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Consumer Complaint Behaviour in Sport Consumption

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Abstract

While consumer complaint behaviour, and specifically voicing, has been extensively investigated from the perspective of goods (see Volkov et al., 2003, for a review), there have been fewer studies investigating consumer voicing with regard to services (Andreasen, 1984, 1985; Singh, 1988, 1990; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Further, no research can be identified in the extant literature with respect to experiential consumer voicing. This research proposes an examination of voicing behaviour of consumers in an experiential consumption setting and uses sport consumption as the context. A review of literature in the area is presented and a proposal for experiential research is offered.

In experiential consumption settings, consumers are more likely to experience emotional reactions to, and be actively involved in, the experience than in traditional consumption episodes (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003; Lofman, 1991). Further, experiential consumption episodes involve greater emotional processing, more activity, more evaluation, but less overall cognitive processing than traditional episodes (Lofman, 1991), which in turn is likely to result in different consumer behaviour in these experiential settings.

In this study, traditional consumer complaint behaviours are re-examined in an experiential context, specifically, consumption of live sport. It is proposed that these behaviours are not motivated by the traditional antecedents of anger and involvement and, further, that they are not enacted with the purpose of reducing dissonance. Instead, it would appear that traditional complaint behaviour concepts such as voicing, overt aggression, and assignment of blame take on a more functional role in the sport consumption experience. The possibility exists that for some spectators these complaining behaviours that have traditionally been classified as negative, actually contribute to overall enjoyment of, and satisfaction with, a sport consumption experience.
**Introduction**

Managing the complaint behaviour of consumers is vital for businesses (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998) regardless of industry type or structure. Current research has found that identification and management of consumer complaint behaviour improves consumer retention rates, negates the diffusion of negative word-of-mouth, and minimizes firm and consumer disadvantages (Kim et al., 2003). Further, the existence of consumer complaints indicates that an economic system may be performing unsatisfactorily. They provide feedback to firms and they assist in planning consumer programs and activities (Best & Andreassen, 1977; Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 1987; Day 1977; Fornell & Didow, 1980). Thus, understanding consumer complaints is necessary for both organisations and for business researchers.

While consumer complaint behaviour has been extensively investigated from the perspective of goods (see Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2003, for a review), there have been relatively few studies investigating consumer complaint behaviour with regard to services (Andreassen, 1984, 1985; Singh, 1988, 1990; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Further, no research can be identified in the extant literature with respect to experiential consumer complaint behaviour. This research heeds the call to stimulate discourse between consumer behaviour and sport marketing researchers (Kates, 1998) by investigating how consumer complaint behaviour differs in the experiential consumption of sport.

This paper has four objectives: first, to briefly review established research in the field of consumer complaint responses; second, to contextualise this research in the area of experiential consumption, specifically sport consumption; and third, to present a conceptual model based on the reviewed literature. The roles of mood, identification, emotion, and involvement in particular will be considered. This model will be based on the proposition that there are generalizable differences between consumer complaint behaviour in experiential consumption settings as compared to “traditional” consumption models. Finally, this paper will conclude with a proposal for experiential research.

In experiential consumption settings, consumers are more likely to experience emotional reactions to and be actively involved in the experience than they are in traditional consumption episodes (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003; Lofman, 1991). Further, experiential consumption episodes involve greater emotional processing, more activity, more evaluation, but less overall cognitive processing than more traditional consumption episodes (Lofman, 1991). Given the special nature of experiential consumption, behaviour of consumers in this realm is also likely to differ (Cooper-Martin, 1992; Lofman, 1991). This research focuses on sport as the consumption experience due to its wide appeal to a large range of consumers (as evidenced by global consumption of sport). Other experiential consumption experience episodes that could have been considered were the arts or wine consumption (Cooper-Martin, 1992); however, these were rejected due to their more constrained and limited consumer appeal.

**Consumer Complaint Behaviour in Experiential Consumption**

This research can be justified with regard to both theoretical and practical applications. This research will make four contributions in theoretical areas, firstly by enabling the analysis of how involvement, mood, emotion, and identification affect the consumption experience. Second, this analysis will enable the identification of individual differences in experience within the same product class. This research differs from the existing literature in that it places the consumers in a “real-world” situation rather than using the recall-based methods of traditional consumer complaint behaviour research literature.

