

# Understanding the Motivations of Teenagers for Sport Related Consumption

Ranganai Kanoyangwa, Dr Jane Summers & Dr Melissa Johnson Morgan  
University of Southern Queensland

## Abstract

*This paper introduces the exploratory stage of a larger study investigating the motivations of teenagers for sport related consumption. Understanding the motivations of teenagers for sport related consumption is an increasingly important topic in the field of sport marketing. Teenagers not only represent a large consuming market in their own right but also represent the future market for both direct and indirect sport consumption. Current literature in this area has identified a number of relevant motivations for sport participation and fandom amongst adults. However, motivations for other forms of sport related consumption such as attending live sporting events and purchasing and using electronic sporting games have not been explored. In addition none of this motivational research in sport has been applied to the teenage market. A review of literature in this area and the findings of exploratory focus groups are reported in this paper.*

Keywords: Sport, Teenagers, Consumption

## Introduction

Sport is a prevalent and pervasive leisure form in many countries and Australia is no exception. Its popularity and influence are evident in the millions who tune in to watch sport on television every day and in those who attend major sporting events (Roy Morgan 2004). One recent example of this is the 2003 Rugby World Cup final which was the most watched television program in Australia in November 2003 (Roy Morgan 2004), with an additional 4 billion viewers across the world also tuning in for that one sporting event and nearly 83,000 people attending the live game.

In addition to game attendance, the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that approximately \$8 billion worth of income was generated by sports and physical recreation services in Australia during 2002, and that Australians spent an average of \$11 dollars a week on sport. Retail sales of sport-related products totalled \$3.8 billion; 83, 008 people had their core job in sport, and more than a million volunteers acted in a supporting role (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004). Thus, sport not only plays an important social role in Australian life, but it also has a significant economic value. This phenomenon is true for most industrialised countries.

Given these statistics, it is not surprising that researchers have begun to examine sport consumption in an attempt to understand and explain it. Researchers from different perspectives such as marketing, psychology, and sociology (Funk, Mahony & Havitz 2003) have all begun to use sport as a context for their endeavours. One area that has received only minor attention is in relation to the motivations of sport consumers. Current activity in this area has mainly focused on identifying motivations for sport participation and on motivations for sport fandom (Meenaghan & Russel 1974; Pope & Voges 1994; Roy & Cornwell 1999) all from an adult perspective.

Thus, there is a gap in the current literature in relation to understanding motivations for general sport related consumption (which would include participation, attendance, media consumption and playing of sport related electronic games) by groups other than adults. This study focuses on teenagers as response to the lack of research related to this age group. Teenagers represent a major market segment of interest as they are emerging as a significant consumption segment in their own right and they will also represent the adult consumption segment of the future (Zollo 2000, Martin and Bush 2000, Zollo 1995)

This paper will report the results of a preliminary study examining the motivations of teenagers for sport related consumption. It will commence with a brief review of the literature, followed by an outline of the exploratory methods used. The paper will conclude with recommendations for future empirical research to be conducted in this area.

### **Literature review**

Motivation refers to an activated state within a person consisting of drive urges, wishes, and desires that lead to goal-directed behaviour (Mowen & Minor 1998). In other words, motivation explains why people behave the way they do (Deckers 2001; Mook 1996; Neal, Quester & Hawkins 2002). Consumption motivation then, refers to the reasons why people buy, use, and dispose of goods and services offered for sale by marketers. Consumption motivation theory has been used to understand consumers' behaviour and yet this theory alone has shown limitations in understanding sport consumption motivation.

Sport can be classified as a type of consumption because in its simplest terms, sport involves the purchase, use, and/or disposition of a good (Kates 1998). Consumer's choices of sport-related products have been known to employ similar decision-making processes to traditional models of cognitive information processing used in consumer research (Bettman 1979). People's choices of the brand of soccer boots or the games to attend are examples of this. Yet sport consumption allows consumers to engage in an extraordinary experience unlike other forms of consumption (namely traditional products or services ) (Arnould & Price 1993). Sport consumption can also be highly communicative, social, and symbolic unlike other forms of consumption (Belk & Coon 1993; Sherry 1983) to the point where people who consume river rafting, sky diving, bungee jumping, and skiing become so involved that they experience a sense of total, transcendental involvement (Celsi, Rose & Leigh 1993; Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

When we look at research related to sport fandom or involvement with sporting organisations or teams, the most common motivations for this consumption activity have been found to be: the desire to affiliate with others, the opportunity to spend time with family members, the aesthetic quality of sport, the pleasant stress (i.e. eustress) that accompanies sport, escape, entertainment, role model, excitement, and drama (Brown 1996; Eastman & Land 1997; Eastman & Riggs 1994; Evaggelinou & Grekinis 1998; Gantz 1981; Gantz & Wenner 1995; Guttman 1986; Krohn et al. 1998; Sloan 1989; Smith 1988; Weiller & Higgs 1997; Wenner & Gantz 1989). However, these motivations have not been tested in relation to other forms of sport related consumption, such as attending games, playing electronic sport games and purchase or ownership of sport merchandise. Further, none of these studies have considered whether these motivations are relevant to teenagers or whether teenagers as a group may have additional motivations not felt by adults.

