Assessing the Role of Passion as a Mediator of Consumer Intentions to attend a Motor Sports Event.

Dr Robin Pentecost*
Lecturer
Griffith Business School,
Logan campus, Griffith University,
University Drive, Meadowbrook QLD 4131, Australia
Phone: +61 7 3382 1095
Fax: +61 7 3382 1981
Email: r.pentecost@griffith.edu.au

Abstract

It makes logical sense that the level of passion one feels towards an event (termed fanship for this research) is likely to influence behaviour. Exploratory research, using two known affective constructs (attitudes, satisfaction), found such a dimension to mediate the attitude-intentions relationship but not the satisfaction-intentions relationship. The importance of this finding is that there is some factor consequent to attitudes influencing intentions towards an event. For the events marketer such a dimension adds another potential segmentation tool. Theoretical development of the construct is acknowledged with limitations and areas for future research recognized.

Keywords: Attitudes, Satisfaction, Passion, Fanship, Intentions, Mediating

*Presenting Author
Assessing the Role of Passion as a Mediator of Consumer Intentions to attend a Motor Sports Event.

Introduction

Companies have turned to sports sponsorship in an effort to cut through the clutter and the costs associated with traditional communication media (Meenaghan, 1996; Madrigal, 2001). To this end, several authors have advanced either conceptually (Hunt, et. al., 1999,) or empirically (see Mahony and Madrigal 2000; Funk, 2002; Tapp and Clowes, 2002) methods to decompose sports fans into segments; fine-tuning a catch-all definition of “a fan as an enthusiastic devotee of some particular sports consumptive object” (Hunt et al. 1999, p. 440). As such, it seems reasonable to assume fanship would influence a variety of factors relevant to marketers. This research takes the perspective that levels of fanship influence intended behaviour.

Theoretical Development and Hypotheses

Research offers little doubt that consumers distinguish between market offerings according to their relative hedonic or utilitarian nature (Batra and Ahtola 1991; Mano and Oliver 1993; Dhar and Wertenboch 2000). Hedonic value, sometimes called experiential consumption, relates to consumption that is pursued as an intrinsically valued end in itself, rather than an extrinsically valued means to some other end (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

The benefit provided by the hedonic offering may be perceived as the pleasure in consumption interpreted within the broader narrative context of a consumers’ life (Deighton 1992). While utilitarian consumption is more functional, the experience of hedonic consumption is auto-eclectic in that the pleasure felt by the consumer is its own reward (Csikszentmihalyi 1980). Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999) coined the term “experience economy” to describe such a paradigm shift in consumer choices. Experience economy, they contend, is the next economy following the agrarian economy, the industrial economy, and the most recent service economy.

Holbrook and others insist that all products and services have an experiential component (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Holbrook et. al. 1984). Such research reveals the consumption experience ranges from being mundane and hardly noticeable to a very significant part of consumer value. Bigne, et. al. (2008) found such hedonic or experiential consumption to be positively linked to satisfaction and loyalty and may even be the key for understanding consumer value given that such a value may mediate consumer behaviour (Holbrook and Batra, 1987). Such an affective state (e.g. pleasure) generated when consuming an event such as sports (Pham, 1992) is then likely to influence consumer behaviour (e.g. intentions).

It is argued that the notion of fanship refers to the pleasure or hedonic value of the product or service; that is, the level of passion one feels towards the object/event. This research partially draws on the work of Redden and Steiner (2000), who laid the groundwork for research into how consumer behaviour can be measured or interpreted in terms of the level of fanaticism involved. In developing their research
framework, these authors review literature suggesting fanatical behaviour to retain aspects of normal behaviour, based on the degree of enthusiasm, excitement, passion and commitment and/or extremes to which an individual is prepared to go to consume an identified product or service. Researching branding, they suggest behaviours such as loyalty or worshiping potentially denotes a fanatical consumer.

