have you ever travelled away to watch your team play

The respondents were asked whether they have ever traveled away to watch their favourite team play. 73% respondents answered Yes and 27% respondend no to the question.

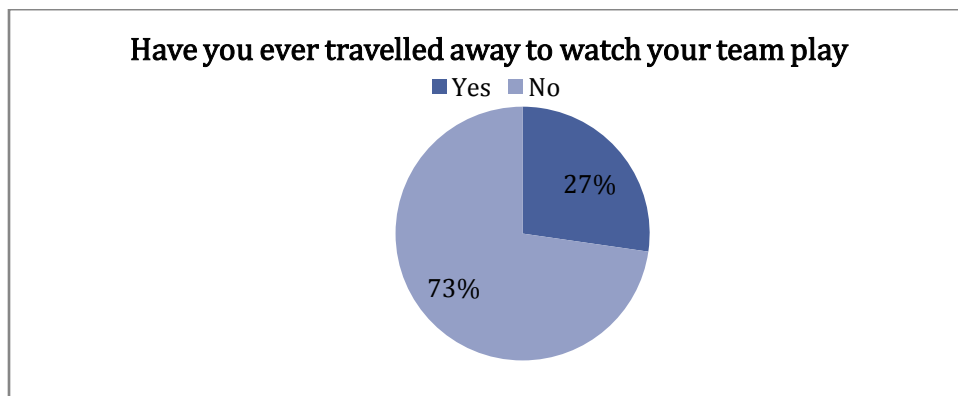


Figure 4.5

4.6 Is cost of attendance a factor that is affecting your ability to travel away to attend matches?

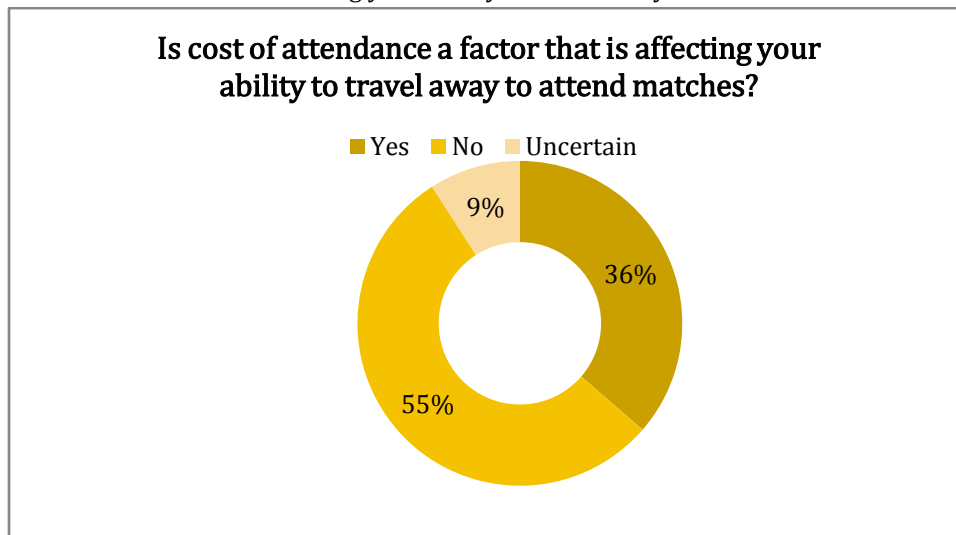


Figure 4.6

The participants were again asked whether if cost of attendance increases, it will affect their attendance. 55% of them said Yes, 36% said No and 9% of them said there are uncertain.

4.7 What other factors dissuade you from attending matches both home and away?

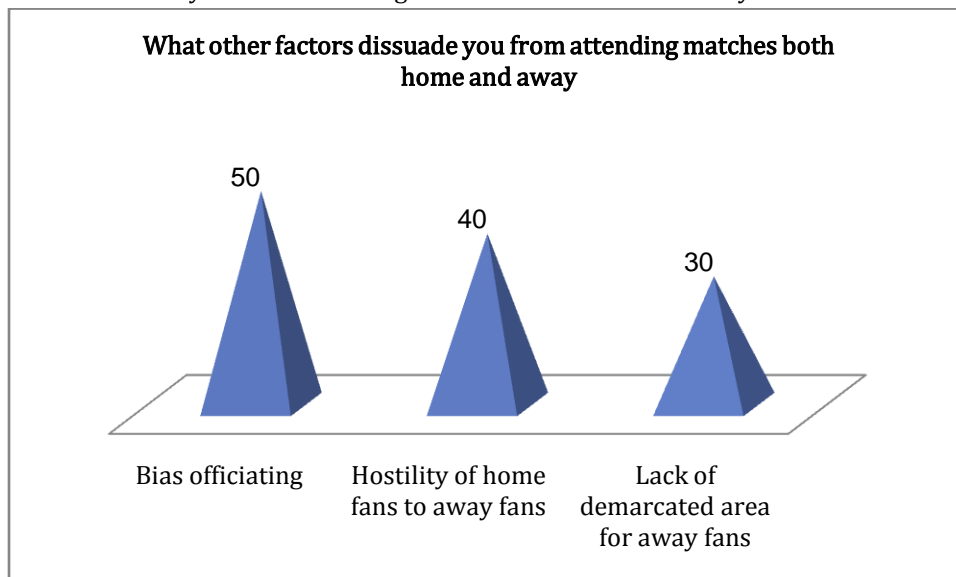


Figure 4.7

The fans were asked to state the factors that prevent them from attending matches both home and away. Out of the respondents, 50 of them mentioned Bias officiating as a reason, 40 of them mentioned Hostility of home fans to away fans and 30 of them said it is lack of demarcated area for away fans.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Fans pay for tickets before they access stadiums during football matches. From data analysis, majority of respondents are influenced by gate entrance charges. Importantly, fans are very sensitive in hikes in cost of tickets. It is clear that costs of stadium attendance are a key factor that drives stadium attendance in Ghana. Football authorities therefore need to consider cost as a critical element as they muse over strategies to propel stadium attendance. New football seasons are ushered with ticket price increases. Based on the findings of this study, fans are price elastic

depicting that slight increases in gate fees will prompt a disproportionate slump in attendees to stadiums. Sports authorities should therefore consider stagnating gate fees to attract fans to stadiums.

This study found that fans in Ghana hardly hit the roads to support their teams when they are playing away from home. It does mean that many premier league clubs in Ghana travel away without their fans which further dilutes stadium attendance and robs competitive matches of atmosphere.

Respondents cited other reasons for underpinning their notable low attendance to away matches.

Bias officiating by match day officials has been highlighted by connoisseurs' of the game as having a negative effect on attendance. Visiting teams have often complained about decisions of match officials which have perpetually fallen on deaf ears. This situation should be tackled by clamping down on match officials who make dubious decisions against clubs. Alternatively, officials who exhibit impartiality and get difficult decisions right should be recognized and rewarded by football authorities.

Besides, home fans have often displayed open hostility towards visiting fans. This is usually common when visiting teams defy all odds and clinch victory. At some stadiums, a fan spotted in colors of a visiting team risk being manhandled by home fans which is why most visiting club fans have kept a distance from the stadium. Lack of clear cut demarcated area for visiting fans in most stadiums has not helped in attracting fans to the stadium. Visiting fans often feel insecure as they struggle for space to settle and cheer their idol clubs. The fact that visiting fans are dispersed around a stadium means they are unable to cheer their clubs in a chorus making their voices subdued. To improve the situation, sports authorities should consider demarcating a specific area for visiting fans and adequate security provided for them. This can bait visiting fans to football stadiums during matches.

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