

# Investigation of Determinants and Constraints of Fan and Participant Engagement in Sport Events

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## ABSTRACT

Attendance at sporting events generates substantial income for sports venues and organizations, which benefits cities and regions economically. High attendance at sporting events generates revenue for sponsors. Despite this, the environment in which sports activities take place is becoming more and more complex, especially given the rise in fan and spectator attendance at numerous competitive events. Increased competition has promoted many event organizers to study the variables that influence fans and spectators' decisions to attend sporting events and advertise them. This study explores and investigates the impact of stimuli (e.g., sports interest, interest in players, alternative achievements, socialization, escapism, drama, knowledge, support for cities, family ties, and team identity) and constraints (e.g., personal, interpersonal, and structural constraints) on sports fans and spectators participating in sporting events. It can be found that sports interest, interest in players, team identity and socialization are the primary motivations for sports fans and spectators to participate in sports events, and based on literature analysis, internal constraints may hinder attendance.

**Keywords:** Sports fans, Sports spectators, Determinants, Constraints, Attendance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been shown that sports and the sports industry significantly influence society [1]. The global sports market reached a value of nearly US\$388.3 billion in 2020, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.4% since 2015. At the same time, by 2025, the sports market is expected to reach \$599.9 billion [2]. Therefore, the importance of sports, sports-related activities and related businesses becomes obvious. As previously said, sports participation is one of the most popular leisure activities, and therefore any initiative aimed at expanding and improving this sector will get additional attention. However, the environment in which sports activities take place is getting more complicated, especially given the rise in attendance of fans and spectators at numerous competitive events [3]. Increased competition has compelled many events organizers to examine the factors influencing fans and spectators' choices to attend sports events and how to promote them [4].

Ticket sales and sports services are essential to the success of sports fans and professional sports organizations, accounting for 20% to 50% of the clubs'

overall income [5]. Consequently, sports marketer's priorities turning casual customers into devoted fans to maximize revenues [1]. Thus, sports marketers may benefit significantly from knowing the determinants and constraints that affect an individual's choice to buy tickets and attend athletic events. Motivation (for example, sports interest, interest in players, alternative achievements, social interaction, avoidance, drama, knowledge, supporting cities, family bonds, and team identity) and constraints (e.g., intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints) are a valuable vital tool to determine the behaviour of sports fans and spectators at sports events.

## 2. SEGMENTATION IN SPORT CONSUMERS

Segmentation variables such as demographics, sociocultural, regional, behavioral, and psychological variables can help improve the accuracy of sports consumer profiles [6]. Sports supporters of American professional leagues use the principle of attracting fans divided into five parts: casual sports fans, local sports fans, loyal sports fans, enthusiastic sports fans, and dysfunctional sports fans [7]. The relevant

characteristics of the five market segments are shown in Table 1 [8]. Additionally, as shown in Table 2, sport consumers are classified into four categories: active sports consumers, passive sports consumers, consumers of tangible sports products, and consumers of a sports event [8]. Active sport consumers engage in a variety of sports and recreational activities, both outdoor and indoor. By comparison, the passive sports consumer is often regarded as attending athletic events and simply enjoying the spectacle. This audience may be present in person, on television, or online [8]. A consumer of tangible sports goods is a person who purchases sport-related equipment and clothing for sport, recreation,

fitness, or lifestyle [8]. Individuals participating in sports events are classified as sports event consumers, and they exhibit unique characteristics such as the combination of sports and travel [8]. Sports customer segmentation uses a unique psychological continuum model (PCM). PCM provides a framework for understanding the process by which individuals initially recognize their loyalty to a sport or team [9]. The PCM is more likely to account for spectator and participant behavior in sports [8]. Fundamentally, the PCM postulates that various psychological and social variables interact to moderate an individual's degree of attachment to a sports item.