Third, no previous study has investigated consumer complaint behaviour in the context of an experiential consumption episode, and, given the special nature of experiential goods and services, it is argued that consumer behaviour differs from that exhibited during consumption of other types of goods and services (Cooper-Martin, 1992; Dube & Mukherjee, 2003; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).
Fourth, research has identified that the management of consumer complaint behaviour is vital to improve consumer retention rates, negate the diffusion of negative word-of-mouth, and minimize firm and consumer disadvantages (Kim et al., 2003). This research will extend theoretical knowledge regarding the effective identification and management of consumer complaint behaviour.

In terms of marketing practice, this research and its outcomes will contribute to the practice of sport marketing in areas such as the provision of a valid and empirically tested model for sport consumer complaint behaviour, which will afford sport marketers a more detailed and thorough understanding of the sport consumer. Practitioners will be able to more effectively position their sport product on the basis of experiences and marry the distribution channels selected with the experiences elicited. In addition, this research has important implications for sport marketers, particularly as a segmentation tool. Marketers may leverage this information to develop the best product, distribution, and message mixes to more effectively reach and communicate with this consumer base. This will permit organisations to formulate “best practice” strategies regarding seeking out potential, actual or repeat complainants, and to better direct their efforts in resolving failed consumption episodes. This is important to future revenue, the projection of positive organisational image, and the creation of positive consumer perception. Finally, this research presents sport marketers with guidelines for policy formation and training in areas including customer service, stadium management, human resource management, and the like. We will begin this paper with a general discussion of consumer complaint behaviour.

Consumer Complaint Behaviour

Consumer complaint behaviour involves the set of multiple, active behavioural responses to dissatisfaction during or following a consumption episode (Volkov, 2003; Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2002, 2003). Consumer complaint responses can be described as the set of all behavioural responses portrayed by consumers which involve the communication of negative perceptions relating to a consumption episode and triggered by dissatisfaction and mediated by anger with that episode (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Day, 1984; Rogers & Williams, 1990; Singh & Howell, 1985; Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2002). It can be argued that this implies that consumer complaint responses are influenced by a multitude of situational, product, and personal variables unrelated to, but triggered by, the intensity of the consumer’s dissatisfaction and anger with the consumption episode. The extent literature therefore provides a path with which to analyse the consumer complaint process, commencing with an explanation of consumer complaint behaviour.

Consumer complaints occur due to a variety of scenarios with the majority being made by consumers who are dissatisfied with a product they are or have been using (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). Yet complaints may also originate from satisfied consumers of a product, non-users of a product, and non-purchasers of a product (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). Consumer complaints have been defined as an action taken by an individual whereby they communicate something negative regarding a product or service to either the firm manufacturing or marketing the particular product or service, to family, to friends, or to some third-party entity (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Landon, 1980; Rogers & Williams, 1990; Singh & Howell, 1985). However, not all complainants seek redress (Alicke et al., 1992; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Nyer, 2000; Owens & Hausknecht, 1999; Rogers & Williams, 1990; Singh, 1988).

Within this definition of a consumer complaint, the term individual refers to a person acting on their own behalf (or on behalf of their family unit) and can be purchasers, non-purchasers, users, or non-users of the product (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). To limit the scope of this specific research, this particular term excludes organisational entities and third parties. Communication refers to expressions made either in writing or orally but excludes informal word-of-mouth communication (again, this step has been taken to limit the scope of this research). Product or service refers to something offered for sale to consumers. Third party refers to formally constituted entities such as governments, special-interest groups, and other sanctioned bodies. These complaints may focus on either the functional (performance-related) or non-functional (the package, price, and the like) components of the consumption process. This section has reviewed what consumer complaint behaviour is. The following section will explore why consumers choose to complain.
Why Consumers Complain

Prior literature suggests that a dissatisfying consumption experience serves as the primary input into the consumer complaint behaviour process (Day, 1984; Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). That is, those consumption experiences in which consumers’ performance perceptions compare negatively to some standard (such as their previous expectations), and therefore are evaluated as dissatisfying, serves as the stressful event that is cognitively evaluated by the consumer and leads to the complaint behaviour (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). Included in the daily, stress-causing issues that people face are the many problems consumers experience in the marketplace (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). The dissatisfying marketplace experience has the potential to cause stress in one’s daily life (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). Further, when consumers suppress their feelings of distress, they dwell on the cause(s) of their dissatisfaction, which then results in heightened levels of dissatisfaction (Kowalski, 1996; Kowalski & Erickson, 1997; Nyer, 2000).