Teenagers as a group have been shown in other research to display different motivations to adults when it comes to participation in sport. It would seem that they are motivated more by self-esteem and belongingness needs than adults (Romeo 1999; Zollo 2000). In addition, it has also been shown that children's early socialisation through sport and social behaviour are significantly related to adult direct and indirect consumption of sport (Yang et al. 1999). This leads us to the assumption that investigating teenagers' motivations for sport related consumption may assist marketers to understand what sport related products are being consumed by teenagers now, and how this consumption is likely to progress into adulthood.

Therefore the research question in relation to this paper is, *What are the motivations of teenagers in relation to sport related consumption?*

### **Methodology**

This study consists of an exploratory study using two focus groups of children between 12 and 18 years of age from a local high school. Both groups consisted of male and female teenagers, with one group of 15-18 year olds (Years 11 and 12) and the other of 12-15 year olds (Years 8-10). It was appropriate to sample teenagers from this school because the school has a broad representation of the socio-demographic population of teenagers in Toowoomba and is the eighth largest school in Queensland (Harristown State High School Prospectus 2004). The analysis of the focus groups was conducted in relation to five themes: playing sport; watching sport; attending live sporting events; purchase of sporting merchandise; and playing sport related computer games.

### **Findings**

Respondents were asked to comment on why they liked or disliked various aspects of sport related consumption and their motivations toward each were recorded as follows:

#### **Playing sport**

The respondents were in accord with regard to their motivations for playing sport. In particular, they were motivated to play sport because for the following reasons: it gave them something to do; it helped them to keep fit; and it provided an opportunity to see new places. The main difference between the two focus groups was that the younger group were less focused on how sport would contribute to their professional careers after school.

#### **Watching sport**

Respondents agreed that they watched sport on the television because: it provided good entertainment. In addition children were motivated to watch sport on television because their parents were unwilling to travel long distances to attend live sporting events, that live sporting events were too far from where they lived, and that watching sport on the television provided an opportunity for children to learn from other athletes.

### **Attending sporting events live**

Respondents commented that they liked to attend live sporting events because: it provided an opportunity to be with friends; and that it provided an opportunity to socialise with other people and with their family. In addition to these motivations, teenagers enjoyed the atmosphere of live sporting events as this was very different from what they would normally experience when watching a sporting event on television. Respondents agreed that they were also motivated to consume sport in this way by the emotions associated with live sporting events such as cheering when their favourite team scores.

### **Purchasing of sporting merchandise**

All of the respondents mentioned that they owned sporting magazines or memorabilia. Their motivations for purchasing this were: belongingness; and knowledge. Sporting magazines particularly provided a method by which respondents could acquire knowledge in relation to their sport of interest (e.g. player profiles and results). Respondents agreed that owning a football jersey of their favourite team, for instance, gave them a sense of identifying themselves with that team. In relation to the sporting products that they used when playing their favourite sports, children said they were motivated to purchase these because it provided a feeling of belongingness to that group. They made comments such as “its all representing one thing”, and “it’s a team thing...everyone has it...you feel like you’re part of the team”.

### **Playing of sport related computer games**

Respondents suggested that they were motivated to play sport related computer games because they allowed them to control the events of the game. Specifically, they liked choosing their favourite team, choosing the player they wanted, setting up plays, and understanding the game that they were playing in more detail. In a one case, a respondent from the younger age group suggested that playing computer games was attractive because “sometimes when a player has a ball...and the crowd are cheering...sometimes I wish I was like that when I am playing the game for real”. This comment was met with affirmation from the others in the group. This would seem to indicate that self-esteem motivations may be relevant in this form of consumption (a finding not consistent with the current literature). Certainly, this is an issue that needs to be explored in more detail in this research study as it suggests that children could be attracted particularly to this form of consumption due to a motivation for esteem needs.

### **Sport on the Internet**

Respondents noted that they used the Internet for sport-related research which included finding out player statistics, and team standings, and researching for assignments relating to sport for their school assessment.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

These findings have supported much already noted regarding motivations from the general literature relating to sport participation and fandom. It would seem that many of the motivations noted there such as affiliation, escape, entertainment, excitement, drama, role models, eustress and belongingness are also relevant for teenagers in relation to other forms

of sport related consumption. This preliminary stage also uncovered the presence of a motivation for esteem and almost fantasy desire for crowd adulation and worship that has not been previously noted in sport consumption literature using adult samples. Further this preliminary stage of the research also suggests that different motivations may be more relevant for different types of sport related consumption and that perhaps teenagers choose the sport consumption options they do based on their different internal make-up.

Thus, this research has validated the list of motivations previously suggested in sport consumption research for use in relation to teenagers. It has also identified a unique motivation that needs to be qualified and confirmed for this market segment. Finally, the results have indicated that different motivations may apply for different types of sport related consumption and future research needs to identify the patterns of relationships that may exist in relation to this. The next stage of this research will therefore investigate the patterns of relationships between these motivations and various types of sport related consumption.

The key limitation of this study relate to the exploratory nature of the work which means that results are not generalisable. But this information will be used in a follow-up quantitative study which will investigate the constructs using a large probability sample.

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