

Rugby Fan Attraction Factors

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Factors that influence sports fans' game attendance have been researched extensively in USA, Europe and Australia but rather less so in New Zealand. Fans provide the financial success for professional sports organisations, not only in terms of direct revenue from gate-takings, but also indirect revenue from sponsorship, television rights and merchandise. Influence upon rugby union fan attendance over four games at two New Zealand venues (Wellington and Palmerston North) are investigated with the objective of providing insight, for sport managers, about the factors they can and cannot control. One hundred and fifty fans were surveyed using Pol and Pak's (1993) two-stage research design that involves initial contact at the venue followed up by interviewing several days later. Fans were assigned to one of three fan groups using a simple behavioural segmentation (based on repeat attendance and "involvement" in the sporting code) that almost any sport organisation can undertake. Results were analysed using standard univariate research techniques for empirical research and show the most important influence on rugby fan attendance was the live sport action itself – the game! Yet, ancillary issues involving the stadia, general atmosphere, other fans' behaviour, community involvement with the home team, pricing and promotion affect different groups of fans differently, giving rise to targeted marketing tactics to encourage fan attendance at home games.

Keywords: Fan attraction; sport marketing

Introduction

Sport marketing has begun to receive considerable attention from practitioners and academics as sport, especially professional sport, competes for the entertainment and leisure dollar against numerous alternatives. No longer can New Zealand sport organisations rely on the "Field of Dreams" (a popular movie of the 1980s) "if we build it they will come" mentality. Non-capacity crowds are the norm. Attendance is one of the primary revenue sources for team sport (Howard 1999; Hill & Green 2000), and examining the motives that help put fans in the stands has preoccupied several sport management researchers in the last decade. Successful professional sport promotion now requires concerted marketing effort. In this context, it is possible to identify and improve areas of the sport marketing mix in the pursuit of more spectators.

Research context

Factors affecting fan attendance have been discussed in several academic literatures, notably social psychology, management, marketing, leisure, tourism and the growing sub-discipline of sport management. Much of the foundation research in sport has been in social psychological contexts, particularly in sport fan allegiance. Comprehensive reviews of this work are covered in, for example, Funk, Haugtvedt and Howard (2000), Laverie and Arnett (2000) and Cunningham and Kwon (2003). A focus on identity salience and behaviour in the context of fan loyalty is common in such work which often tested the proposition that higher identity salience results in higher home team game attendance. In turn, the emotions associated with attachment to, and involvement with, the home team help reinforce and maintain fan self-concept. The enduring involvement with a home team epitomises the "die-hard fans" of Wann and Branscombe's (1990) research, in which they gave prominence to the factors of self-esteem enhancement – BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) and its corollary

CORFing (cutting off from reflected failure). Thus the role of self concept in fan attendance has not been overlooked (see, for example, Mahony & Moorman 1999) and sport marketers, aware of the intricacies of their fans' self-esteem enhancement, have been quick to include aspects of these emotions in their advertising.

As is widely known, sport can provide fans with stress and stimulation. Fun and enjoyable stress, often referred to as "eustress," is a major motivational factor for fan attraction (Madrigal 1995; Mahony & Moorman 1999). This concept is best exemplified by the fan's heightened anticipation moments before the start of any match. Increasingly, sport can provide diversion from the routines of everyday life. Yet there is entertainment value too. Enhancing this entertainment value, usually by changing aspects of the basic game (the essential sport product), has been prevalent in most professional sports. Shortening matches, widening goalmouths, changing (shortening) boundaries, allowing technological improvements in equipment are all examples of trying to enhance entertainment value. And the introduction of legalised gambling on sports events in New Zealand heralds a new economic value that some fans place on the sport contest. Previously value was more aligned to the contest itself (quality of the opposition, team record, stage in the competition, type of game – semifinal, final) and the ticket price (Mahony & Howard 1998; Mahony & Moorman 1999). Competitive issues affecting attendance are not only other sports and other leisure activity but there are also competing forces from within the sport itself. Is the game being televised? If so, should the viewing audience be treated differently to the paying patron?