Such insights are relevant when exploring the relationship between the degree of devotion to consumption and behaviour. In the fashion marketplace Parks et al. (2005) inferred an association between fanship and behaviour when they found a positive relationship between fashion consciousness and expenditure to be influenced by the hedonic value. Thus, in fashion, fanship, encompassing both consciousness and involvement, influences behavioural outcomes, e.g. purchase decisions (Bakewell et al., 2006; O'Cass, 2004; Rook and Fisher, 1995).

Like fashion, the experiential consumption of sports events produces affective polar reactions among viewers such as pleasure or displeasure (Pham, 1992). This pleasure then becomes interpreted within the context of the consumers’ life (Deighton 1992) with the reactions felt not the means to an end but the intrinsically valued end in itself (Csikszentmihalyi 1980; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The major premise of the fanship construct is that such a characteristic will influence consumption behaviour. To test this theory, the following hypothesis is stated: H1: fanship will have a significant positive effect on intentions to attend a sports event.

After consumers have consumed they evaluate the outcomes of their decision. The feelings resulting from this evaluation can be either positive (satisfaction) or negative (dissatisfaction). Containing both utilitarian and hedonic dimensions, if consumers’ expectations are met they are satisfied and as such are more likely to remain customers and committed to purchasing the product/service again (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2010). This then implies those who are satisfied with an event will have a high positive intention to attend. H2: Satisfaction will have a significant positive affect on intentions to attend a sports event.

One cannot deny the importance of attitudes in experiential consumption given that attitudes are a predisposition to respond and have a positive relationship with consumption (Allport, 1935). This applies to events marketing given the strong relationship between attitudes and behaviour (Zimbardo et al., 1977; Fiske and Taylor, 1991). The implication is that attitudes towards a sports event have a positive relationship with intentions. Based on the foregoing, the following hypothesis is stated: H3: Attitudes towards the event will have a significant positive influence on intentions to attend a sports event.

The core essentials of attitudes are that they are evaluative in nature (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Fiske and Taylor, 1991). Being a superset of consciousness, attitudes also contain cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects (Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960; Zimbardo et al., 1977), even though these need not be consistent with each other (Zanna and Rempel, 1988). The question is whether attitudes formed lead to the degree of fanship one has with the product/service with fanship then influence consumer behaviour or do they run parallel? From a sequential perspective and as proposed by previous literature, it is likely that hedonic value such as fanship will
have a mediating effect on intentions (see Holbrook and Batra 1987). **H4: fanship will have a mediating effect on attitudes and intentions to attend a sports event.**

However, Parks et. al. (2005) proposed that in the hedonic fashion marketplace levels of satisfaction are antecedent to attitudes. Should this be the case, in the events marketplace then it is likely that while fanship may mediate the attitude-intentions relationship it may not do so for the satisfaction-intentions relationship. To test this theory the following hypothesis is stated: **H5: fanship will not have a mediating effect on satisfaction and intentions to attend a sports event.**

**Research Design**

Using a field study approach, a team of research assistants intercepted attendees at a major international motor sports event in Southeast Queensland, Australia and asked respondents to complete the self administered survey. The data was collected over a range of different times over all 4 days of the event.

**Measures**

Attitudes were measured using a three item scale adapted from Holbrook and Batra (1987). Intentions, while not an exact match, used a 4 item scale adapted from the willingness to buy scale by Dodds, et. al. (1991). Such a scale was used to measure the respondents’ level of intention to attend the event in the next year. Satisfaction was measured using a 3 item construct adapted from Mano and Oliver (1993). While the original scale used 8 items the use of 3 items from the scale has been found to be reliable (see Matilla and Wirtz, 2001).

Due to time limitations on the applied research fanship items were developed primarily from a face validity perspective based upon involvement. As involvement with an event can possess both affective and cognitive components (Shank and Beasley, 1998), to capture fanship 5 items were developed. Affective items ranged from general perceptions of themselves as sports fan (“I am an avid [name of event] fan”), to their perceived degree of fanaticism (“I am fanatical about [name of event]”), to how others may perceive them as a fanatic of the sports event (“My friends would consider me a [name of event] fanatic”). Cognitive items centered on the degree of general knowledge a person have with the event (“I carefully follow what is happening in the [name of event] world” and “Compared to most people, I know a lot more about [name of event] than they do”). All items were measured using a 5 point scale anchored with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5).