Consumers’ perceptions regarding the functional performance of a product or service are based on their evaluation of the product or service in relation to their expectations prior to usage and any first-hand experience acquired from that usage (Day & Landon, 1977; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). These consumer usage experiences either exceed, match, or fall below the consumers’ prior expectations, with dissatisfaction occurring if the performance of the product or service falls below those expectations (Day & Landon, 1977; Granbois, Summers, & Frazier, 1977; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). However, it must be noted that at times the consumers’ expectations prior to usage or first-hand experience are unreasonable, and the consumer is without the necessary skills to properly evaluate the performance (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). Regardless, dissatisfaction alone is not sufficient for the production of a consumer complaint (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981).

Other factors, such as the individual consumer themselves and the situation, also impact the propensity of consumer complaint behaviour occurring and the level of consumer dissatisfaction (Bolwing, 1989; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). Further, the consumer’s anger with the consumption experience has been shown to have a moderating effect, and it further influences that complaining propensity (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003).

Related to the consumers themselves, individual factors affecting their propensity to complain include their personality, their attitudes, their motives, perceived value of time, the information levels, and their sociodemographics (Bolwing, 1989; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Moyer, 1984; Volkov, 2003; Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2002, 2003). That is, consumer complainers are not characterized by a cross-section of society because complaining propensities and abilities are stronger in some societal groups than in others (for example, those community members that are of a higher socio-economic status tend to complain more than those community members that have lower status). Further, consumer complaint behaviour is a complex function of many variables including those intrinsic to the consumer themselves.

The literature suggests that there are differences between those consumers who complain and those who do not. Such findings indicate that complainers tend to be older, have attained higher levels of educational qualifications, earn a higher gross weekly income, possess greater degrees of wealth, and have higher participant levels of local community involvement. Further, in general terms, complainers have more resources in terms of intrinsic abilities (for example, self-confidence, feelings of self-worth) and external resources (for example, time, money, qualifications) to avail themselves when dissatisfied (Kolodinsky & Aeleng, 1990; Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2003).

The importance of the situation to the consumer and the prevailing social climate (relating to societal norms) are also stimulants to complaints from a situational perspective (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). The importance of the situation does not necessarily relate to the cost of the product or service, but rather relates to the magnitude of the perceived loss (Bolwing, 1989; Granbois, Summers, & Frazier, 1977; Prakash, 1991; Singh & Widing, 1991) and its essential nature for daily living (Day & Landon, 1977). Specifically, through development of ideals such as consumerism, consumer rights, and the alteration of social norms, it is now more acceptable for consumers to complain (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Landon, 1977), and thus complaint behaviour is increasing.
Therefore, complainants display a variety of attributes that set them apart from other members of the population and also possess specific attitudes that provide the motivation for them to exhibit complaint behaviour. The following section will review the behaviours consumers exhibit when complaining.

Consumer Complaint Behaviour

Complaint responses have been categorised in two ways: behavioural and non-behavioural (Singh, 1988). Behavioural responses constitute any or all consumer actions that openly express dissatisfaction (Day, 1984; Landon, 1980; Singh, 1988). These responses include those directed towards the seller, manufacturer, retailer, service provider, third parties, family, friends, and others (Andreasen & Manning, 1990; Day, 1984; Richins, 1983; Singh, 1988, 1990). Non-behavioural responses are viewed as those situations when the consumer takes no action at all (Singh, 1988). That is, the consumer forgets about or ignores the dissatisfying experience and does nothing about it. Although some researchers view non-behavioural complaint responses as elements to research (Day et al., 1981), the fact that these responses entail no behaviour indicates that this category falls outside the scope of this specific research into consumer complaint behaviour.

