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Sport consumer motivation: Autonomy and control orientations that regulate fan behaviours

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ABSTRACT

The vast majority of research on sport consumers fails to utilize a theoretical understanding of motivation to examine behaviour. Self-Determination Theory was used to develop a new understanding of sport consumer motivation. Sport consumer motivation is conceptualized as representing autonomy and control orientations that energize a desire to engage in sport goal directed behaviour to acquire positive benefits. A multi-attribute survey instrument was designed to measure five motivational sub-types and administered to three samples of sport consumers, with the goal of testing for reliability and validity ($N = 1222$). Structural equation modelling analysis revealed that control orientation of sport motivation regulates desired benefits of socialization and diversion. In contrast, autonomy orientation of motivation regulates desired benefits of performance, esteem and excitement. Sport consumer motivation explained over 60% of the variance in game attendance, media usage, wearing team related clothing and purchasing team related merchandise. Results illustrate how sport consumer motivation represents intrinsically motivated behaviour that treats sport consumption activity as an end in itself as well as extrinsically motivated behaviour as the engagement in an activity is to obtain a separable instrumental outcome from the activity itself.

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The role of professionalized competitive sport is recognized by academics in sport management as well as practitioners (Chalip, 2006; Ziegler, 2007). Individual spending on admission to US sporting events is difficult to accurately gauge but estimates for 2005 range from \$5 billion to \$16.1 billion (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2010). The breadth and depth of attention to sport as an entertainment product is highlighted by the number and diversity of articles in the recent Journal of Sport Management two special issues on sport events (Dwyer & Fredline, 2008). The role of sport is not lost on government and business as the US sport market is estimated at \$425 billion and a significant proportion of the work force in Australia, Japan, United Kingdom, and United States depends on the spectator sport industry (Plunket, 2007). In Australia, individuals who attend sporting events spend on average 2 h and 7 min per day on audio/visual media or 8.8% of his or her leisure time following sport (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Despite this popularity, the spectator sport industry continues to face demand challenges.

Constantly changing consumer preferences and evolving technologies will influence the demand for sport entertainment products and services. Within Australia, general population surveys indicate that overall attendance at sporting events has

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declined from 42.3% in 1999 to 39.9% in 2005 despite more professional teams being introduced (ABS, 2007). The sporting good market from which \$8.25 billion in team licensed merchandise is generated has experienced slow growth between 2003 and 2007 in the US (Plunket, 2007). The fragmentation of the TV sport audience into niche and regional markets continues to have implications for lower ratings and broadcast revenues (Klayman, 2007). Management issues related to performance enhancing drugs, behaviour of professional athletes, escalating payroll expenses, and public/private financing of venues continue to dampen public perceptions of sport. Advances through the Internet, satellite TV, and wireless technologies will impact the consumption of sport entertainment requiring new delivery strategies to develop revenue from local residents and tourists. The changing landscape within which the sport spectator industry operates requires a deeper consideration of the interchange between the individual and socio-contextual.

A sub-set of sport management research has emerged to understand sport consumers. To date, the social–psychological perspective (Sloan, 1989) remains the dominant approach to explain a range of attitudes and behaviours of sport consumers (Heere & James, 2007; Madrigal, 2006; Pritchard & Funk, 2006; Seo & Green, 2008). Investigations have led to measurement tools with a number of constructs to examine the relationship between individual motives and sport consumption related activities (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). The bulk of this work embraces the concept that spectator sport provides the opportunity to satisfy individual needs and receive benefits, and specifies motivation as the substantive basis for sport consumer behaviour activity (Funk & James, 2006). This has provided a good foundation to examine how discrete motives combine to elicit motivation and drive behaviour.

The current study builds upon this research by examining sport consumer motives under the conceptual guidance of a broad theory of motivation. The literature suggests that domain specific knowledge, such as sport consumer motivation, can be enhanced by grounding research within broad theoretical frameworks (Kyle & Mowen, 2005; Weick, 1989). In this research, sport consumer motivation is considered from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985a). Within SDT, the regulation of specific sport consumer motives is a product of individual needs and socio-contextual considerations that represents an individual's motivational orientation (Deci & Ryan, 1985a).

An individual's motivational orientation can be broadly classified into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation reflects an *autonomy orientation* that involves regulating behaviour based on interests, self-endorsed values and ego enhancement. As such, the autonomy orientation of sport consumer motivation would be intrinsically regulated behaviour that treats the sport consumption activity as an end in itself. Extrinsic motivation represents a *control orientation* that directs how one regulates behaviour based on feelings of stress, tension and public interaction. As such, the control orientation of sport consumer motivation would be intrinsically regulated behaviour that treats the sport consumption activity as means to an end. Together, autonomy and control motivational orientation regulate the type and frequency of sport consumption activities.

The present research examines how sport consumers regulate individual motives through autonomy and control orientations that influence attendance at sporting events, use of media to follow sport, and the purchase of licensed sport merchandise. Guided by SDT, the regulation of key sport consumer motives that explain a range of behaviours is examined. SDT has a strong tradition of being applied to understand sport participant motivation and was recently applied to understand motives of youth sport spectators (e.g., Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The next section provides a theoretical discussion of motivation followed by a discussion of sport consumer motivation.

1. Literature

Motivation refers to the processes that energize and direct purposeful behaviour (Hebb, 1955), and represents one of the most studied concepts in sport-related research (Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2008). Various theories have been used to inform research on sport consumer motives (e.g., Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Kahle, Kambara & Rose, 1996; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002). However, most often, no organizing framework is relied on to guide research into sport consumer motivation (e.g., Funk & James, 2001). Extending from this, limited attention has been paid to clarifying what motivation is intended to represent (e.g., Cooper, 2009; Pons, Mourali, & Nyek, 2006). Therefore, prior to considering existing approaches to studying sport consumer motivation, some brief notes delineating what is meant by motivation in this research are in order.

1.1. A motivational perspective

There are many different perspectives on motivation (e.g., Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Mele, 1995; Ramlall, 2004), each with its own underlying assumptions suited to certain paradigms. It is beyond the scope of this article to compare and contrast the alternate views of motivation. Rather, we merely present one perspective on motivation that fits with the current authors paradigmatic beliefs, and it is left to the reader to decide if this is congruent with their personal beliefs and values.

Motivation in this research is viewed from what can be termed an organismic perspective (Day, Laland, & Odling-Smee, 2003; Lewontin & Levins, 1997; Moreno, Umerez, & Ibenez, 1997). This perspective adopts a holistic, or gestalt, view of the unit of analysis in research (Wheeler, 1936). Being a gestalt perspective, an organismic approach to research requires consideration of the part-whole problem endemic to our understanding of the world around us. That is, we should carefully describe how relativity and unity combine to bring into being the topic of our research. In this case, an organism may be described as any self-governing entity (Irwin, 1932).

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