Sport marketers, like any marketers, encourage their customers to hold a positive disposition or attitude to the sport product so that, in turn, these customers (fans) will buy the sport product. The role of attitude and attitude strength in sport fan attraction and fan intentions has been reviewed extensively by authors such as Mahony and Moorman (1999) and Funk *et al.* (2000). Yet sport management research on fan attraction has not just been restricted to the social psychological domain. "Recently, attention has turned to the role that the facility and its service elements play in fan behaviour and satisfaction" (Hill & Green 2000 p146). Obviously aspects of the sport contest's venue – stadia – will impinge on fan attraction – parking, seating, toilets, food and beverage quality and selection, replay screens, prices, etc. Often termed the "sportscape" after the popular "servicescape" (Bitner 1991), a plethora of studies addressing venue quality in sporting contexts have found their way into the academic literature (for example, McDonald, Sutton & Milne 1995; Tomlinson, Buttle & Moores 1995; Wakefield & Sloan 1995; Sutton, McDonald, Milne & Cimperman 1997; Westerbeek & Shilbury 1999; Hill & Green 2000). Each of these studies refers to the impact of service quality (usually at the stadium) upon fan satisfaction, fan loyalty and repeat purchase.

Fan differentiation

Spectators are a key constituent of a sport organisation's success – greater fan numbers attract sponsors. A form of double jeopardy exists – sports that attract small crowds are unlikely to attract large sponsorship deals or negotiate lucrative television rights, further reinforcing the sport's low profile and its unattractiveness for sponsors. Fans are the demand nodes; differences in demand according to spectator characteristics are recognised. A number of sport fan studies, reviewed by Quick (2000), have suggested that not all fans are motivated by the same factors. Various typologies of fan attendance abound in the sport fan academic literature with many relying on product usage rates (levels of spectatorship) for their classifications. The terms "theatre-goers", "fair-weather fans" and "hardcore fans" connote attendance statuses as well as commitment to the sport/team. Typically, "theatre-goers" and

“fair-weather fans” display temporal and situational involvement with their team/sport whereas “hardcore fans” display enduring involvement (Madrigal 1995). Implicit in most sport marketing activity is the desire to move spectators up the attendance/participation escalator (akin to Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne’s 1991 “ladder of loyalty”) thereby turning light users (“theatre-goers” and “fair-weather fans”) into heavier users.

Quick (2000) summarises the heterogeneity of sport fan spectatorship. “The tribal, hard-core fan is but a minor figure in the professional sportscape. In recent decades a number of other fan segments have been identified, each having a different expectation of the sport experience. Moreover, each group, whether consuming the sport product at the event, on the street, or over the Internet, has unique value to the sport organisation; because of this, if possible, the needs and experiences of each group must be accommodated” (p 150).

Numerous studies on a multitude of sports have investigated influences on fan attendance at sporting events. For instance, Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) classify these influences into factors that can be controllable, and those not controllable, by management. Their research demonstrated that spectators at sport events are far from homogeneous with statistically significant distinctions between regular and less regular spectators. For instance, less frequent spectators valued, more than anyone else, a party atmosphere in the stadium, food and beverages, opportunities to socialise and pre-, post- and interval entertainment. In contrast, the “die-hard” or hard-core fans emphasised the live sport action “on the pitch” and factors relating to the team or athletic performance, issues beyond management’s control. These findings led Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) to surmise that “performance of the team on the pitch is not of paramount significance. This is perhaps just as well as it is largely uncontrollable. Management cannot blame poor financial performance on poor team performance, particularly when a large proportion of spectators are attracted by factors other than a winning record” (p29).

The attributes used by Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) in their classification framework (shown in Table 1) seemed worthy of extension to professional sport in the Southern Hemisphere. Some adaptations were required for the New Zealand sportscape and for rugby union. For example, *cheerleaders*, *band* and *actual seat available* (as seat availability was not an issue at this level of rugby), *evening game* or *weekend game* were removed, and *half-time entertainment* added. These attributes of fan attraction were applied to four professional rugby matches in New Zealand.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify issues that influence New Zealand provincial rugby union spectators to attend professional provincial rugby events.
2. To identify the differential influence of these issues upon different groups of fans with a view to adopting segmentation strategies for subsequent marketing effort.