A review of the consumer complaint behaviour literature indicates that researchers appear unified in their understanding of the classification of consumer complaint behavioural responses (Day & Landon, 1977; Singh, 1988; Volkov, 2003; Volkov, Harker, & Harker, 2002, 2003). That is, with respect to behavioural responses, consumers have three basic options: private responses, direct voicing, and amplified voicing (Day & Landon, 1977; Singh, 1988). Private responses are consumer complaint behaviours that are directed towards family, friends, acquaintances, and the like through word-of-mouth communication. These responses are directed towards actors that are within the complainant’s social network, but these actors are not directly involved in the dissatisfying consumption experience.

Direct voicing is consumer complaint behaviour directed towards the seller, manufacturer, retailer, service provider, and/or any other parties involved in the production and delivery of the product. Direct voicing is usually directed towards actors that are not within the complainant’s social network (this is not always necessarily so) and who are directly involved with the dissatisfying consumption experience. In contrast, amplified voicing is consumer complaint behaviours that are directed towards third parties such as regulatory bodies, journalists, and legal representatives. Amplified voicing is directed towards actors that are neither within the complainant’s social network, nor are they directly involved with the dissatisfying consumption experience. Therefore, the network position of the actors and their involvement with the consumption experience are used to categorise consumer complaint behavioural responses into the three categories of this taxonomy.

When considering consumers’ post-purchase alternatives for action in a complaint situation, alternatives within the sport context can be explained as follows: A private response would involve the consumer communicating a dissatisfactory experience concerning the league, team, player, stadium, etc. to family, friends, or acquaintances to identify to them that the consumption experience led to the dissatisfaction and anger. Voicing would occur when a private response would not yield appropriately perceived restitution in the opinion of the individual consumer. Direct voicing would be represented by the consumer complaining directly to the league, team management, stadium manager, etc. Amplified voicing would occur when the consumer enlists the support of third parties such as broadcast or print journalists, consumer protection agencies, or industry regulatory or self-regulatory bodies to act on her or his behalf.

These behavioural responses are goal directed (Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1990; Singh & Wilkes, 1996). This indicates that consumer complainants perceive their behaviours as aiming to achieve a particular goal, rather than as an end in and of themselves (Singh & Wilkes, 1996). These complaint behaviours increase the probability of achieving goals but do not guarantee success in that goal attainment. Specific goal attainment through consumer complaint behaviour is difficult due to lack of control on behalf of the dissatisfied consumer, scarcity of resources available to the consumer, and other environmental contingencies (Singh & Wilkes, 1996). Further, consumer complaint behaviour is multifaceted. That is, consumers may engage in one or all of the diverse options—private responses, direct voicing, and amplified voicing (Day, 1984;
Richins, 1983; Singh & Wilkes, 1996). Importantly, these behaviours are independent—a consumer may undertake one, two, or all three of these behaviours in response to a consumption experience (Liu, Watkins, & Yi, 1997; Richins, 1987).

Although extant literature has mentioned mere dissatisfaction as the antecedent feeling that consumers experience prior to expressing complaint behaviour (Singh, 1988, 1990), Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg (2003) identify that anger must be felt for consumers to enact behavioural complaint responses. Further, alternate research investigating consumer complaint behaviour finds that consumers tend to remain passive rather than complain when they are merely dissatisfied (Best & Andreasen, 1977; Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 1987; Oliver, 1996; Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). Contrasting literature from disciplines such as anthropology, social psychology, sociology, and marketing explain that complaint behaviour is a common response when consumers are angry (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994; Shaver et al., 1987). Therefore, the current literature suggests that both dissatisfaction and anger are required for consumer complaint behaviour to be evidenced, with anger being a mediator of the effect of dissatisfaction on consumer behavioural responses (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

![Diagram](image)


**Figure 1: Taxonomy of CCB behavioural responses**

This research specifically investigates the consumer voicing aspect of consumer complaint behaviour, and, thus, consumer voicing will now be specifically addressed.

