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TITLE: Segmenting initial fans of a new team: A taxonomy of sport early adopters

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Abstract

Marketers are interested in the first buyers of new products, given their important role in driving wider community adoption. This is especially the case for new entertainment products, like new or relocated sports teams, who must quickly build fan connections and loyalty given the importance of crowds and social networks in adding value to the entertainment experience. Fans choose to connect with sports teams for numerous reasons; however, fan development in the context of a new team has rarely been examined. This paper examines the diversity and similarity among inaugural fans of an expansion team. A large sample (n = 1,724) was classified into five segments revealing how each varies in their brand associations, satisfaction, identification, and involvement. By analysing key dimensions (relationship identifiers) that characterise how consumers connect with a new team, the authors provide new insights about the nature of consumers in the context of a new sports team. Furthermore, the five segments were found to be distinct cohorts, with sufficient variation between them to warrant variant marketing approaches to achieve the outcome of committed, long-term fans.

Keywords: segmentation, new sports team, sports fans, brand association

Segmenting initial fans of a new team: A taxonomy of sport early adopters

One of the primary tactics for professional sport league growth is the addition of new teams. This increases distribution of the product (sport) through an increase in the number of fixtures (live and broadcast matches) and by making live attendance accessible to more consumers. As with most product line expansions, league growth can lead to the capture of consumers from existing teams. To minimise such cannibalisation and increase the rate of market acceptance, the new team (product) should convey a distinctive identity, based on a strong regional connection or a close relationship with local consumers (Sharp, 2010). Examples of such teams include the New York City Football Club in America, Western Sydney Wanderers in Australia, and Ottawa Redblacks in Canada.

Guidance on how a new or relocated team creates and develops a fan base in the early years remains limited. This paper addresses a gap in existing knowledge of how new teams create a consumer base, by profiling the early adopters that embrace such teams. A segmentation procedure was employed to gain a deeper understanding of how and why people attach themselves to new teams. Knowledge about first adopters is always useful to marketers, but improved information about how fans are 'born' is particularly important to sports managers. New teams need to build fan connection and loyalty quickly – or face empty stadiums. This is particularly the case in new markets where there is little brand equity for the sport, league or team. If a new team fails to gain traction in the marketplace in its early years, there is evidence that growth is difficult thereafter (McDonald & Alpert, 2007).

As sport organizations develop products in new or existing markets, they are faced with increasingly fragmented customer bases and fierce competition for revenue driven by attendance, viewership and other forms of consumption. Such changes have heightened calls for a greater focus on understanding and segmenting complex consumer bases for both participation and spectatorship of sport. Without proper segmentation and targeting strategies,

sports organizations, including teams, can struggle to effectively leverage limited resources to develop and maintain relationships with various consumer groups (Stewart, Smith, & Nicholson, 2003).

Sport spectator segmentation models

There have been a number of theoretical and practical approaches to classifying fan types:

[Insert Table 1 about here]

These studies reflect the value of segmentation in developing sound understanding of target markets, but illustrate that modern segmentation approaches and methodologies can differ significantly from one study to another. At the heart of segmentation is the notion that by knowing more about consumers, marketers can target specific groups with either refined products or more effective promotional efforts. Simple methods such as identifying and comparing heavy and light users or segmenting based on geographic proximity to distribution points have proven to be highly effective (Sharp, 2010). Similarly, there are now also more complex methods of segmenting markets which use combined psychographic, demographic and behavioural data.

In this study, we have chosen to revisit sport segmentation approaches in order to review the inaugural fans of a new team, and see what different consumer groups, if any, there are among that initial cohort. It is possible that some consumer groups who were initially attracted to new teams may leave if their needs are not met. There may also be some who are new to the team, but have the advantage of being surrounded by an established crowd with established patterns of behaviours and norms. Previous segmentations of existing team fans have focused mainly on those who tried the product and continued to consume it, which is a major flaw.

Those who tried it and opted out are not generally captured. For those that are, they are confined to the lower levels of fandom with little consideration of why (e.g. the descriptions of 'low involvement' fans by Bristow and Sebastian (2001), and Tapp and Clowes (2002)). It is likely that many who opted out had good reasons for doing so, and that some may not have discontinued if their needs had been better met. Therefore, the aim of this research is to increase understanding of consumer groups in a new sports team context. As a result, the study provides two key contributions. Firstly, it investigates how consumers engage in the early years of a new team's existence. And secondly, it provides practical insights into how a team's marketing activities might be adjusted to increase both the rate and depth of fan creation in neophyte organisations.

Context of this study

This study examines the expansion of the Australian Football League (AFL) in 2011. The AFL administers Australian Rules Football, the dominant national sporting code in terms of television audience, live attendances and revenue in the Australian market. The season consists of 23 regular games and a knockout finals or playoff series. At the elite level, the AFL has 18 teams that compete for an annual premiership, with the two most recent expansion teams entering in 2011 (Gold Coast Suns) and 2012 (Greater Western Sydney Giants). The AFL has been a remarkable success with attendances at regular season games totalling over 6.4 million in 2014. Furthermore, the Grand Final (premiership match) was watched by over 3.7 million in 2014, making it one of the most viewed programs on Australian television among a population of just over 22.7 million.

This study focuses on the launch of the 17th team into the AFL in 2011, the Gold Coast Suns (GC Suns). The Gold Coast is an area in the north eastern Australian state of Queensland. With a tropical climate and a strong beach culture, the region is popular with

tourists and a common retirement destination for those from the relatively colder southern Australian states. This background made the launch of a new team here an interesting choice.

As described by McDonald and Stavros (2012), the AFL's decision to launch a new team was based on a desire to have a stronger presence in this fast-growing market and to ensure there was more AFL content in the state of Queensland. Although Queensland already had one established AFL team (the Brisbane Lions), Rugby League is still the dominant sport. A new team translates to greater distribution of the product, which is crucial for market share (Sharp, 2010). This also means that under the AFL's current television rights there would be at least one live game on-air in Queensland each week as broadcasters are required to televise 'home' teams live in each state.

Australian Rules Football is a winter sport and is not a natural fit for the Gold Coast which has a dominant sun and surf culture. However, the rapidly growing community has expressed a willingness to embrace new sporting ventures as part of a move toward establishing a broader image (e.g., a new rugby league team and international motorsports events). In addition, there is a history of amateur AFL teams in the region with strong integration into the community through social initiatives. Given this background, the AFL offered a number of reasons why a consumer might adopt the GC Suns and support them early in their history. The first is regional support with support for any organization that bears that name and represents it in national competitions rather than a team from another state. The second is the already strong connection to the sport among some locals. Third, consumers, such as the high number of self-funded retirees, may be looking for new entertainment options, and may adopt the AFL team as another leisure pursuit. Finally, local consumers are more likely to associate themselves with a team which is linked to various community charity events and activities.

