

Fan Motivation And Loyalty: Extending The Sport Interest Inventory (SII) To The Australian Football League

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Abstract

This study used the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) to examine the motivation of fans attending a game in the Australian Football League. This is the first study to use the SII for professional men's team sport outside the United States. Confirmatory factor analysis showed the model provided a good fit for the data collected in Australia, and regression analysis revealed that *team interest*, *vicarious achievement*, *excitement* and *player interest* were the significant factors in predicting and explaining the level of attitudinal loyalty of fans toward their favourite team.

Keywords: motivation; sport; loyalty; Australian football

Introduction

Being a loyal, die hard fan is important. Loyal sport fans resist the temptation to switch to a 'more successful' team during a losing season, or adopt a new 'favourite' player when their current favourite is down on form. Loyalty in sports takes on additional meanings than in other consumer brands (Sebastian and Bristow, 2000). For sports team loyalty, superior brand (team or player) performance is not a pre-cursor to cognitive loyalty (Oliver, 1999; Parker and Stuart, 1997). However, understanding factors that contribute to loyalty is critical and increasing attendance is a key objective of professional sports organisations (Hansen and Gauthier, 1989). The income generated from attendance contributes as much as 75% of the overall revenue of some sports teams (Zhang, Smith and Pease, 1996).

Literature Review

Loyalty

The concept of loyalty has received extensive attention from marketing academics and practitioners. Loyalty has been described as both uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional (Day, 1969; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Uncles, Dowling and Hammond, 2003) and the attitudinal component is important for distinguishing true brand loyalty from simply repeat buying (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Mellens, Dekimpe and Steenkamp, 1996; Oliver, 1999). The definition of brand loyalty that enjoys widespread academic support (Mellens, Dekimpe and Steenkamp, 1996) is provided by Jacoby and Chestnut:

"The (a) biased, (b) behavioural response, (c) expressed over time, (d) by some decision-making unit, (e) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (f) is a function of psychological (decision making evaluative) processes" (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978, p. 165).

Motivation

The study of consumer motives in professional team sport has received considerable attention. A number of scales have been developed to measure factors that explain fan behaviour (Wann, 1995). One of the most comprehensive scales developed is the Sports Interest Inventory (SII) that measures a number of core and contextual motives related to sporting teams (Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2003). Like many other scales, the SII was developed for North American sport and these scales have rarely been used to understand Australian sport consumers. The SII examined the relationships between the 33 observed variables and 11 first order latent variables. See Table 1 for construct descriptions. The purpose of this study was to confirm the SII's applicability to Australian Rules football and explain loyalty to a team.

Table 1: Description of Sport Interest Inventory (SII)

Family Bonding	Opportunity to spend quality time with family
Friends Bonding	Opportunity to spend quality time with friends
Drama	Close game versus a one-sided game with the element of uncertainty as to the outcome of the game
Entertainment Value:	Affordability of the entertainment
Escape	A desire to "get away" or be a part of something different from the "normal routine"
Excitement	Excitement surrounding the games and spectacle
Player Interest	Watch and follow a specific favourite player
Role Model	Players serve as positive role models for young children
Socialization	Opportunity to interact with other spectators and fans
Team Interest	Interest in the team as a whole rather than individual players
Vicarious Achievement	Team provides a heightened sense of personal or collective esteem

Source: (Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2004)

Methods

Data were collected at a Fremantle Dockers home game at Subiaco Oval on July 24, 2004. A total of eight research assistants were stationed inside four gates one hour before bouncdown. The gates were roughly equidistant from each other and the assistants handed out 820 self-completed paper questionnaires to patrons as they entered the stadium. To randomise the sample, the assistants were instructed to approach every fourth individual or group, with further instructions not to give the questionnaire to more than one person in any group. The respondents could either complete the questionnaire on the spot, or return the questionnaire to the same location before the end of the three-quarter time break. Respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement with each of the 33 items from 11 motivational factors on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly

Agree). Respondents also completed four questions that measure attitudinal loyalty towards their favourite team (Funk and Pastore, 2000; Gladden and Funk, 2001). A total of 651 completed questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 79%. This response, from a game day attendance of 35,037 corresponds to 1.8% of the overall crowd. The number of refusals was low.