The voicing of complaints may have limited ability to affect the outcome of the critical incident; however, it can provide a cathartic, satisfying interaction through which to air grievances. This process can be enough to encourage further consumer voicing and a return to the consumption experience through alleviating consumer dissatisfaction and anger. It is therefore evident that consumer voicing is a relevant area for investigation from practitioner, organisational, and theoretical perspectives within the consumer complaint literature in that it provides indications of market and firm performance; allows analysis of consumer behaviours; adds direction to strategy and policy formulation; provides meaningful communication between the stakeholders; and identifies social concerns. To contextualise this research of consumer voicing in the field of sport spectator consumption, experiential consumption is now addressed.
Experiential Consumption

There has been an important shift in the attention of researchers towards the experiential aspects of consumption (Holbrook et al., 1984; Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999) in an attempt to understand consumer behaviour in a more holistic sense (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Holbrook et al., 1984; Lofman, 1991). Within the broad discipline of consumer behaviour, experiential consumption deals with goods and services that consumers choose, buy, and use purely to experience and enjoy (Cooper-Martin, 1992). Sport consumption, therefore, constitutes a relevant area of research, as the consumption of sport is an end in itself and serves as the primary benefit in use (Holbrook et al., 1984) and constitutes an area that requires further attention (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook et al., 1984; Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). As such, this research heed the call to stimulate discourse between consumer behaviour and sport marketing researchers (Kates, 1998) by investigating how consumer complaint behaviour differs in the experiential consumption of sport.

Since the late 1970s, researchers have identified that consumer behaviour involves more than mere information processing in order to reach a purchase decision or to solve a particular problem (Olahovsky & Granbois, 1979; Sheth, 1979). Research has identified that elements including fantasy, fun, imagination, feelings, pleasure, emotions, and the like also have a role in some consumption experiences (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook et al., 1984). This extension of consumer behaviour theory indicates that research should not always assume that consumers will behave as rational decision makers and that marketers need to understand this phenomenon in order to more fully understand their consumers (Addis & Holbrook, 2001).

With regard to experiential consumption, the core function of the product as a good or service takes on less relevance, while the product’s role in symbolism increases (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). When considering a product in the experiential consumption realm, the relative weight of the objective features of the product is lower than one would expect if considering the process from a more rational or utilitarian framework (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). As such, consumer decisions and behaviours rely on fast, intuitive consideration of the relevant information and how that makes them feel (Dube & Mukherjee, 2003). Far from being purely rational decision makers, consumers in the experiential realm rely on their intuitions and emotions associated with prior experience of the situation (Dube & Mukherjee, 2003).

An example of such a product is sport. The differences between the utilitarian and experiential views of consumption assist in rationalising the need to adopt two different views of consumer behaviour (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). The experiential perspective indicates that in a sport consumption experience, consumers consume in order to create feelings, experiences, and emotions rather than merely to solve a problem (Mowen, 1988). The consumption of sport as a spectator (and therefore the viewing of sport) results in the emotion related components of the consumption experience predominating. That is, these facets of consumer behaviour relate to the multisensory aspects of the consumer experience (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

Given the special nature of experiential consumption, the behaviour of consumers is likely to be different due to the relatively greater emotional processing, more activity and evaluation, but relatively less cognitive processing (Cooper-Martin, 1992; Lofman, 1991). The differences arise due to the understanding that consumers in an experiential consumption setting do not act as rational decision makers as they have been portrayed in “traditional” product and service consumption settings, and, as such, their behaviours (including complaint behaviour) are unlikely to fit with the extant view (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003).

Sport consumption is subject to a high degree of consumer subjectivity, and therefore uncertainty, which leads to an inability of researchers to rationally analyse this consumption episode utilising existing models (Addis & Holbrook, 2001; Hoffman, Kumar, & Novak, 2003; Mizerski & White, 1986). Further, as experiential consumption relies on rich, sensory input, it requires different measures than those developed for utilitarian or functional products to ascertain consumer dissatisfaction, anger, and complaint behaviour (Minor et al., 2004). Through analysis of the published consumption literature, it is clear that
the existing “traditional” and typical consumer behaviour models do not explain consumer complaint behaviour in real-life experiential consumption settings.

Specifically, these models do not allow for the influence of emotion, mood, and involvement, all of which have been shown to be relevant and critical constructs in sport research. Further, traditional models do not consider a priori and experiential emotion, mood, and involvement, where sport consumption research has shown that in these experiential settings, these constructs vary prior to and following an experiential incident or experience. Figure 2 shows the experiential consumer complaint behaviour model as we believe it operates.