Theoretical background and approach

This study employs segmentation through both a priori (theoretically based) and data driven (analysis based) approaches. A review of past literature and commercial practice identified a number of variables that might be used to distinguish the first consumers of a new product. The classifications described in the following paragraphs were compared against the stated motives of the AFL in establishing a team on the Gold Coast (McDonald & Stavros, 2012). Examples include relocated fans, proud local residents who would support any team helping the community, and general sports fans that might be seeking more local content in professional leagues. We then conducted data driven research using statistical modelling to identify major differences between groups of initial consumers (fans).

The data used in this process was collected directly from a team database through a fan survey. The survey contained questions relating to the factors identified in the a priori stage, and a battery of other behavioural, attitudinal and demographic variables that could reasonably be expected to play a role in shaping fandom. We then followed a multidimensional approach, as recommended by Stewart et al. (2003), to develop sport consumer taxonomies as this provides a richer description of the underlying factors of sport consumption, and accommodates the complexity of concepts such as emotion, identification and loyalty.

Given the existence of a range of antecedents and outcomes of fan connection (e.g. loyalty or behaviour), we adopted a holistic perspective considering both the attitudinal and collective nature of consumption. Specifically, we captured:

- Attitudinal measures including commitment, loyalty, and perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) to examine consumers' internal attitudinal preferences for the new offering;

- Customer involvement, measured using the Psychological Continuum Model scale (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger & Jordan 2011). These measures have been designed to capture the multi-faceted way that consumers become progressively involved in sport and events, and the corresponding behaviours.
- Consumers' attitudinal stability toward new products manifests in commitment, resistance to change (RTC) and loyalty (Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). We drew on attitudinal theory to conceptualise the extent to which consumers are psychologically connected to the new product, which indicates commitment to the organization and RTC in preference;
- Organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995) as a theoretical base to explain the collective activity of consumption (Holt, 1995).

Relevant to this study, fans often express themselves in terms of their degree of identification with a sports team, enabling consumers with comparable beliefs or attitudes to be clustered together (Ross, 2007). In Table 2, we examine past studies and describe the variables identified from a priori knowledge.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Based on the theoretical foundations mentioned above, there are a number of possible drivers of fan connection with new sports teams. Our research process therefore covers: a) how consumers connect with a sports team in terms of team identification, commitment, loyalty, and perceived CSR; b) how those connections manifest into different consumer relationships with a sports team (relationship identifiers); and c) the different consumer profiles and behaviours emerging from the cluster analysis on team brand associations, loyalty, involvement, satisfaction, and expectancy confirmation. The conceptual process for this research is presented in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

Method

Following identification of key factors from previous literature that may drive connection with a new team and differences in new fan attitudes and behaviours, we quantitatively tested the impact of these factors via data driven segmentation models.

Participants and procedures

Data were collected from a survey conducted among fans of the newly formed Gold Coast (GC) Suns. The fan base in its initial year included those who may have had an AFL background and now had a local team to support, those switching from other sports or entertainment options, and those with little knowledge of the sport (or sport at all) who were experiencing it for the first time.

As part of this research, the GC Suns ran a campaign to encourage the registration of fans on a consumer database in the lead-up to their inaugural season. Thus, fans that provided a current email address were invited to respond to an online survey at the start of the inaugural season. In total, 1,741 responses were collected (a 24% response rate). Respondents were 66% male and had an average age of 47. This is largely in line with the fan and season ticket holder (STH) demographics presented in past work, although it should be noted that the Gold Coast is a popular retirement area for Australians (like Florida is for Americans), and thus the average age of residents is high (McDonald & Stavros, 2012).

Non-response bias was evaluated using two methods. Initially, we compared early and late respondents, which showed no significant differences on key attitudinal variables. Following this, the sample of respondents was compared to the overall fan database, which again showed no significant differences when compared on the basis of demographic variables.

Initial consumer identification items used in the survey were developed from existing measures in all cases. A six-dimension measure of team identity was used, with three items per dimension: private evaluation, public evaluation, behavioural involvement, interdependence, interconnection, and cognitive awareness (Heere & James, 2007a). The private evaluation scale captures the degree to which an individual is glad or proud to be associated with a sports team, while public evaluation measures the extent to which they feel that others favourably or unfavourably view the sports team (Heere & James, 2007a).

The interdependence scale captures the extent to which success or failure of the sports team influences the lives of fans. The interconnection scale measures the degree to which an individual feels associated or intertwined with the identity of the sports team (Gurin & Townsend, 1986). Behavioural involvement captures the extent that consumers engage in actions to support the group. The cognitive awareness scale captures the range of knowledge an individual has regarding the history of success or failure of the sports team (Heere & James, 2007a). RTC measures the level of commitment, stability of preference and degree of resistance a consumer has in changing sports teams (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Pritchard et al. 1999). Items for perceived CSR were taken from Lichtenstein et al.'s (2004) past work measuring consumer attitudes toward an organization's involvement and commitment to community activities. All constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). A follow up survey was conducted at the end of the inaugural season to collect games attended and watched on television data, and the club provided data on season ticket purchase and use.

Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assist conversion of consumer identification items to constructs (relationship identifiers) prior to the development of

clusters. The items of the six dimensions of team identity, RTC and perceived CSR were subjected to CFA. The initial CFA results suggest that there were problems with interdependence and cognitive awareness dimensions of the identification scale. Similar to the findings of Lock, Funk, Doyle & McDonald (2014), the correlation between interdependence and interconnection dimensions was high (r = 0.88) in our study, and thus the discriminant validity using the average variance extracted (AVE) cannot be confirmed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Given strong arguments that interdependence and interconnection are closely conceptually related (Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011), and following the advice of Lock et al. (2014), we deleted the interdependence construct and proceeded with the other five dimensions. A smaller problem was found with the cognitive awareness dimension, where the AVE was slightly less than the recommended level of 0.50 (AVE = 0.45). The remaining factors were subjected to CFA once more. The final solution produced a good model fit [$\chi^2_{(120)} = 545.95$, $\rho < 0.00$; CFI = 0.99, NFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.45], and the full list of items from the final CFA are shown in Table 3. The composite constructs of the factors were calculated to represent the relationship identifiers.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

