

Special Features of the Product in Sport Management

(Herbert Woratschek und Lars Griebel)¹

Uncertainty of outcome and **co-opetition** are special features of sport products that are mainly addressed in sport economics (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). In sport management literature, these features are widely accepted as fundamental hypotheses (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart & Nicholson, 2006, pp. 4-5). Furthermore, IHIP characteristics, BIRGing superstar effects, CORFing, giant-killing effects, and backing the underdogs are acknowledged as special features of products (sport events) in sport management.

IHIP Characteristics

Sport events belong to the service sector, and services are described by the following IHIP characteristics: **intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability** (e.g. Edgett & Parkinson, 1993, p. 8110). Although IHIP characteristics are open to dispute, they are still applicable to different aspects of services because **customers' resources** are always required for the production of services (Moeller, 2010, p. 362). Spectators contribute to the stadium atmosphere (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010) and, consequently, integrate their resources in sport event production. This illustrates that IHIP characteristics are special features of sport events.

People watch (consume) games when they are played (produced), which means production and consumption **cannot be separated**. Accordingly, sport events must be presold and cannot be stored because sport event products are **perishable** commodities. Although on-demand videos, social media clips or newspapers extend the product life in a different form, the original event is transient (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007, p. 18). Additionally, sport consumers purchase the excitement generated by uncertainty of outcome (Dobson & Goddard, 2001, pp. 125-126; Woratschek & Griebel, 2020), which shows that sport events are **heterogenous** and **intangible** goods.

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BIRGing and Superstar Effect

BIRGing is an acronym for “**basking in reflected glory**”. It reflects the desire of individuals to strengthen their associations with successful others. BIRGing has a positive self-presentation and an ego enhancement function (Cialdini et al, 1976, p. 366). Individuals describe the outcome of the match in terms of “we” (e.g. “we won”) and achieve a positive image transfer from the club to themselves (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne & Braddock, 2007, p. 382; Wann & Branscombe, 1990, pp. 103-104).

Consequently, sport events help to shape an individual’s self-identity. Fans identify with the club’s success in order to enhance their self-esteem (BIRGing). **Identification** leads to an emotional and loyal binding between fans and their favourite club. High identification results in an **extreme fan** and a **high spectator loyalty**. Fans and spectators gladly **provide their resources** to contribute to an unforgettable event (described by IHIP-characteristics) together with the club.

Star players attract spectators and, as a result, the attendance increases. The positive effect of superstars on attendance in professional sports leagues has been verified in several papers (e.g. Humphreys, Johnson, p. 153). This **superstar effect** may lead to a higher identification of spectators with their teams.

The antecedents and consequences of unique features of sport products are summarized in figure 1:

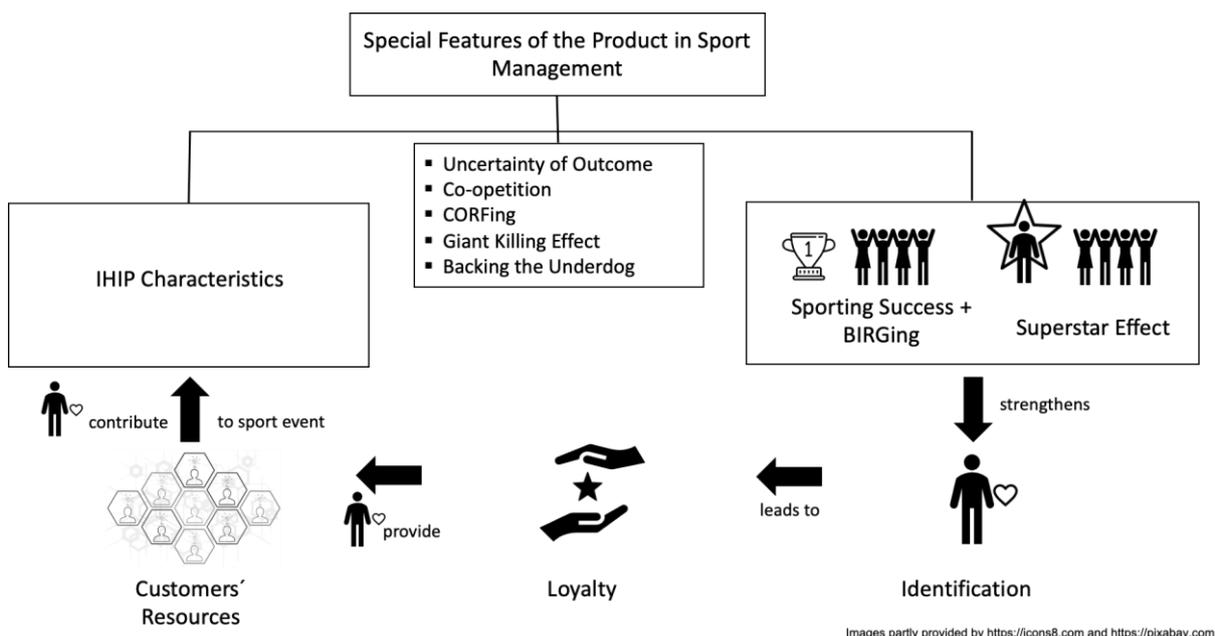


Figure 1: Antecedents and consequences of special features of sport products.

CORFing

CORFing means “**cutting of reflected failure**”. This notion is referred to people who tend to sever associations with others who have failed. CORFing serves an ego protective function and strives to avoid a negative evaluation by others (Snyder, Lassegard & Ford, 1986, p. 383). Losses are often described in terms of “they” (e.g. “they lost”) (Wann & Branscombe, 1990, p. 104). If a team fails, CORFing decreases spectators’ identification with the team.

Giant-Killing Effect and Backing the Underdogs

Spectators’ may be excited when the underdog beats the favorite (Coates, Humphreys & Zhou, 2014, p. 971-972). This aspect can be labeled as the **giant-killing effect** (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), which may have a short-term influence on demand.

Some spectators like when underdogs overcome the inferior status and upset the favoured opponent (Frazier & Snyder 1991, p. 380). Frazier & Snyder (1991, p 387) state that by “focusing attention on the underdog, a measure of excitement is returned to a potentially uninteresting event,” which is caused by an imbalanced competition. This kind of spectators’ behaviour is often connected with sport betting, and could be referred to as **backing the underdogs** (Express, 2020). It can be observed that clubs can regularly underperform, yet they still rely on the loyalty of their fans, who will not leave to a better performing team. For example, the German club VfB Stuttgart just had a very slight decrease in spectator numbers after relegating from the Bundesliga (Transfermarkt GmbH & Co. KG, 2020).

To put it in a nutshell:

1. **Uncertainty of outcome** and **co-opetition** are special features of sport products.
2. **Customers’ resources** are always required to produce a sport event.
3. Sport events as services show **IHIP characteristics** in different aspects.
4. **IHIP** characteristics are **intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability**.
5. Furthermore, **BIRGing, super star effects, CORFing, giant-killing effects, and backing the underdogs** are acknowledged as special features of sport products.
6. BIRGing, in combination with sport success and the superstar effect, lead to **identification** with a sport team.
7. High identification results in an extreme fan and a **high spectator loyalty**.
8. Loyal fans and **spectators provide resources** and contribute to a sport event.

9. CORFing, in combination with failure, **decreases the degree of fans' identification** with the team.
10. Giant-killing effects and backing the underdogs may have an **influence on demand**.

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