Source: Literature reviewed for this study.

Figure 2: Experiential consumer complaint behaviour model

The research question posited in this study is

How does consumer complaint behaviour occur in the experiential consumption of sport?

Consumer behaviour and service literature have shown mood, emotion, identification, and involvement to be important predictive variables. However, if we consider the inherently variable nature of services and events, traditional measures of mood and involvement appear inadequate. If emotion, identification, mood, and involvement are indeed variable during the time of the consumption experience, marketers would have unique opportunities to influence this fluctuation or react to variations in the construction of the encounter.

We propose that fans bring an existing mood state, emotion level, level of identification with the actors involved in the sporting contest itself, and level of involvement into the sport consumption experience, which we term “a priori mood,” “a priori emotion,” “a priori identification,” and “a priori involvement.” We further propose that this mood state, emotion level, level of identification with the actors involved in the sporting contest itself, and level of involvement is likely to then vary constantly during the consumption experience, which we term to be “experiential mood,” “experiential emotion,” “experiential identification,” and “experiential involvement.” Therefore we propose that in sport consumption settings, mood, emotion, identification, and involvement will be dynamic constructs operating both on a priori and on experiential levels.

**Mood**

Mood is considered to be a dimension of experiential sport consumption with research identifying that optimal experience is in part defined by mood (Chalip et al., 1984; Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).
Further, Chalip et al. (1984) state that conditions conducive to optimal experience are accompanied by states of high positive moods. Following such research, it has been identified that consumers regulate their expectations, satisfaction, and verbalisation aspects of a consumption experience depending on their mood before and during the experience (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).

Due to the sport consumption experience being so unpredictable because of the uncontrollable elements of competition, mood has been identified as a dynamic, mediating factor in the sport consumption experience (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).

### Emotion

Emotion is an important component of consumer response (Holdbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, & Greenleaf, 1984; Oliver, 1994; Schultz, Kleine, & Kernan, 1989; Havlena & Holbrook, 1993; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). The extreme emotions and violence displayed by some sport fans at sports events is testimony to the passion of the spectator and the power of the sport (Strychacz, 1994). Building on the previous depiction of the conceptual model provided for this study, the addition of emotion is necessary as it may be a mediating factor on the variables of anger and identification and ultimately on consumers' complaint behaviour. Similar to the other mediating constructs in the model, emotion is believed to have an a priori and experiential state where the emotion brought to the experience by the fan may in fact vary during the sport experience.

The “experiential view” is based on the premise of hedonic consumption as described by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982):

> "Hedonic consumption designates those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience . . . " (p. 92).

Indeed, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982, p. 98), specifically cite the watching of a football game as an example of an experience which could be laden with fluctuating emotions.

Emotion is defined here as more than just pleasant or happy feelings. In contrast to low involvement activities such as brushing one's teeth or doing the dishes, watching a sporting event is more intense, more involving, and potentially more important in the life of a consumer (Maslow, 1968). Therefore, sport spectating as a form of intrinsically motivated consumption could be expected to evoke more than just unidimensional emotional responses, such as positive or negative, happy or sad, particularly with people who are enthusiastic about sports.

### Involvement

Experiential consumption researchers have long advocated a shift in focus from the “degree of involvement” (low versus high) to the “type of involvement” (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), which will allow researchers to consider involvement in terms of the degree of activation or arousal during the experience (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). This approach would suggest that there is potential for involvement to change during an experience to moderate the effect of other factors (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).

In order to discover more about the operation of the mood, emotion, identification, and involvement constructs in relation to voicing, a series of existential-phenomenology focus groups is proposed. In this method, participants will be encouraged to describe their experiences with sport consumption. There will be an emphasis on letting the participants naturally describe only those factors of prior experiences that they considered relevant, avoiding the use of “why?” questions at all times (Dale, 1996; Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).
Identification