Table 1. Fan attendance influences

<i>Controllable Influences</i>	
General atmosphere/party atmosphere	Game live on television
Food & beverage availability & quality	Star players/team quality
Stadium sportscape – capacity, toilets etc	Tradition
Opportunities for social interaction	Parking availability/proximity/access
Other fans’ behaviour (especially offensive)	Pricing – tickets/parking/”whole” day”
Location of available seats	Ease of access to stadium
Entertainment - pre & post match/off-field	Time of game (weekend/evening)
Planned special events – testimonials/benefits	Childcare facilities
<i>Uncontrollable Influences</i>	
Good weather	Unplanned special events – semifinals/finals
Recent performance (slumps/winning)	Quality of opposition
Time in the season	Team position in the league
Chance of winning	Live sport action/family outing/other games
Other competing entertainment	Fan income/catchment area size

Method

Most researchers acknowledge the difficulties of interviewing fans at the sporting contest. Adjustment to commonly used research designs can be necessary. This study adopted the two-stage survey research process used in sport research by Pol and Pak (1993). Stage one involved approaching fans in the stadium (with seat numbers providing the sampling frame), inviting their participation in a subsequent survey and, on acceptance, recording their contact details. Stage two was a follow-up telephone interview that addressed the objectives discussed above. This two-stage process of “initial approach/follow-up interview” is standard “foot-in-the-door” methodology used extensively in both commercial market research and in academic research (see, for example, Dillman, Gallegos & Fry 1976; Bergsten, Weeks & Bryan 1984).

Procedure and Sample

Four professional rugby matches in New Zealand’s National Provincial Championship were selected for this study. Of these four matches, two were held in Palmerston North and two in Wellington. Each interviewer was issued with five randomly selected seat numbers and instructed to select every second person along that row of seats as potential respondents (aged 15 years and over) in the 20 minutes prior to match start. This resulted in a cluster sample with an acknowledgeably slightly higher margin for error than for a true random sample. Incentives in the form of a prize draw for signed rugby jerseys were offered to willing participants and support for the survey was given over the public address system. In the initial phase, 399 spectators were approached, 98 refused to take part, yielding 301 potential respondents (or 75% of those approached). For the follow-up phase, only 221 potential respondents were required to achieve the arbitrarily determined sample size of 150 interviews (leaving 80 potential respondents no longer required). Hence, in the follow-up phase, the response rate was 150/221 or 68%. Given that 98 people refused to participate at the recruitment stage, one might present the overall survey contact results as: actual respondents (150) divided by those attempted to contact (399) = 47%.

Table 2. Fan segments by demographic and behavioural characteristics

	Aficionado	Fair-weather	Theatre-goer	Total
	(44)	(40)	(66)	(150)
Gender	%	%	%	%
Male	73	85	67	73
Female	27	15	33	27
	Chi-squared = 4.29, df = 2, $p = 0.12$			
Age	%	%	%	%
16-30 years	16	30	24	23
31-50 years	32	57	55	49
51+ years	52	13	21	28
	Chi-squared = 19.27, df = 4, $p = .001$			
Household Income	%	%	%	%
<30K	25	15	11	16
30K - \$59.9K	54	45	47	49
\$60K +	14	33	41	31
Refused / Don't know	7	7	1	4
	Chi-squared = 12.91, df = 6, $p = .05$			
Home game attendance	%	%	%	%
100%	100	-	-	29
50-99%	-	75	55	45
<50%	-	25	45	26
Season ticket?	%	%	%	%
Yes	48	30	-	22
No	52	70	100	78
Rugby involvement?*	%	%	%	%
Yes	23	78	-	27
No	77	22	100	73

* Player, referee or administrator

As shown in Table 2, about three-quarters of the respondents were male, half were aged between 30 and 50, and just over half came from "high income" households. Almost all (97%) were at the game with family or friends, 22% were season ticket-holders, 27% were "involved" in rugby (playing, coaching, team management, refereeing or club administration) and 36% were adamant they attended all home games.

The maximum margin for error on the results derived from this sample of 150 fans is approximately +/- 8% at 95% confidence but it should be acknowledged that design effects from the sample selection procedure (clustering) would increase this error slightly. While this sample size might be considered as rather small, it is likely that non-sampling errors generated in the interviewing process (for example, respondent selection bias, inaccurate respondent recall, social desirability bias) might be more worrying. Fortunately most of these potential errors were minimised by the third author's heavy involvement in the data collection.

The telephone survey (pre-tested prior to interviewing) took an average of 13 minutes and contained a mixture of Likert-type scale questions, behavioural questions on fan status, involvement in rugby and demographic information (see Table 2). The critical part of the questionnaire invited respondents to write down or memorise a five point importance scale (with 1 being *not at all important* and 5 being *very important*) and then the attributes of

influence as depicted in Table 1 above were read out to them. As advocated by Hill and Green (2000), linear transformations were used on the results to aid interpretability. A score of zero indicates indifference, a positive score indicates importance and a negative score indicates non-importance (See Table 3).