These relationship identifiers were used as the input variables for the clustering process. The first stage of cluster analysis relied on a hierarchical clustering algorithm to determine the appropriate number of clusters (Cannon & Perreault, 1999; Punj & Stewart, 1983). Adhering to recommendations by Wong, Wilkinson and Young (2010), and Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2005), the two Average Linkage and Ward's methods were used. The Average Linkage has the advantage of being less susceptible to the effects of outliers (Hair et al. 2005). Although Ward's method has a drawback in that it is sensitive to outliers, it was used here because it allows comparisons between clustering solutions (Wong

et al. 2010). We re-ran the hierarchical clustering on five random subsets (approximately 48% of the data). From a dendogram, we examined the number of possible clusters and attempted to exclude outliers by looking at the univariate |Z-score| >3 and multivariate Mahalanobis distance (D^2/df>4, sig >0.001). A total of 20 outliers were found and deleted. We then compared the results of two clustering methods. Through these assessment procedures, a list of potential cluster solutions was identified for use in the next stage of clustering.

The next stage of cluster analysis employed the SPSS K-mean procedures. While the K-mean tends to perform well in the presence of outliers, it requires prior specification of the number of clusters (Punj & Stewart, 1983). The number of potential cluster solutions was therefore used as an input into K-means clustering. The focus at this stage was on assigning the respondents into one of the final cluster solutions. We allowed the K-means clustering to pick random seeds (Hair et al. 2005), using either factor (Singh, 1990) or standardised mean scores (Wong et al. 2010) as input variables. Two subsamples (approximately 74%) of the total sample were drawn. Kappa coefficients were then used to determine the stability and robustness of the cluster solution (Singh, 1990). The final cluster centroids were retained for further analysis.

Finally, we followed Wong et al.'s (2010) cross-validation procedure to assess internal validity. At this stage, the holdout sample was used with the K-means clustering to allocate the respondents to their closest centroid. We then independently used the same two-stage procedures to classify the holdout sample. We found that the K-means clustering using factor scores performed better in terms of the robustness and usefulness of the cluster solution. The final cluster structure and number was therefore determined, and additional analysis was conducted to profile segment characteristics.

After clusters were defined, multiple outcome variables were used to deduce differences between segments in the profiling stage. Further, satisfaction measures were used to assess the consumer's outright satisfaction, happiness and general feeling about the decision to support the team (Oliver, 1980). This was complemented by an expectancy disconfirmation item (Madrigal, 1995) that captured a consumer's overall experience compared with the expectation of being a fan of the team. Thirteen brand association measures referring to association or connection to a team sport brand (Gladden & Funk, 2001; 2002) were also used here, to capture "experiential and emotional benefits that consumers received through the consumption of sport" (Gladden & Funk, 2002, p. 56). This is in line with recent calls to investigate how various sports fan segments choose to relate to and express their connection with a brand (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012). Items collected represented consumer perceptions of product attributes, benefits and attitudes toward a product, and their evaluation of brand (Gladden & Funk, 2002). To explore differences across segments, mean scores for outcome measures were compared.

Results

Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations for the five relationship identifiers for each cluster. Further insight about the characteristics of each cluster is provided through the set of variables that portray descriptive information about each segment. Table 5 summarises the main characteristics of each segment, as portrayed by the outcome variables measured. The five segments have been labelled as Instant Fanatics, Community Focused, Independent Triers, Social Theatre-goers, and Casuals. The naming of these segments was difficult, because as previously noted by Funk and James (2001) and Stewart et al. (2003), there is a great deal of duplication in past work on sports segments, and as a result there are myriad names that have been used to essentially describe the same type of sport consumers.

To avoid adding to this confusion, where possible, we have used established names to label the segments we observed.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Instant Fanatics (26.2%) represent highly satisfied, committed and involved consumers, analogous to what have previously been described as hard core ‘fanatics’ (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999). Examining Table 5, this segment scored the highest on all items. In particular, this segment has the highest mean scores for pleasure, centrality and sign, and is highly attached to the brand. Instant Fanatics are mainly in the most committed stages of the PCM, with 29% in the allegiance stage and 54% in the attachment stage.

In terms of game consumption, Instant Fanatics attended 6.3 live games (the highest mean) and watched the highest number of TV/internet games (mean = 76.2 games) in the past 12 months. In many ways, the fans in this segment mirror the ‘high team attachment’ segment in Alexandris and Tsiotsou’s (2012) study of well-established Greek soccer fans. However, there is no evidence here of the ‘dysfunctional’ behaviours that Hunt et al. (1999) noted among some highly-committed fans, so we use the term ‘fanatic’ in a positive sense. What is notable here is how quickly this deep attachment formed.

Community Focused fans (20.1% of the sample) identify strongly with sports teams that are involved in CSR activities. This segment is similar to the ‘local fans’ identified by Hunt, et al. (1999), and the ‘civic fans’ identified by Lewis (2001); that is, fan groups primarily motivated by their links to a geographic area. Measuring fan perceptions of team CSR activities has revealed that these fans are motivated by a combination of both the location of the team and the impact it has on the community.

Members of the Community Focused segment primarily identify with their area or community, and as a team unifies or blends with the region, the support of these fans can be

activated. They have the highest mean score for perceived CSR and public evaluation, but are only moderately involved with the team (highlighted by lower than average scores for interconnection and behavioural involvement). Sixty-one per cent of the Community Focused segment is in the attraction stage of the PCM, suggesting commitment is still developing. Within this segment, 72% live in the local area – the highest of any segment.

With regards to game consumption, this segment attended about 5.5 live games and on average watched 69.6 TV/internet AFL games in the past 12 months. This community focus is reflected in the length of time they have lived in the region – the longest of all segments – and a key indicator of their commitment to the region.

Independent Triers (14.6%) represent consumers with high levels of consumption (the second highest live game attendance), although they differ from the other segments in important ways. For example, these consumers have the lowest score for public evaluation; that is, they love their team, but do not believe many others respect or like it. They are also unlikely to support the team because family and friends do. As such, while they exhibit strong loyalty and private evaluation, they may engage in ego-protection techniques by publicly distancing themselves from the team (Madrigal, 1995).

They most closely resemble the segment described by Stewart, Smith and Nicholson (2003) as ‘reclusive partisans’ – those that have strong team affiliation but low attendance, and are thought to be largely unconcerned with the team’s other fans. There is some evidence of these characteristics in this segment, with comparatively high levels of centrality and sign scores within the PCM items. This segment has the second highest percentage of fans in the allegiance stage of the PCM, although at 4% the number is not large. However, we reject the ‘reclusive’ label, as this segment attended almost half of the team’s home games and rates second highest on behavioural involvement.