Anger

Traditional consumer complaint behaviour models identify that anger is an important element in models exploring or predicting consumer complaint behaviour. Research that has considered the behaviours of sport fans has also highlighted that anger and yelling abuse (such as yelling at the referee for a bad decision) are socially sanctioned as part of the sporting experience (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999a; Wann et al., 1999a). In fact, some research has indicated that the greater the level of affiliation felt by the fans with the respective sporting combatants, the greater the levels of aggression and the more vocal the fans will be (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999a; Wann et al., 1999a). This affiliation, or identification, with the fan's chosen team enhances the feeling of solidarity amongst groups of supporters and is a key preoccupation of the individual's self concept, with the team's values marrying with those more established foci of fan support (Giulianotti, 2002). The team, however, reciprocates in the relationship by providing a complex and evolving representation of the fan's public identity (Giulianotti, 2002). Such a relationship provides the fan with a strong, obligatory, collaborative motive to support her/his chosen team. Thus, it would appear that a mediating role of aggression in the decision to “voice” in a sport consumption setting would still be prevalent.

Prior research has identified that the greater the level of identification that fans feel for a team, the more aggressive they are on behalf of that team (Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999b; Wann et al., 1999b). Sociology theorists indicate that this is due to this identification being a central component of the fans' identity, and any competition that their team is involved in will hold great relevance for their own, personal self-worth (Wann et al., 1999a).

Through fan association in a crowd, as is common in sporting stadia, “fanatical” excitement can lead to significant arousal, including increased heart rate, whereby fans may actually exert as much energy and effort as the sporting participants themselves (Corbin, 1973; Sloan, 1979). Excitement, such as that experienced by fans, can produce unacceptable complaint behaviour outcomes in terms of legalities and other social issues, including destructive violence and hooliganism. However, excitement can contribute to the growth of personal aggression amongst fans that has outcomes that are possibly more socially acceptable (e.g., raucoous applause) (Bromberger, Hayot, & Mariottini, 1993; Fiske, 1992; Redden & Steiner, 2000; Sloan, 1979).

Emotionally, two types of aggression can be differentiated: hostile and instrumental (Conroy et al., 2001). Hostile aggression is classed as behaviour that is designed to harm a specific target and the reinforcement sought by the fan is solely from injuring the targeted victim or seeing that target injured (e.g., injurious hooliganism) (Husman & Silva, 1984). Alternatively, if the reinforcement sought from the aggressive act is designed purely to present the fan with an action that will allow her/him some sort of advantage without causing injury, this is classed as instrumental aggression (e.g., yelling cheers when their team performs well) (Husman & Silva, 1984). Research investigating aggression portrayed by sportspersons, and fan opinion of this aggression, identified that consumers perceive that aggression is increasingly acceptable when the actor, or athlete, is competing at a higher level of sporting contest (Conroy et al., 2001). Following this assertion, it can be said that fans would perceive their own aggression as more acceptable if directed towards a higher-level sporting competition.

A Methodology for Experiential Consumption Research

Some of the phenomenological focus groups will be carried out before and during a televised broadcast of a live national football league game. Conducting the focus groups during an actual experience of the type being investigated is required to conform to the phenomenological method of first-degree information
collection (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). This method also differentiates the current research from the recall-based methods of traditional consumer complaint behaviour research literature, in that it places the respondents in a real-world situation.

Phenomenological focus groups are considered a particularly appropriate choice for those wishing to explore consumer experience (Calder, 1977), as they provide a systematic description in terms of first-degree constructs of the consumption-relevant intersubjectivity of the target segment (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). Phenomenological focus groups require the participants and the researcher to share participatively (Calder, 1977; Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). This means that the researcher should immerse themselves in the experience, with the subjects, in order to collect data from the respondents about the experience (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). Another important reason for conducting the focus groups during an actual sport consumption experience is to document which characteristics of the game elicit responses, changes in mood, discussion among participants, emotion displayed, and the like (Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003).

Phenomenological focus groups require homogeneous participants in a natural setting (Calder, 1977; Johnson Morgan & Summers, 2003). For this reason, participants will be recruited using the snowball sampling technique. The groups will be made up of friends and associates who normally watch football together.

This paper has achieved the three objectives set: first, to bring together established research in the field of consumer complaint responses; second, to contextualise this research into the general area of experiential consumption, specifically sport; and third, to present a conceptual model based on the reviewed literature espousing the proposition posited by authors that there are generalisable differences between consumer complaint behaviour in experiential consumption when compared to “traditional” consumption models. As such, an exciting and revolutionary program of research was presented.

References


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