In the academic marketing literature, segmentation is usually taken to mean the process by which marketers “divide a market into distinct groups in the belief that developing different offerings for some or all of these groups will increase profitability” (Hoek, Gendall & Esslemont, 1996, p 26). Usually, but not always, sophisticated multivariate analysis is involved in deriving these groups. Yet in certain circumstances, simple behavioural analysis can yield logical and robust consumer segments of particular appeal to most small to medium enterprises such as sport organisations. Thus for this research, sport fans were assigned to one of three segments by combining their behaviour on the three easily obtained (for a sport organisation) variables of proportion this season’s home games attended (100%; <100%), involvement in rugby as player, referee or administrator (yes; no) and season ticket holder status (yes; no). Based on Quick’s (2000) “fan involvement” typology, the three fan segments divide into:

- Aficionados (hard-core fans) – 29% of the sample
- Fair-weather fans – 27% of the sample
- Theatre-goers – 44% of the sample.

Results and Discussion

Before addressing this paper’s specific research objectives, the characteristics of each fan segment (see Table 2) require discussion. Even at this most basic level of analysis one sees the greater proportion of a provincial rugby crowd (at least in Wellington and Palmerston North) as a “walk-up” or “theatre-going” crowd. Men outnumbered women by a ratio of nearly three to one. *Aficionados* are rather more likely to be older, lower-medium income spectators with relatively low active participation in rugby administration. Half are season ticket-holders. *Fair-weather* fans are younger (nearly all are aged under 51), from wealthier households, and four out of five of their number actively participate in playing or running the game of rugby. Behaviourally then, they are *fair-weather* fans to the extent that their rugby involvement can take them away from attending provincial (representative level) home games. Finally, *theatre-goers* are the ‘walk-up’ crowd; none have season tickets and none are “involved” in playing or running the game. While men still dominate their numbers, one third of *theatre-goers* are women. They tend to be in their thirties and forties, and enjoy above average incomes.

The first objective of this research was to identify the most salient issues that attract rugby union spectators to rugby matches. Using an adapted form of Tomlinson et al.’s (1995) fan attendance attributes, results (presented as averages) of this exercise are shown in Table 3.

Here it can be seen that the most important influence on attendance is the live sport action (1.16) – the sport contest itself – which in research terms is more like an overriding dimension to fan attendance because without the fixture there would be no reason to play the game. Also of relative importance for fan attendance were stadium cleanliness (0.91), general atmosphere of the event (0.73), other fans’ behaviour (0.71), social/family outing (0.67) and stadium comfort (0.41). Sport managers can have some influence over ensuring these issues are to the fore in their event management and event planning.

Table 3. Relative importance of controllable and uncontrollable attributes

Attributes of Influence Controllable Attributes	Sample (150)		Contrasting Importance Using ANOVA at $p < 0.05$
	Mean	σ	
Clean stadium	0.91	1.02	Went alone v with friends
General atmosphere	0.73	0.93	Involved in rugby v not involved
Other fan behaviour	0.71	1.08	Over 50 v under 30
Social/family outing	0.67	0.97	Went alone v with friends
Stadium comfort	0.41	1.16	Season ticket v "walk-up" fan; over 50 v under 30
Food/beverage availability	-0.18	1.02	Involved in rugby v not involved
Pre-match entertainment	-0.44	1.18	Season ticket v "walk-up" fan
Half-time entertainment	-0.60	1.14	Season ticket v "walk-up" fan
Off-field entertainment	-0.65	0.98	With friends v went alone
Community support for team	0.69	1.09	-
Traditional rivalry	0.65	1.07	-
Price of tickets	0.63	1.15	Season ticket v "walk-up" fan
Ease of access to the stadium	0.58	0.98	Over 50 v under 30
Star players	0.51	0.98	-
Availability of parking	0.47	1.10	-
Game live on TV	-0.39	1.08	Involved in rugby v not involved; "walk-up" fan v season ticket
Child-care facilities	-0.71	1.56	-
Uncontrollable Attributes			
Live sport action (the contest)	1.16	0.72	Males v females
Quality of opposition	0.61	0.93	Males v females; few home games v all home games
Good weather	0.47	1.19	"walk-up" fan v season ticket
Special occasion	0.41	1.10	With friends v went alone
Home team's recent performance	0.33	1.13	Males v females
Home team's chance of winning	0.23	1.11	-
Time in the season	-0.13	1.20	Involved in rugby v not involved
Other games on TV	-0.23	1.15	-

Several factors over which marketers have less control (except perhaps for ticket prices) scored quite high in their relative effects upon fan attendance. *Community support for the home team* (0.69), *traditional rivalry with opposition team* (0.65), *ticket prices* (0.63), *ease of access to the stadium* (0.58), *presence of star players* (0.51) and *availability of parking* (0.47) each held considerable relative importance.