Despite a large proportion of this segment not living on the Gold Coast, they attended the most live games on average, making them an obvious target for conversion into lifelong fans. In terms of game consumption, they attended 6.2 live games on average and watched 68 TV/internet games of AFL in the past 12 months.

Social Theatre-goers (27.8%) include consumers who are less satisfied and engaged. These consumers have low team identification and the lowest level of commitment. They also have relatively low brand association with the sports team (lower than average). In addition, they attended the least amount of live games (mean = 5.1 games), and watched a moderate number on the TV/internet (mean = 55.9 games) in the past 12 months.

Previous research has described sport consumers whose main motivation is entertainment as 'theatregoers' (Stewart et al. 2003). We added 'social' to reflect this segment's higher likelihood to follow the team because of friends or family, and their strong sense of interconnectedness. Despite their generally low engagement, these fans find the sport pleasurable – they enjoy watching star players, and perceive football as an escape. Also, half of this segment is in the attraction stage of the PCM, indicating increased commitment forming among them. This is how the Social Theatre-goers differ from other lowly engaged fans (e.g. Casuals segment).

Casuals (11.3%) include casual observers, with infrequent attendance and non-committal attitudes toward the team. Consumers in this segment have the lowest levels of commitment, interconnection, behavioural involvement, and private evaluation. They perceive the team as adding little value to the broader community (lowest perceived CSR). They also exhibit low levels of satisfaction and expectancy confirmation. This is the only segment to score below the mid-point of four on the single item self-reflected fan measure, and they are lowest on all three dimensions of the PCM. Eighty-four per cent of these fans are still in the attraction phase of the PCM, distinguishing them from other segments.

This segment attended about 5.5 live games, and watched the least number of games via TV/internet (mean = 55.7 games) in the past 12 months. The low attendance is partially explained by the fact that they are the most likely group to live outside the immediate catchment area of the team (i.e. the Gold Coast). Yet even though their consumption levels are relatively low, they are still active consumers who provide revenue to the team. The question arises as to why they do not feel a stronger connection and involvement given they are consumers of the team, albeit at low levels.

To demonstrate key differences between the segments, a positioning map (Figure 2), shows how the five segments differ in terms of satisfaction and fandom.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to empirically examine the first consumers (fans) of an expansion sport team in its inaugural year, in order to identify any specific cohorts that warrant differing marketing tactics to encourage their development. Such situations have rarely been examined, even though studies into the 'early adopters' of consumer products are common (Rogers, 2003). Previous early adopter studies have suggested that the first consumers of any product are often heavy users of the product category, and act independently of the opinions of others, being more active in spreading word-of-mouth (McDonald & Alpert, 2007). This makes them particularly attractive, but they are often lumped together as a single cohort. They are the first 16.5% to adopt and are often relatively younger, more educated and more risk averse than later adopters of the same product (Rogers, 2003).

With almost 8,000 fans registering on the GC Suns consumer database prior to the team playing a game in the elite league, it seemed likely that they were not a single cohort

with identical motivations and backgrounds. Segmentation is therefore of value if these variations are going to impact consumption, especially in guiding future efforts to retain, service and communicate with fledgling consumers. The reasons for launching a new team on the Gold Coast were also varied, suggesting the sport's governing body believed fans would be attracted to the team through various avenues.

Examination of the initial fan base is interesting, given that minimal relevant research has been conducted on new fans of expansion teams. In this study, a large number of variables and constructs were included, in deference to the many different perspectives from past work on established teams. We found that the vast majority of fans of this new team had long-term experience of following the sport, which aligned with findings from Lock, Taylor, & Darcy's (2011) research conducted on new team consumers. As such, we would say that for most fans this was not a case of adopting a 'new to the world' innovation, but rather a 'new to the market' innovation. They consumed both live and broadcast games in strong numbers, and were frequently committed enough to travel to attend their team's games interstate. In some sense, on a league level, this represents the cannibalization of existing consumers. However, given the location-dependent nature of sport (with its regional fan bases and limitations on live attendance), new teams can also grow both overall revenue and total fan bases (Lock, Darcy, & Taylor, 2009).

Given the varied demographics, behaviours and attitudes of respondents, viewing this initial fan base as one cohort is unwise. The results reported here suggest the presence of five consumer segments with distinct profiles. The drivers of identity were formed quickly, with attitudinal and behavioural differences between segments suggesting there is significant value in pursuing segmentation-related communications and product strategies. However, the challenge remains of how best to market the team and related products to these different segments.

Managerial implications

Our portrait of five segments provides evidence of the diverse ways that fans can identify and display varying degrees of behavioural engagement and involvement with a sports team.

Instant Fanatic Segment

For instance, the results show that Instant Fanatics perhaps represent the most attractive segment, characterised by the highest levels of commitment, loyalty and private evaluation. These fans also demonstrate high levels of connectivity, public evaluation and cognitive awareness, which suggests they are a key target for spreading positive word-of-mouth as the team develops. This segment is also the most obvious for conversion into STH or relational consumers, given multiple strong points of identification and connection (Funk & James, 2001). They are also likely to serve as team advocates among their own networks, and could drive the rituals and co-created behaviours which may eventually characterise the team and its fans. It is not surprising to find such a segment of fans with high levels of consumption and attitudinal loyalty – similar hard core fans have been identified in many past qualitative (Dionísio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008) and quantitative (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Tapp & Clowes, 2002) studies.

What was unexpected was to find that almost 30% of the fans of this new team had already reached these high levels of involvement within the first 12 months of its existence. It should be noted that frameworks of fan development (e.g. Funk & James's (2001) PCM or Mullin, Hardy and Sutton's (2007) escalator model) which suggest a stepwise progression of fans' increasing intensity of engagement over time may need to be softened to recognise that these levels can either progress quickly or stages can be missed altogether (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012). Overall, however, our analysis provides strong support for Funk and James's (2001) PCM framework, in that we see a logical relationship between the fandom

intensity of the segments we identified and the stage of the PCM where the majority sit. Given that we used the PCM as a descriptive variable, not a classification variable, this strong relationship is a further validation of the usefulness of the PCM framework, even among new fans of a new team.