**Methodology**

The mediating effect was assessed using a model developed by Baron and Kenny (1986). In such a system a variable may act as a mediator when (a) variations in the independent variables significantly account for variations in the potential mediator, (b) variations in the mediator significantly account for variations in the dependent variable, and (c) when controlling for (a) and (b) a relationship contained in both is not longer significant. To test for mediation three conditions must hold. Using
regression analysis, first, the independent variables must significantly affect the mediating variable, second, the independent variables must significantly affect the dependent variable, and third, the mediator must affect the dependent variable. Mediation is established if a previously significant relation between the independent and dependent variables is no longer significant in the third equation. This leads to the following theoretical model for testing mediation:

Figure 1: The Mediating effect of Fanship on Intentions.

Results

The total sample of 350 respondents consisted of 72% males and 28% females. Average age for the sample was 33 years with a standard deviation of 12.5. Reliability tests found all constructs to have alphas $\geq .70$ (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). All relative items were aggregated and averaged for further analysis.

The results shown in table 1 support hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. All regression models were statistically significant ($p < .01$) with fanship found to have a significant positive relationship with intentions (equation 3; $\beta = .211$, $t = 5.24$). Attitudes and satisfaction had a significant positive relationship with intentions in equation 2 ($\beta = .24$, $t = 2.59$; $\beta = .44$, $t = 5.00$ respectively). Attitudes had a significant ($p < .05$) relationship with fanship and intentions (equations 1 and 2; $\beta = .25$, $t = 2.10$; $\beta = .24$, $t = 2.59$ respectively) but had no significant ($p > .05$) relationship with intentions when fanship was entered into the model (equation 3; $\beta = .17$, $t = 1.82$). Satisfaction had no significant relationship with fanship (equation 1; $\beta = 19$, $t = 1.7$). Meeting the criteria defined by Baron and Kenny (1986) these findings support hypotheses 4 and 5.

Table 1: Regression Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equation 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>.248</td>
<td>2.100</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>1.673</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equation 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>2.587</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>5.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equation 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>1.821</td>
<td>.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>.418</td>
<td>4.909</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanship</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>5.242</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Dependent variable: Fanship (R\(^2\) = .075; F = 14.427; sig < .001)
\(^b\) Dependent variable: Intentions (R\(^2\) = .289; F = 62.482; sig < .001)
\(^c\) Dependent variable: Intentions (R\(^2\) = .348; F = 53.468; sig < .001)

Conclusions

Defining what is a sports fan and understanding their behaviours has clear practical import, yet our understanding of sports fans is limited (Hunt et al., 1999). This research sought to establish the effect of fanship on intentions to attend a sports event. Current sports consumer research has primarily focused on the degree of affiliation with team and/or the effect of team performance on self-identity (see Cialdini et al., 1976; Hunt et al. 1999; Mahony and Madrigal 2000; Shank and Beasley 1998; Wann and Branscombe 1993; Wann & Dolan, 1994). Based upon conceptualisations advanced by Hunt et al. (1999) and Mahony and Madrigal (2000), this paper established that levels of fanship (passion) mediate the attitude-intentions relationship but not the satisfaction-intentions relationship. Such a construct now provides a potential segmentation tool for events marketers. Marketers can now measure consumers based upon their level of fanaticism rather than attitudes in an effort to increase intentions toward the event. Such a tool also provides a means to assess differing levels of passion towards the event upon which marketers may evaluate other psychological antecedents that positively influence such a construct and act accordingly in an effort to increase levels of passion and subsequent intentions.

Limitations / Future Research

Two important limitations exist within this paper. First, only one specific event in one specific geographical region was researched. Further research over multiple events would help test the generalisability of the findings. Second, the scales were not developed according to stringent criteria (see Churchill, 1995). While the items used to measure fanship may appear to have face validity, application of more rigorous testing is required to validate such a construct. For instance, extra psychometric research using confirmatory factor analysis would facilitate further testing in an effort to support the validity of this scale (e.g. nomological, criterion, discriminant, congruent, internal).
References