As might be expected, the uncontrollable influences of *quality of opposition* (0.61), *good weather* (0.47), *the specialness of the occasion for spectators* (0.41), *the home team's recent performances* (0.33) and *chance of winning* (0.23) each exerted some influence on the decision to attend National Provincial Championship rugby matches. It is important to note that eight of the ten "most important" items listed in Table 3 were the same as reported by Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) in their American research. While this is not a claim for cross-cultural generalisability, some comfort is derived from the concurrence.

At a general, “crowd-as-a-whole level”, Table 3’s results show that male spectators are more attracted by influences relating to the game (*live sport action, the quality of the opposition and recent performance*) than female spectators. This finding was also noted in Tomlinson *et al.*’s (1995) study. In the New Zealand case it probably arises from male propensities for greater awareness and knowledge of the technicalities of rugby.

Several of the segmentation-specific findings reported above were expected, not just because they had been found in previous studies, but also because of their logic. For instance, season ticket holders tend to be *aficionados* and it is expected that weather and ticket prices will not deter them from attending a game they love. Understandably though, “walk-up” (*fair-weather* and *theatre-going* fans) spectators seem deterred by these influences. Also intuitively appealing is the finding that older people, some with mobility problems, will be more concerned with access to the venue and comfort within. Older spectators, usually brought up in times of stricter social norms, might also be expected to tolerate less what they deem as poor behaviour by other (usually younger) patrons. Spectators in the 31-50 age groups tended to focus on *other fans*’ [bad] *behaviour* too, often because they were at the match with their children. Conversely, the under 30s were less bothered by *fan behaviour* and it is likely that whatever is perceived as poor behaviour was perpetrated by this age group’s peers. Table 3 can be analysed in considerable detail by comparison of mean scores for various groups but a more efficient analysis arises from analysis by the fan segments (derived from the behavioural segmentation discussed above in Table 2). Thus Table 4 highlights those attributes emphasised most by each fan segment. As discussed earlier, everyone placed most importance upon the *live sport action* – the contest itself. *Hard-core* or *aficionado* fans place most importance, apart from *live sport action*, upon the *sportscape* (especially stadium *cleanliness* and *comfort*) along with *community support*, the latter perhaps reflecting their strong commitment to “their” team. Also, *other fan behaviour* (as discussed above) received much emphasis from *aficionados*.

Fair-weather fans also signal the importance of *sportscape* but with the additional emphasis upon *food and beverage availability*, and most importantly, *ticket prices*. These attributes can be within management’s control. Also of vital importance to *fair-weather* fans’ attendance are the attributes of *quality of opposition, home team’s performance, and time in the season*, showing that they tend to patronise the bigger games. The *theatre-goer* attends the game almost exclusively for the *entertainment value* from the *live sport action, the atmosphere*, all packaged into “*an outing*”.

There is little doubt that *hardcore* or *aficionado* fans are strongly committed to their team. Not surprisingly, Mahony *et al.* (2000) recommend a reinforcement strategy when promoting to these fans, trying to at least hold their current levels of commitment and if possible, increase their game attendance, their level of purchase of team merchandise, their contribution to team fund raising, etc. Rewarding loyal fans through economic incentives, sometimes connected to a loyalty scheme, are often tried by management along with psychological reinforcement based on preferential treatment for these fans.