Marketing to highly connected fans seems straightforward, requiring almost a 'build it and they will come' approach. In additional to other easily obtained benefits, these demanding heavy sport consumers, expect personalised service, high levels of access and specialised communications. For example, simply emailing team news is unlikely to satisfy, unless it has some behind-the-scenes insights or a strong team perspective unavailable through the myriad of other sports news sources these fans are likely to be trawling.

Community Focused Segment

The presence of the Community Focused segment highlights the importance of a sports team's CSR activities, as suspected by the AFL when establishing this team, and as noted by several researchers (e.g. Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). This aligns with Heere and James' (2007b) argument that sports organizations should seek to align their identity with external groups in the community to maximise consumption. Past studies have indicated that consumers respond positively to the CSR activities of a sports team. For example, Walker and Kent (2009) substantiated that CSR activities have a strong and positive impact on the organization's perceived reputation, and increase word-of-mouth and merchandise consumption. Our study revealed a group of fans already primarily attracted to the new team because it is deemed as good for their community. Obviously maintaining such CSR activities and communicating their impact back to the public is important. Additionally, as the on-field activities for the Community Focused segment are secondary, ensuring some

education and communications are undertaken to integrate them with other fans and enhance their enjoyment of the game is imperative.

Independent Triers Segment

Our Independent Triers segment provides interesting insights as it clearly deviates from the pattern of segments simply being consistently high or low on all dimensions often found in segmentation studies (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012). Highly correlated variables or simply the survey response style of respondents can yield a high/low split (Greenleaf, 1992). Even though the Independent Triers attended a lot of games, they differ from the Instant Fanatics segment in significant ways. For instance, Independent Triers exhibit far lower levels of centrality and connectivity than may be expected given their high attendance. They also have the lowest level of public evaluation of any of the segments. As such, they are a segment we have identified that has no real parallel with what has been observed in past studies of fans of established teams.

There are several explanations why Independent Triers have the lowest perceptions of how others view their team. One explanation is that this study's sports team is new. Thus, the absence of on-field achievement (the team predictably won only a few games in its first season) may provide a basis for these fans to engage in ego-protection (Madrigal, 1995). Past studies have indicated that vicarious achievement is less relevant in a new team (Lock et al. 2011). Another explanation is that these fans may be exhibiting the 'us versus them' or 'David versus Goliath' mentality that supporting a new team can foster. They do not believe their team is respected by fans of other teams or sporting codes, which may not be a negative. Indeed, in sport this sort of underdog image can unify and galvanise fans' or observers' support for a team or athlete (Frazier & Snyder, 1991; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007).

Independent Triers reject the idea of supporting the team solely to foster social connections, resisting or limiting their active involvement in fan-related activities. This suggests a self-sufficient aspect to their motivation to consume and enjoy the team and related activities. While requiring a medium-term approach, it will likely be a challenge for the team to enhance the social (and emotional) connections among this segment to encourage a broader relationship with it and other fans. Community engagement through CSR activities or high-profile endorsements may build these fans' pride and desirability to increase connection and alignment with the team. However, if an 'us versus them' mentality is actually a positive for these fans, such efforts to improve broader acceptance of the team might be counterproductive. Further research is warranted here.

Social Theatre-goers Segment

Fans in the Social Theatre-goers segment are unique due to their high cognitive awareness but lower identification and connectivity with the team. Yet unlike Casuals, this segment has already developed social connections with the team (support with friends) and active involvement in team-related activities. These consumers are therefore defined by their enjoyment and satisfaction with the sport, but low-level personal bonds with the new team. This segment has the highest percentage of male fans, and has a long history of involvement with the sport. Their low level of direct connection with the team suggests they may have existing connections with other teams that have not been supplanted by the new arrival.

League regulations which limit how often each visiting team plays in each region ensure that Social Theatre-goers are likely to stay behaviourally loyal to the home team; however, building attitudinal loyalty may require a longer term approach from the team. Teams historically loathe using this approach. However, they publicly acknowledge that some fans have dual allegiances, which suggests that this may not be a bad approach and

could help resolve some of these fans' internal conflicts. As an example, the team studied here adopted a tactic in later games of encouraging fans to wear both teams' merchandise when they were playing their 'old' team, and this was warmly embraced by many fans.

Casuals Segment

In contrast to the Instant Fanatics, consumers in the Casuals segment demonstrated behaviours similar to 'casual' observers (Tapp & Clowes, 2002) that have low attachment to the sports team in term of levels of commitment, loyalty and private evaluation. A large number of these consumers live outside of the Gold Coast region, which could explain why overall this segment demonstrates the lowest level of cognitive awareness. This raises an important consideration of how to persuade this segment to become more engaged with the team. Their low levels of identity correlate with low scores on outcome variables including satisfaction and brand association, and although causality is unclear, intuitively, it seems plausible that providing a satisfying experience for these fans can improve team identity. Education on both the sport and team to drive cognitive awareness and product trial, and build emotional involvement with the team are priorities to encourage development of this segment's fandom. The team needs to better understand this segment for two reasons: they are most likely to churn as supporters or consumers (McDonald, 2010), and it is likely that growth will come from the ranks of light users like these (Sharp, 2010).

Limitations, conclusions and future research

In some ways, this study employed a scattergun approach to identifying the variables pertinent to the engagement and development of fans of a new team. This was necessary due to the volume of past studies on established fans, and the countless ways they have been segmented. The results both challenge and confirm previous research in this area. The finding

that the initial fans of this new sports team are comprised of five distinct cohorts, each likely to require distinctive marketing tactics is novel. It could be argued, however, that this is unsurprising given that the AFL administrators involved in launching the new team recognised that they could attract different types of fans, and set their objectives accordingly (McDonald & Stavros, 2012). There are three key outcomes from this examination of new fans of a new team, which have direct impact for the theory of fan development and engagement, and which are a relevant contribution to both the GC Suns and the AFL.

First, we have found highly and lowly engaged fans even at this early stage, confirming the work of Bristow and Sebastian (2001), and more recently Alexandris and Tsiotsou (2012). The large number of highly engaged fans at such an early stage of the team's life raises questions of models of 'fan development' where a series of sequential steps must be 'climbed'. Here it seems that some fans have quickly jumped to high levels of engagement.

Second, CSR activities have long been believed to play a role in broadening the fan base of sports teams (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), and here we have seen some of the first empirical evidence of consumers being attracted to a team primarily as a response to this. CSR has not previously been linked directly to the attraction of new customers, but here we see support for the notion that being a strong participant in a local community can be a powerful tool in attracting support for a new brand from customers in that region.

