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Examining the Antecedents and Consequences of Ritualized Fan Behavior.

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Abstract

One of the features of the sporting industry is the ritualized way in which it is consumed across the world. Fans of every sport have rituals and superstitions to help them enjoy the spectacle, socialize with other like-minded fans, and reduce some of the anxiety of watching their team play. These rituals include dress, barracking styles and pre and post match behaviors. What is not known are the factors that lead fans to engage in ritual behaviors and what relationship rituals have with desirable outcomes such as increased attendance, attitudinal loyalty or satisfaction. Given that some ritual behaviors are clearly undesirable, (e.g., hooliganism), understanding these relationships is important to managers who may be questioning whether rituals should be encouraged.

Although ritualized behavior amongst fans is clearly visible, the symbolic and emotional nature of ritual poses challenges to researchers. Most previous ritual research is exploratory and qualitative in nature. This study, however, uses a behavior-based scale to measure fan ritual and relates it to desirable outcomes such as commitment and attendance.

Over 2,000 season ticket holders of a football (soccer) team in Australia’s professional A-League competition were surveyed to investigate the antecedents and consequences of fan ritual behavior. Cluster analysis was used to explore the characteristics of respondents, and it revealed that those fans that engage in ritual behavior also differed on many other demographic and attitudinal dimensions. The associations between ritual and psychological commitment, and ritual and attendance are positive and significant. When used in conjunction with other constructs, fan ritual also improves the explanation of attendance behavior.

The findings support previous research that found a significant and positive relationship between team identification, involvement and attendance, and extend previous research by finding a significant and positive relationship between rituals and attendance. For sports marketing practitioners, the results indicate the importance of developing and managing consumption rituals tied to game day attendance, with a view to generating uncommon loyalty.