**Table 1.** Cluster groups of professional sports fans in the USA

	Temporary fans	Local fans	Devoted fans	Fanatical fans	Dysfunctional fans
	Time-bound	Geographically bound	Loyal fans	Devoted fans	Disrupted behavior
<b>Characteristics</b>	Lack of identification with the sport team	Lack of commitment with the sport team	Strongly identified with the sport team	Committed fans	Anti-social behavior

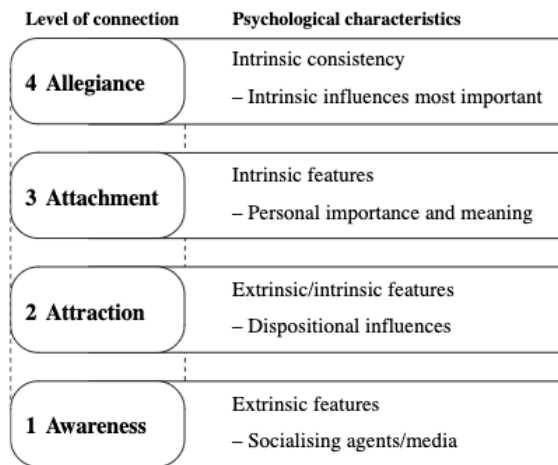
After being conscious of a sports item, a person may proceed through three different hierarchical phases of psychological attachment. This progress is based on favorable inputs and processes to achieve results at each level [10]. The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) was developed by Funk and James (2001) to describe the psychological transformation of an individual from a conscious bystander to a loyal fan [11]. The PCM consists of awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance, detected below Figure 1 [11]. Attachment and allegiance were the most often mentioned concepts in previous research [12-13]. *Attachment* is a term that refers to a sustained psychological bond with a sport or team. Attachment, to some degree, indicates the amount of association with a sport or team based on the perceived significance connected with it. A fan who agrees with the team at a medium or high level will develop a sense of loyalty to the team. Loyalty refers to the supporters who are committed to a sport or team. Regardless of whether the team is successful, the supporters' view of the team remains the same.

**3. MOTIVATION IN SPORTS FANS AND PARTICIPANTS**

**3.1 Classification of sport motivation**

Motivation is a critical psychological component related to the outcome of positive behavior. It represents

an individual's motivation to meet personal needs and achieve personal goals [8]. It is necessary to consider the more important physical and psychological motivational process, not just call this logical process a mental state. In addition, to systematize the influence of motivation on behavior, many concepts have been proposed, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, Alderfer's ERG theory, and McClelland's acquired needs theory [14]. So far, only Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory applies to sports. According to Maslow's theory, human needs are classified in order—starting from the most urgent and most important. The list goes from physiology to safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization [14]. Sport necessities were classified into three categories based on Maslow's theory: energy consumption to meet human or physical requirements, sports insurance, body products, and health quest. They correspond to secondary or safety requirements of humans and team affiliation and high-quality services that address the third or social needs of humans [15]. A distinct pyramid of quaternary necessities was developed, including passion, rest, and leisure. These requirements closely correlate to Maslow's fourth and fifth needs, ego needs and self-actualization [15].



**Figure 1.** The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)—A conceptual framework for understanding an individual’s psychological connection to the sport

A five-factor framework was established to classify and comprehend sports fans’ motives and their impact

on behaviour [16]. Each factor’s presence and effect on an individual’s behaviour differs significantly among observers. These variables incorporate the following:

- 1) Beneficial effects-exercise can improve people’s good feelings and bring better physical and mental health.
- 2) Seeking stress and stimulation exercise helps people regulate stress and energy levels and may increase the intensity of arousal.
- 3) Catharsis and aggressiveness-when their favorite team loses, the degree of the hostility of the fans may decrease or increase.
- 4) Entertainment sports can improve personal happiness and satisfaction and meet their needs for aesthetic and moral expression.
- 5) Striving for achievement-sports triggers a correlation between emotions and game results; anger increases when the player loses, and fun increases when the player wins [16] (Slogan, 2012).