Third, we see that segments suggest that fans that behave alike can be very different attitudinally. Our "Independent Trier" and "Community Focused" segments are good examples of that. This supports theories of multiple points of attachment (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002), and that fans can have very different ways of expressing team connections, as posited by Alexandris and Tsiotsou (2012). Teams cannot afford to be too focused in their

marketing strategies, nor too singular in their appeals to the market, as there are myriad ways people will learn about, and become interested in, a new team.

The main overall conclusion here is that within the group of new fans are several distinct sub-groups, and there is value in recognizing this and marketing the team accordingly. Distinctions highlighted by the profiling variables suggest differing approaches may be successful in encouraging consistent and on-going support, despite the clearly different pathways of initial fandom. However, this study is limited in that it examines only one team in one country. Future work to examine whether these five segments are found in other circumstances would be valuable.

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Table 1. Fan classification studies

Funk and James, 2001	Psychological Continuum Model
Ogles and Masters, 2003	Categorical segmentation based on motivations
Stewart et al., 2003	Numerous alternative approaches found, necessary to 'taxonomise' the taxonomies Approaches: dualistic (i.e. simple binary division, e.g. traditional vs. modern), tiered (i.e. multiple stages of increasing levels of a construct, e.g. involvement) and multidimensional (i.e. more than one construct or variable used to classify fans)
Taks & Scheerder, 2006	Categorical segmentation based on sport participation
Ross, 2007	Categorical segmentation based on brand associations
Dwyer & Drayer, 2010 Dwyer, Shapiro, & Drayer, 2011	Categorical segmentation sport consumption
Casper, 2012	Categorical segmentation based on demographics and skill levels

Table 2. Theoretical foundations

Previous Studies	Variables used in this study
Commitment to community through CSR	
Mohr, Webbs, & Harris, 2001 Babiak & Wolfe, 2006 Breitbarth & Harris, 2008 Bradish & Cronin, 2009 Walker & Kent, 2009 Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010 McDonald & Stavros, 2012	CSR in sport may include various activities such as philanthropy, community involvement, youth educational initiatives and youth health initiatives (Walker & Kent, 2009). The aim of sport CSR is to impact the attitudes and behaviours of consumers around team reputation, patronage intentions and outcomes. As CSR is not a variable that can be directly used to segment consumers, the authors use fan perceptions of a team's CSR efforts, and the relative importance of CSR to a consumer. In its formative stage, GC Suns worked directly with the local community in areas like preventing domestic abuse and childhood obesity, and improving community fitness and sports facilities.
Commitment, loyalty and involvement	
Day, 1969 Crosby & Taylor, 1983 Morgan & Hunt, 1994 Oliver,1999 Pritchard et al. 1999 Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001 Caceres & Paparoidamis, 2005 Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011	Specific to the context of this study, commitment can be captured through RTC, which indicates a stable preference and tendency to resist change; brand loyalty is defined as purchase loyalty, representing an intention to keep supporting and purchasing a brand. As a counterpoint to direct measures that assess commitment and loyalty, the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) framework (Funk & James, 2001) were also included in the data collection. The nine items in this scale measure three distinct constructs: pleasure, centrality and sign (see Table 5). The items allow consumers to be classified into four stages of involvement with sports and events, tat show a logical progression from Awareness to Allegiance. The sport-specific nature of this scale, and its multidimensional nature, makes it preferable

Doyle, Kunkel & Funk, 2013	to other more general measures of consumer involvement.
Organisational identification	
Tajfel, 1982 Mael & Ashforth, 1992 Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999 Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000 Dimmock, Grove, & Eklund, 2005 Heere & James, 2007a Lock et al., 2014	Based on SIT, Heere and James (2007a) developed a measurement scale comprising six dimensions: private evaluation, public evaluation, interconnection of self (affect), interdependence, behavioural involvement, and cognitive awareness. Based on statistical and theoretical considerations, Lock et al. (2014) has since removed interdependence, reducing the scale to five robust dimensions. The Team*ID scale captures the private and public self-esteem consumers derive from membership of a new team's fan base (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), the affective significance of identification and, finally, their ascription to rituals and normative practices (cognitive awareness). Together, these factors provide a robust multidimensional evaluation of consumers' identification with a new sports organization within our segmentation model.
Team brand associations	
Gladden & Funk, 2002 Doyle et al. 2013	Team brand associations represent mental links that exist within a consumer's mind concerning a sport team (Gladden & Funk, 2002). These associations represent images, thoughts or ideas about the team and are positively correlated to game attendance and media behavior (Doyle et al. 2013). Drawing upon this perspective, associations related to attributes (e.g., venue, marque player, logo, head coach) and benefits (socialization, peer group acceptance, excitement of games) of the new sport team would form relatively quickly and would become part of the initial connection to the team.

Table 3. Scales, items and scale reliability for relationship identifier dimensions

Scales and Items	Factor loadings	t-values
Private evaluation (α = 0.89, CN = .90 and AVE = 0.76)		
I feel good about being a XYZ fan	0.87	31.13
I am glad to be a XYZ fan	0.87	29.01
I am proud to think of myself as a fan of XYZ	0.87	34.25
Public evaluation (α = 0.88, CN = .88 and AVE = 0.71)		
Overall, XYZ are viewed positively by others	0.80	37.13
In general, others respect XYZ	0.86	39.35
Overall, people hold a favourable opinion of XYZ	0.87	38.81
Interconnection (α = 0.84, CN = .87 and AVE = 0.69)		
When someone criticises XYZ, it feels like personal insult	0.84	48.98
Being associated with XYZ is an important part of my self-image	0.78	40.84
When someone compliments XYZ, it feels like a personal compliment	0.88	50.72
Behavioural involvement (α = 0.81, CN = .83 and AVE = 0.62)		
I participate in activities supporting the XYZ	0.86	43.47
I am actively involved in activities that relate to XYZ	0.88	51.66
I participate in activities with other fans of XYZ	0.59	25.71
Resistance to change (α = 0.79, CN = .80 and AVE = 0.57)		
My preference for supporting XYZ would not willingly change	0.80	33.89
Even if my close friends recommended following another team, I would not stop following XYZ	0.75	30.77
It would be difficult to change my beliefs about Gold Coast Suns	0.71	28.93
Perceived corporate social responsibility (α = 0.86, CN = .87 and AVE = 0.70)		
XYZ is committed to helping charitable causes in the community	0.89	47.89
XYZ gives back to the local community	0.93	45.86
XYZ is involved in corporate giving	0.68	27.34

Note: All items were measured using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). $\chi 2$ (120) = 545.95; $\rho < 0.00$; CFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.99; NNFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.45