Analysis

The sample was 55% male, with an average age of 38.1 years. The gender split of the sample compares favourably with the overall gender split of AFL games in Perth of 57.6% (Megalogenis, 2004). Approximately 61% were members of the Fremantle Football Club, and of those members, 94% purchased season tickets. The Fremantle Football Club reports that during most home games, 65-70% of the attendees are Fremantle members. These figures indicate that the sample is representative of the attendee population.

Most attendees (86%) live within 60 kilometres of Subiaco Oval – the ground where Fremantle plays its home games. Sixty-four percent of all respondents attended in groups of two to four persons, while 5.3% reported coming to the game alone. Forty-three percent of those sampled first started attending football games aged 10 or younger, while 73% began attending games before they turned 21. The means, standard deviations, and consistency measures for each involvement antecedent are displayed in Table 2. As would be expected when surveying predominantly home team fans on game day, the means for the motivational constructs are almost universally high. Even amongst these fans however, there are variances in levels and types of motivations, and it is these differences that are the subject of this study.

Table 2: Sport Interest Inventory Construct Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities and Average Variance Extracted (N = 559)

SII Constructs	Mean	SD	α	Avg Variance Extracted
Vicarious Achievement	5.6	1.32	.82	.63
Team Interest	6.3	1.01	.81	.61
Player Interest	2.9	1.35	.67	.43
Excitement	6.3	0.86	.77	.55
Escape	4.8	1.63	.88	.71
Drama	5.5	1.27	.72	.48
Socialization	4.8	1.29	.76	.54
Family Bonding	4.8	1.64	.88	.72
Friends Bonding	5.2	1.28	.79	.56
Entertainment Value	5.0	1.56	.92	.79
Role Model	5.5	1.32	.87	.69
Attitudinal Loyalty	6.1	1.01	.68	NA

The means for each construct ranged from 2.9 for Player Interest to 6.3 for Team Interest. Standard deviations ranged from 0.86 for Excitement to 1.64 for Family Bonding. The internal consistency measures for each antecedent ranged from $\alpha = .67$ to $\alpha = .92$. Inspection of the correlation matrix (not provided here due to space limitations) revealed moderate correlations between the 11 constructs. An additional test of discriminant validity was conducted and revealed that the average variance extracted by each of the three items

representing a construct exceeded the squared correlation between each antecedent (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results provide evidence that the SII constructs are unique from one another.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1999) to examine the psychometric properties of the SII consisting of 33 scale items and 11 constructs. A covariance matrix taken from these respondents was used as the input data (N = 559). The error terms for all 33 observed variables were constrained to not correlate while the 11 latent variables were left to freely correlate. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed the SII achieved a good fit for data. The parameter estimates and the accompanying *t* test of significance for the relationship between each scale item and its respective construct were significant at $p < .01$. The factor loadings ranged from a low of $r = .57$ to a high of $r = .88$ with seven of the items below the $r = .70$ benchmark. The average variance extracted for each construct ranged from .43 to .79 with over 61% of the variance in the 11 constructs accounted for by the 33 scale items. The two constructs failing to extract more than the recommended 50% of the variance were Player Interest (0.43) and Drama (0.48).

Inspection of the fit indices indicated that the data supported the hypothesized measurement model. The RMSEA value of .06 was below the recommended .06 cut-off and in acceptable range of .05 to .08 for a close fitting model (Hair et al., 1998; Hu and Bentler, 1999). The SMRM (.06) was below the recommend .08 cut-off indicating a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 1998). Based upon these results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the psychometric properties of the SII were confirmed and provided a close fit for the data collected.