Table 4. Fan segments' attitudes to the game

Attributes of Influence	Segments			Stat. Signif.
Controllable Attributes	Aficionado (44)	Fair-weather (40)	Theatre-goer (66)	
Clean stadium	very important	very important	important	**
General atmosphere	Important	very important	important	*
Other fan behaviour	very important	important	less important	*
Social/family outing	Important	important	important	n.s
Stadium comfort	very important	important	less important	**
Food/beverage availability	less important	important	not important	**
Pre-match entertainment	less important	less important	not important	n.s
Half-time entertainment	less important	not important	not important	**
Off-field entertainment	not important	not important	not important	n.s
Community support for team	very important	important	less important	*
Traditional rivalry	Important	important	important	n.s
Price of tickets	Important	very important	important	**
Ease of access to the stadium	Important	important	important	*
Star players	Important	important	important	n.s
Availability of parking	Important	important	less important	n.s
Game live on TV	less important	important	not important	*
Child-care facilities	not important	less important	not important	n.s
Uncontrollable Attributes				
Live sport action (the contest)	very important	very important	very important	n.s.
Quality of opposition	less important	very important	important	**
Good weather	important	important	important	n.s
Special occasion	important	important	important	n.s
Home team's recent performance	important	v important	less important	*
Home team's chance of winning	important	important	less important	n.s
Time in the season	less important	important	less important	**
Other games on TV	less important	important	less important	*

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

n.s = not significant

Moving the *theatre-goers* further up the ladder of loyalty (Christopher *et al.* 1991) is never easy. Sometimes these fans may be quite like *aficionados* in game attendance behaviour but without their passion. Hence the *theatre-goer* may be a paying customer but from our research it is unclear whether there they are there just to be with others or to socialise or even as recipients of complimentary tickets, etc. Obviously the sport marketer has to seek ways of increasing the psychological commitment to the team of *fair-weather* and *theatre-going* fans, perhaps by more access to the players or by aligning attendance with a relevant social cause (such as a contribution of gate takings to local charities).

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

In this study, rugby fans placed heavy emphasis upon *live sports action* and *general atmosphere* as key motives for their spectatorship. It can be inferred that these motives are ways that rugby spectators express eustress and stimulation derived from the "match" as highlighted by researchers such as Madrigal (1995), Wann (1995) and Mahony and Howard (1998). While *entertainment value* derived from the match itself and *entertainment activities* before and during the match (half time) did not receive as much emphasis as expected, these all add to *general atmosphere*. Herein lies some fertile ground for sport marketers to try and present matches as entertainment packages. Indeed, such an emphasis on entertainment seems

expected by rugby patrons interviewed for this study. Perhaps this “extra value” can become part of the promotional strategy for selected games and might even justify increased ticket prices.

Apart from the attraction factors discussed above, aspects of the sporting contest’s *venue* seemed to weigh heavily on attracting fans to the match. While sport marketers do not always control all aspects of service delivery at the sportsground or in the stadium, these results suggest that catering for fan enjoyment of standard services such as seating, cleanliness, food and beverages, toilets, etc at the venue is of particular importance.

Overall, the results of this study tend to reinforce those reported elsewhere, albeit from sports different to rugby union. While it may not be a surprise to sport marketers and event managers that *controllable* factors exert considerable influence on hardcore fans, having their own anecdotal evidence in this regard confirmed by more authoritative research is comforting. Also the consistency in the way fans emphasise the items that attract them to sporting contests is gratifying to sports marketers (from a planning of future events’ viewpoint) and to academics (from a methodological stance).

The type of research reported here is available to almost all sport organisations, regardless of size. Pol & Pak’s (1993) two-stage research design of respondent recruitment at the venue and then follow-up interviewing (by telephone, internet or mail) is relatively easy to implement. Similarly, the authors believe that the attributes derived from the Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) classification scheme for fan attendance and the simple behavioural segmentation undertaken here have enough merit to receive more attention from sport marketers. At the sport organisation level, lists of season-ticket holders are available and should form a resource for direct marketing initiatives to *aficionados* whose commitment to the home team ought to be a priority for value-added services from the sport organisation. Conversely, results from our research suggest that *fair-weather* and *theatre-going* fans respond to aspects of the *contest*, the *atmosphere* created, *star players* and *time in season* of the game. These appeals each lend themselves to promotion of particular home games through the broadcast media.

As with any consumer research, limitations need to be acknowledged. The study was carried out midway through the season rather than at season’s end. Fan satisfaction may change over the whole season, suggesting longitudinal rather than point-in-time studies would be preferable (but expensive). The Tomlinson *et al.* (1995) classification scheme of *controllable* and *uncontrollable* factors had to be adapted to both New Zealand conditions and to a professional rugby environment necessitating the omission of several attributes. While the focus of this study was inter-provincial New Zealand professional rugby, there is no reason to doubt the efficacy of the classification scheme for other sporting codes. Appealing too would be combining a more qualitative research approach to fan attraction factors. Whatever part of fan attraction research is emphasised, there is considerable scope for ongoing research endeavour in New Zealand sport.

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