Table 4. Means and standard deviation of relationship identifier by clusters

Segments	n	Private evaluation	Public evaluation	Interconnection	Behavioural involvement	Perceived CSR	Resistance to change
Instant Fanatics	452	6.48^{a}	5.31^{a}	5.07^{a}	5.09^{a}	5.86^{ab}	6.17^{a}
Community Focused	346	5.91^{b}	5.31^{a}	3.00^{c}	3.80^{b}	5.93^{a}	5.21^{c}
Independent Triers	252	5.81^{bc}	3.09^{d}	3.56^{b}	3.76^{bc}	4.89^{c}	5.55^{b}
Social Theatre-goers	479	5.23^{c}	4.67^{b}	2.91^{cd}	3.41^{d}	4.51^{d}	4.50^{d}
Casuals	195	3.08^{d}	3.29^{c}	1.76^{e}	2.12^{e}	4.25^{e}	4.50^{d}
Total sample	1724	5.62	4.59	3.46	3. 83	5.18	5.07

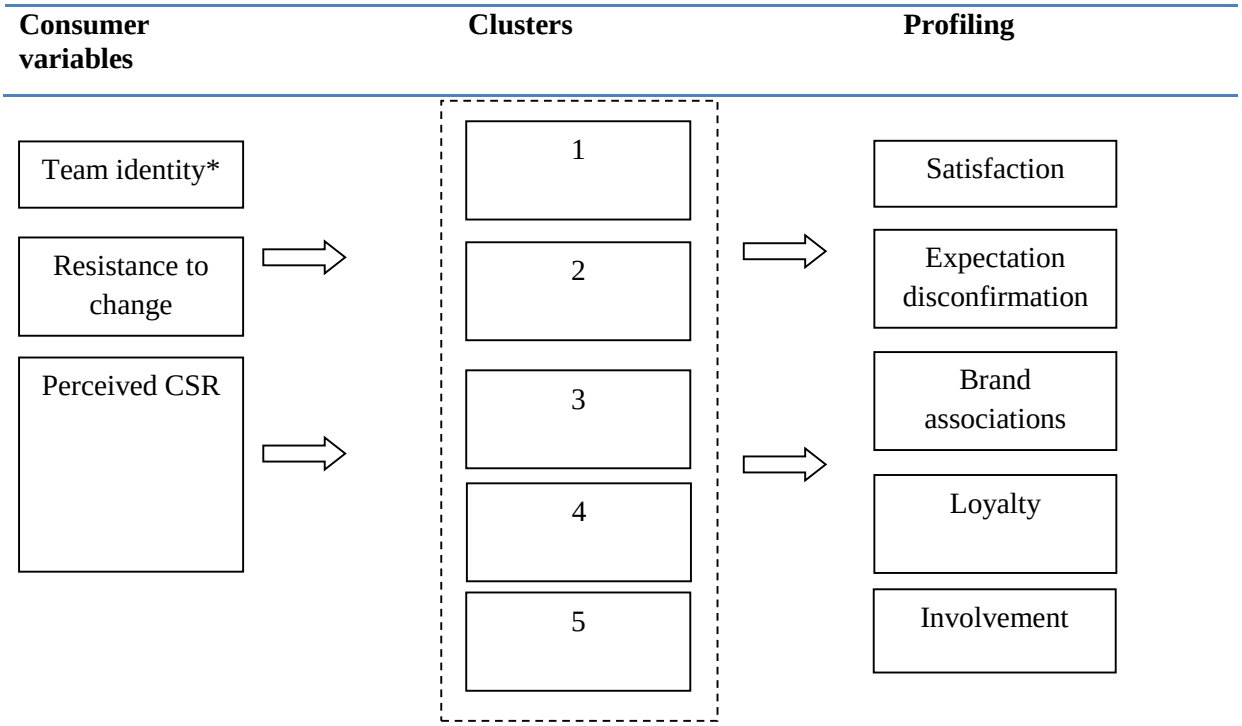
Note: For each variable (column), means for different consumer segments with the same superscript are not significantly different (p > 0.05), based on Scheffe's joint pairwise comparison test. The mean(s) in the highest range are designed with a superscript a, the next highest with b, and so on. Solid-lined boxes represent the consumer type(s) with mean in the highest range; dashed boxes represent the next highest level (though not significantly different from the solid-lined boxes), while circles represent the lowest range.

Table 5. Descriptor variables by type of consumer (cluster)

Descriptor Variables	Significance	Casuals	Social Theatre-goers	Independent Triers	Community Focused	Instant Fanatics	Total
Characteristics of the consumers							
Live games attended in last year (Mean)	*	5.5^{ab}	5.1^{c}	$6.2a^{b}$	5.5^{ab}	6.3^{a}	5.7
TV/internet games watched in last year (Mean)	***	55.7^{cd}	55.9^{c}	68.0^{ab}	69.6^{ab}	76.2^{a}	65.7
Male (%)		75.9	68.5	66.7	65.0	55.8	68.5
Located on the Gold Coast (%)		46.7	65.5	56.0	72.0	65.3	62.8%
Brand association							
I follow XYZ because my friends like the same team	***	1.9^{e}	2.5^{ab}	2.1^{cd}	2.2^{c}	2.6^{a}	2.3
XYZ help elevate the image of local community	***	3.8^{e}	4.7^{d}	4.9^{c}	5.5^{ab}	5.7^{a}	5.0
Following XYZ provides a temporary escape from life's problems	***	2.3^{e}	3.4^{cd}	3.6^{bc}	3.8^{b}	4.6^{a}	3.7
It is important that XYZ genuinely competes for the premiership	***	5.0^{e}	5.3^{cd}	5.4^{bc}	5.6^{b}	5.9^{a}	5.5
XYZ have star players that I like to watch	***	4.8^{e}	5.3^{d}	5.6^{c}	5.8^{b}	6.2^{a}	5.6
The head coach of XYZ does a good job	***	4.5^{e}	5.3^{d}	5.5^{c}	5.9^{b}	6.1^{a}	5.6
XYZ's management makes wise player personnel decisions	***	3.7^{e}	4.6^{cd}	4.7^{c}	5.5^{ab}	5.7^{a}	5.0
I like the XYZ logo	***	3.8^{e}	4.9^{cd}	5.1^{c}	5.6^{ab}	5.9^{a}	5.2
XYZ's stadium has character	***	4.3^{e}	4.7^{cd}	4.9^{c}	5.4^{b}	5.8^{a}	5.1
XYZ's games are exciting	***	2.9^{e}	4.3^{cd}	4.4^{c}	5.1^{b}	5.6^{a}	4.7
XYZ has a rich history	***	2.0^{d}	3.0^{c}	3.0^{c}	3.4^{b}	4.3^{a}	3.3
When I talk about XYZ, I usually say "We" rather than "They"	***	2.3^{e}	3.7^{d}	4.5^{b}	4.2^{c}	5.5^{a}	4.2
Thinking of XYZ brings back good memories	***	2.1^{e}	3.4^{d}	3.7^{bc}	3.9^{b}	5.0^{a}	3.8
Psychological Continuum Model							
Pleasure	***	10.3^{e}	13.9^{d}	15.2^{c}	15.9^{b}	18.1^{a}	15.17
Centrality	***	5.39^{e}	8.70^{d}	10.3^{b}	10.0^{bc}	14.6^{a}	10.37
Sign	***	6.5^{e}	9.8^{d}	11.5^{b}	11.0^{bc}	14.8^{a}	11.23
PCM stage							
Awareness		84%	39%	16%	13%	1%	26%
Attraction		15%	50%	52%	61%	16%	39%
Attachment		1%	12%	28%	24%	54%	26%
Allegiance		0%	0%	4%	2%	29%	9%
Outcomes							
Overall, I am satisfied with XYZ	***	4.4^{e}	5.6^{d}	6.1^{c}	6.2^{ab}	6.6^{a}	5.9
So far my experience of being a XYZ fan has been: 1 = much worse to 7 = much better than I expected	***	3.6^{e}	4.2^{cd}	4.4^{c}	4.9^{b}	5.5^{a}	4.7
Overall, I am loyal to XYZ	***	3.0^{e}	4.1^{d}	5.6^{b}	5.3^{c}	6.2^{a}	5.2
Thinking of XYZ, I considered myself a: 1 = casual observer to 7 = hard core fanatic	***	3.0^{e}	4.1^{d}	4.9^{b}	4.7^{bc}	5.6^{a}	4.6