Table 3 Regression Analysis for Attitudinal Loyalty on Sport Interest Inventory Factors

Factor	B	Standard Error	Beta
Player Interest (PLA)	-.193	.100	-.07
Vicarious Achievement (VIC)	.488	.122	.16
Excitement (EXC)	.524	.198	.11
Escape (ESC)	-.080	.083	-.03
Drama (DRA)	-.162	.100	-.05
Family Bonding (FAM)	-.014	.086	-.01
Socialization (SOC)	.014	.119	.01
Role Model (ROL)	.036	.116	.01
Friends Bonding (BON)	.021	.118	.01
Team Interest (TEM)	2.165	.161	.53
Entertainment Value (VAL)	.090	.084	.04

Items in **bold** are significant at ($p < 0.05$)

Regression Results

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to explain the attitudinal loyalty of fans to their favourite team. The mean level of attitudinal loyalty was 6.1 (on a 7 point scale) and the

internal consistency measure was $\alpha = 0.68$. The regression model is displayed in Table 3 and indicates that 52.5% of the variance in the level of attitudinal loyalty is explained by the following factors: TEM, VIC, EXC and PLA ($F = 54.27$, $df = 552$, $p < 0.05$). The β coefficients indicate the strongest relationship to loyalty was TEM ($\beta = 0.53$), distantly followed by VIC ($\beta = 0.16$), EXC ($\beta = 0.11$) and PLA ($\beta = -0.07$). The negative coefficient of PLA indicates an inverse relationship with the level of attitudinal loyalty. The overwhelming dominance of TEM in the regression model means it could possibly stand as a proxy measure of attitudinal loyalty, leaving the other significant constructs redundant. However, the predictive capabilities of the model are strengthened when PLA, VIC and EXC are included and team interest does not capture the element of resistance to change which is a central component of psychological commitment (Mahony, Madrigal and Howard, 2000; Pritchard, Havitz and Howard, 1999).

Discussion

The present study replicates the use of the SII in an Australian sport context and provides new insight into the structure of sport consumer loyalty in Australian Rules football. Although this scale has been used in a variety of sporting situations (Funk et al., 2001; Funk, Mahony and Ridinger, 2002; Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2004), the present study marks the first time the SII has been distributed to spectators attending a competitive men's team sport outside the United States. Although there is nothing to suggest the SII model would not fit data gathered in Australia, cultural and sport differences between the two countries were a concern and required replication. These data revealed that the SII is applicable and future researchers should feel comfortable using this scale to increase their knowledge of non-American sports fans by applying the motivational constructs to other important variables such as game day attendance or sponsorship awareness.

The current research allows sport managers to move beyond marketing activities focused solely on attracting consumers to develop strategies that can build loyal consumers. The regression results indicate that team interest is strongly predictive of attitudinal loyalty among AFL consumers and should be leveraged through increasing team identification. This approach will require more targeted planning with respect to identifying niche markets to create initial interest using star players in advertising and promotions versus relationship marketing activities that foster identification with the team. To induce team interest, a holistic approach to branding must be considered that emphasises the consumer as part of the organisation. In addition, the importance given to *vicarious achievement* and *excitement* as part of the consumption experience suggest sport managers should examine their unique environments to determine what contributes to an entertaining atmosphere.

Taken together, these results are consistent with some of the challenges and issues previously discussed using the SII (Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2003). The strong positive relationship between attitudinal loyalty and team interest suggests this motive represents a higher order construct or that more sophisticated multivariate analytic methods (i.e., structural equation modelling) are needed to understand the variance explained by other motives. The relationship between attitudinal loyalty and interest in a specific player was negative indicating that star players are good for attracting spectators but become less important for loyal fans. In addition, adding a behavioural component such as repeat attendance measure to create a loyalty composite (e.g., Day, 1969) may also provide a different perspective.

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