**Table 2.** The typologies of the sport consumers

	Active sport consumers	Passive sport consumers	Consumers of tangible sport product	Consumers participating in sport events
Characteristics	Participating in indoor & outdoors	Spectators of sport contest	Buy sport-related goods	Combination of sport with tourism
Consumption approach	Sports centers, health clubs, mountains trails	Attendance or watching online or TV	Equipment, apparel	Half and full marathon, extreme sports events, triathlons

### 3.2 Motives of sports spectators and fans

The search for the motivations of sports spectators may be summarized as an attempt to answer the following two questions:

- What motivates people to visit a stadium to watch a game?
- What kind of needs may be met by viewing a game?

Previously published research used more than 20 terms to describe the motivation of sports spectators, and more than five measures have been created to assess the motivation of sports spectators [15,17,18]. However, according to Wang & Matsuoka (2015), all previous studies that attempted to create a scale to measure sports audience motivation have encountered significant reliability, validity, and data collection

limitations, which restricts them from disseminating the results [14].

The 9-motivation 24-item scale established by Wang and Matsuoka among Chinese spectators, also known as intrinsic motivation, may be beneficial to sports audiences in other countries, including sports interest, Interest in players, alternative achievements, social interaction, escape, drama, and knowledge, Support the city and family bonds [14]. Sports managers and marketers pursuing a global market may utilize this scale to delve deeper into the motivations of their prospective customers and therefore create a more effective market segmentation. This would enable them to target more profitable segments and improve their earnings.

### 3.2.1 Sports interest/Interest in Player

Interest in specific sports and specific athletes are the two most frequently cited reasons for participating in sports events in previous studies [15,18]. The motivations mentioned above are related to the individual's interest or concern for a particular sport and the athletes who attract their attention. For example, in football, interest in the sport may be related to enthusiasm for the game, and the audience's identity as a football fan motivates individuals to participate in the game. Interest in a player refers to the specific football that attracts that person to the game, not the team [14].

### 3.2.2 Vicarious achievement

*Vicarious achievement* is a term that relates to the desire to feel successful, proud, or awestruck by the accomplishments of others [19]. This motive has an antecedent. If an individual has a favorite team, they will support that team and feel that they will win or perform well. The primary motivation for spectators of international hockey leagues is accomplishment striving [20]. One of the top three incentives for Chinese and Japanese spectators is a vicarious achievement [14]. At the same time, substitute achievement is an important and reliable indicator of future participation in sports [20-21].

### 3.2.3 Socialization

The term "socialization" alludes to the fact that attending a game in a stadium enables people to connect [22-23]. It is not unusual for spectators to attend games with their colleagues. These groups of friends often have similar sports interests. They, therefore, may cheer for the same team, remark on the team's performance, discuss the team's players, verbally attack the referee, and even gossip about specific players. These interactions often contribute to the improvement of one's interpersonal connections. Thus, attending a match may satisfy a person's need to socialize with others, particularly those with similar sports interests.

### 3.2.4 Escapism

*Escapism* is a term that refers to the act of attending sports events to escape from the difficulties and pressures of daily life. [18,24].

### 3.2.5 Drama

*Drama* refers to the suspense around a match's result or the excitement connected with a tight contest that encourages spectators to attend [19,23]. To some degree, the drama explains why semi-final and final matches draw larger crowds than regular season matches, owing to the teams' similar competitiveness and the heightened

significance of the contests. The rising drama also explains why the attendance of the relegation match has increased. While such matches are uncommon in the United States, they are frequent in other nations and relate to a lower-ranked team that loses is demoted to a lower league. These are highly competitive and well-attended events.

### 3.2.6 Knowledge

The term "knowledge" refers to a scenario in which an individual's desire to gain knowledge about a sport drives them to engage in a game [11]. By attending a game, one may learn about the game's regulations, the significance of the referee's specific signals, and the methods or tactics employed to win. Understanding the sport improves one's pleasure of viewing it.

### 3.2.7 Support the city

Supporting cities refers to instances where individuals' connections with the city or urban pride drive them to participate in sports [25]. This motivation is seen as community support, national pride and university pride, depending on the organization the team represents [21]. The term "city support" was used because nine incentive measures were created to study professional football clubs, each strongly connected to a specific city.