*Note: Items otherwise stated were measured using a 7-point scale (1= strongly disagree, to 7 = strongly agree). In each row, means with the same superscripts are not significantly different (p >0.05), based on Scheffe's joint pairwise comparison test. Mean(s) in the highest range have superscript a, next highest b, and so on. For pleasure, centrality and sign, the scores are summations of relevant PCM items. *p<0.05, ** p<0.01 and ***p<0.001.*

Figure 1. Overview of key constructs relevant to segmenting consumers in a sport context



**Team ID includes private evaluation, public evaluation, interconnection, and behavioural involvement.*

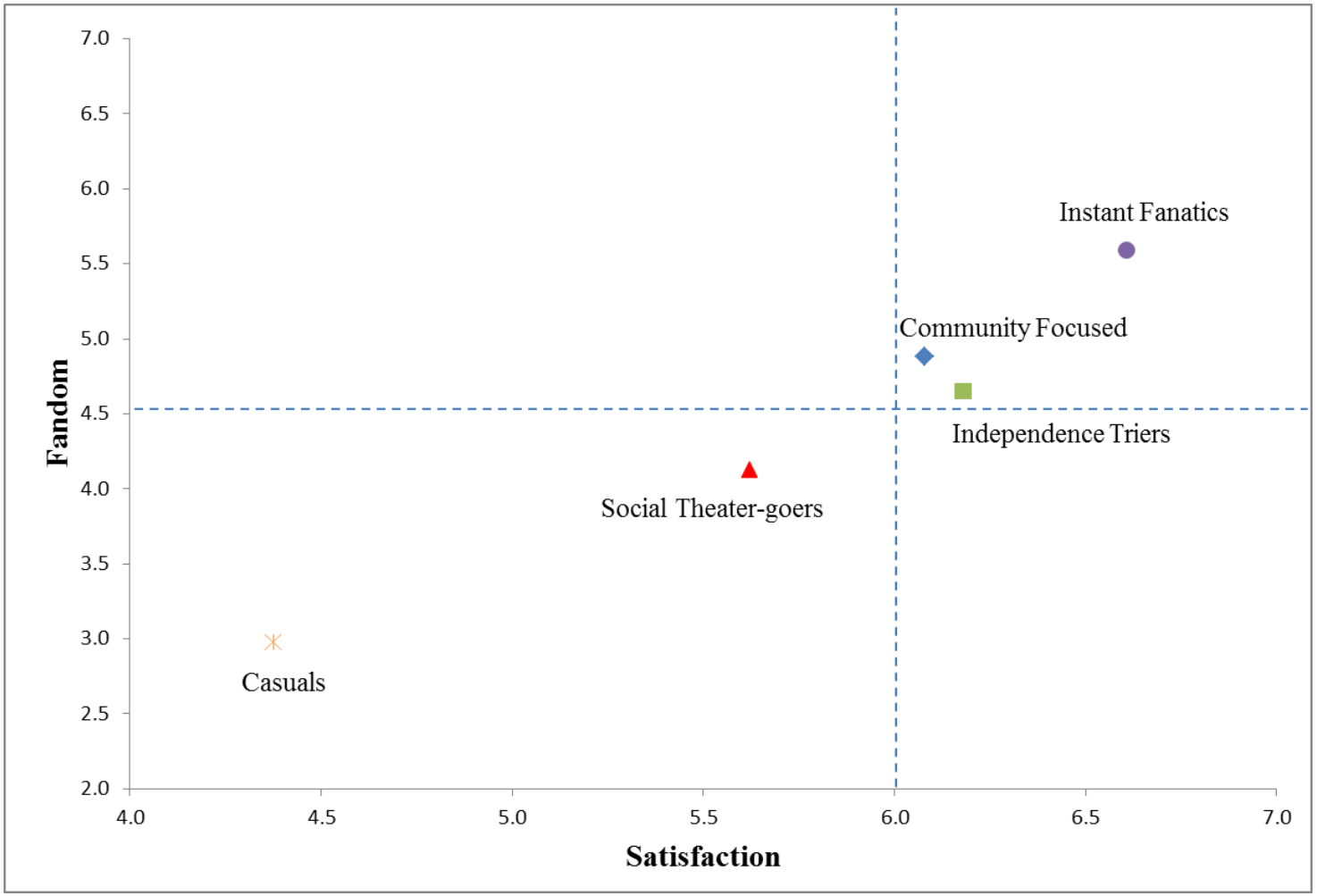



Figure 2. Positioning of consumer segments