### 3.2.8 Family bonding

Examples of family bonds are people participating in games to spend time with other family members [17,26]. According to previous research, family relationships mainly influence female audiences [17,21]. In addition, there are cultural differences. For example, Japanese audiences are more driven by family relationships than American audiences [27]. These differences are especially beneficial for sports managers and marketers who sell goods internationally.

## 3.3 Team identification

A previous cross-cultural study examined team identity, which refers to the psychological attachment of fans to the team [28]. Team identity is a term that involves consumers' sense of belonging and their connection with other spectators and sports team supporters. The identity of the sports team is essential to increase attendance and consumption [8]. According to the research of Sutton et al. (1997), sports consumers with a higher degree of team identity have a higher degree of emotional attachment to the team [29]. Supporters are more inclined to participate in and watch games. Highly identified supporters are more likely to remain loyal to the team, regardless of winning or losing. In other words, no matter what happens,

supporters will continue to consume goods related to favorite clubs and participate in competitions [8]. Highly identified customers consistently purchase products and services of specific brands and use word of mouth to spread information about the brands and teams. According to this view, team loyalty is a positive result of team identification, which means that customers with solid self-awareness are more likely to become loyal consumers [30]. Therefore, team identity is an essential tool for sports marketers. Sports organizations must expand the internal fan base because supporters are more likely to participate in actual spending and creating money [8].

#### **4. CONSTRAINTS IN SPORTS FANS AND PARTICIPANTS**

Constraints prevent a person from participating in sports events [5]. Leisure constraints are divided into three categories: introspective constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints [8]. *Leisure restrictions* hinder participation in leisure activities and reduce their enjoyment.

##### **4.1 Intrapersonal constraints**

Intrapersonal constraints incorporate an individual's psychological state and other characteristics that may have a detrimental effect on leisure choices (e.g., stress, religious beliefs, reference group attitudes, prior socialization to particular leisure activities, perceived self-skills and subjective evaluations of the suitability and availability of various leisure activities) [5].

##### **4.2 Interpersonal constraints**

Interpersonal constraints are considered the result of interpersonal relationships or lack of interpersonal relationships (for example, lack of appropriate leisure activity partners). It may harm leisure choices and participation [5].

##### **4.3 Structural constraints**

*Structural constraints* are defined as factors that hinder people's leisure preferences and participation, including physical or environmental restrictions that prohibit people from engaging in leisure activities (for example, financial resources, seasons, climate, work schedules) [5].

#### **5. THE EFFECT OF MOTIVATION AND CONSTRAINT ON SPORT CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

Internal motivations were the most crucial element on sport consumer behavior, which means more attention should be given to this component to help it

grow [1]. Sports interest is seen as a critical factor in how sports clubs meet their customers' needs. Consumer interest in the team and its associated components (e.g., coaches and players) affects the participation of sports fans (Bravo et al., 2016). Sports fans are encouraged to attend sports events as fans already identify with the team. In other words, team identification is a critical predictor of sports consumption behavior [1]. Socialization is a crucial predictor of sport participation or attendance in sports events [8]. Team identification is a crucial determinant of sports fans and spectators' engagement in sports events. Fans with higher team identification may retain a bond with their favorite team regardless of victory or defeat. Irrespective of what occurs, they will continue to purchase favorite team-related products and attend matches (Funk et al., 2016). Constraints limit involvement in various ways, as shown by the applied literature [31]. Leisure constraints, such as interpersonal constraints (e.g., psychological factors, negative self-perceptions, and beliefs), interpersonal constraints (e.g., social isolation, social depression) and structural constraints (e.g., external factors, lack of resource requirements, limited choices) are the main reasons for the decline in the number of sports participants and spectators [8].

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

Discussion and analysis of theories and concepts related to fans and audience participation suggest that sports researchers and marketers must consider consumer segmentation, motivation, leisure restrictions, and team identification when studying consumer intent and behavior and developing strategies. Internal motivations and internal constraints should focus on further research and future strategic marketing, as these two structures often significantly influence the behavior of sports consumers (fans and spectators).

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