

A RELATIONSHIP MARKETING APPROACH TO SPECTATORS AS CONSUMERS

Seán de Búrca, Teresa Brannick and Tony Meenaghan*

Introduction

The reigning paradigm that dominates the traditional marketing approach has been criticised for being incomplete and manipulative and for not taking into account the interaction and relationship aspect of marketing. Interactions and relationships have not been well explained and have played a limited role in the traditional marketing mix. Accordingly, a new approach has been called for. The old marketing concept is passé and needs to be overhauled and replaced by a new concept capable of capturing the dynamics of the interactions in customer relationships. Relationship marketing has been proffered as the new paradigm of marketing that provides an alternative to the traditional marketing mix theory. However, when the empirical research in this paper was first reported the concept of relationship marketing had not been sufficiently developed in the marketing literature. Instead, the product involvement literature provided the contextual basis in considering spectators as consumers. Accordingly, it is now possible to revisit and reconsider the phenomenon of spectators as consumers in light of the conceptual developments that have taken place in the relationship marketing literature.

The first section of this paper traces the evolution in thinking from the traditional marketing mix concept to the new relationship marketing concept. It highlights the criticisms levied at the traditional marketing mix concept for being incomplete and manipulative. The next section describes the relationship marketing concept. The nature of the concept is defined and its characteristics are explicated. The third section focuses its attention on the phenomenon of spectators as consumers. Various insights to spectators as consumers are provided by both sociology and psychology disciplines.

The findings of a research study, based on a survey of 493 spectators which attempted to identify the motives for attendance at the All-Ireland semi-finals games in Gaelic Football and Hurling is presented. Conclusions are drawn from these findings particularly with respect to the loyalty of spectators.

Finally, given the nature of the consumption process and the complex interplay of motives responsible for actual behaviour of spectators as consumers, the concept of

*Department of Marketing, Graduate School of Business, UCD, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

relationship marketing is proposed as a more applicable approach capable of capturing the dynamics of the interaction processes and the subsequent relationships that develop when considering spectators as consumers.

From the 4Ps to Relationship Marketing

The new marketing concept of “relationship marketing has emerged as a result of deep dissatisfaction with the traditional ‘marketing concept’ for its inability to absorb new developments in marketing, especially in the services and business to business marketing area. The traditional “marketing concept” developed in a consumer goods context and transferred directly to all aspects of marketing thinking has damaged marketing in the sense that it fails to capture the interaction and relationship aspects of the marketing process. This traditional view of marketing favours an approach which subscribes to the notion of a marketer assembling a mix of variables the 4Ps (Product, Price, Promotion and Place) which are then launched towards a relatively homogeneous group of many potential consumers, who may or may not respond to the offering. Such a view of an active marketer, passive consumers and an atomistic market has restricted understanding of the reality of much of what occurs in markets (Ford, 1990).

Attempts have been made to overcome the deficiencies of the 4P’s approach by extending the number of Ps. In the service marketing literature, Booms and Bitner (1982) have added three additional Ps people, physical evidence and process. Kotler (1986) has extended the mix to include public relations and politics. Judd (1987) suggests that the addition of one new P, people, is sufficient to capture the dynamics of services marketing. Regardless of these attempts, the traditional marketing mix concept is still promoted as a general theory of marketing.

However, a number of researchers in service marketing reject the prevailing view of services in the literature (Gummesson, 1987, 1993, 1994; Berry, 1983; Grönroos 1990, 1994). In particular, Gummesson (1987) suggests:

... that the theories and models that constitute the present marketing concept are too limited in scope, exaggerate some aspects of marketing and suppress others. The old marketing concept needs to be replaced.

Indeed, Gummesson (1994) has argued that the debate within the services literature has concentrated too much energy on the goods - services division. Customers do not buy goods or services in the traditional sense, they buy an offering which renders services, which create value for the customer. Therefore, the traditional division between goods and services is outdated. It is a matter of redefining services and seeing them from a customer’s perspective. Hence, this author suggests that services management is suffering from “services marketing myopia” and describes the phenomenon as watching the customer’s navel without reflection. He describes how managers passively rely on what the customer says they want. However, he suggests that by giving the

customers what they say they want brings no real closeness to the customer. Rather it manipulates the customers into an external state of ignorance and concludes that myopia has thus moved from one extreme to the other, from the inside to the outside.

In addition, Grönroos (1990, p.4) argues that:

...the notion of the marketer as a mixer of ingredients, in spite of its pedagogical virtues, is far too simplistic and may easily misguide both academics and practitioners.

He contends that the marketing mix approach frequently does not cover all resources and activities, especially during the consumption process, where there are a range of contacts between the service firm and its customer, which are outside the traditional marketing function as defined by the 4 P's of the marketing mix.

Grönroos (1994) further extends the argument that the marketing mix concept as a universal truth has damaged marketing in the sense that marketers and sales-people have become isolated in their organisation. The marketing function is viewed as an intermediate function, where the specialists of the marketing department are the only persons who have an impact on the customer's view of the firm and on their buying behaviour. Hence, the marketing department concept is obsolete because it prevents the spreading of a market orientation and an interest in the customer throughout the organisation.

Indeed, a similar argument can be made in the industrial marketing literature where little if any attention was given to the continuity and complexity of interactions between business organisations. However, the situation has changed radically during the last twenty years. The existence and role of relationships between companies have received growing attention. Business relationships have been the object of a number of studies (Hakansson, 1982; Turnbull and Valla, 1986; Gadde and Mattsson, 1987; Hallen and Johanson, 1989; Ford 1990; Frazier, Spekman and O'Neil, 1988; and Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987).

In summary, the reigning paradigm that dominates the traditional marketing approach has been criticised for being incomplete and manipulative and for not taking into account the interaction and relationship aspect of marketing. Interactions and relationships have not been well explained and have played a limited role in the traditional marketing mix. Accordingly, a new approach has been called for. The old marketing concept is passé and needs to be overhauled and replaced by a new concept capable of capturing the dynamics of the interactions in customer relationships. Relationship marketing has been proffered as the new paradigm of marketing that provides an alternative to the traditional marketing mix theory. However, it is important to emphasise at this point that the relationship marketing concept does not suggest that the traditional elements of the marketing mix, such as the various promotion techniques, pricing and the conceptualising of the product are not important. They are still important

decisions facing marketing managers but they have to be taken in the context of the management of customer relationships.

Relationship Marketing

Although no single definition of relationship marketing is universally accepted, there is a high degree of commonality between them. Berry (1983) describes relationship marketing as attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships. He introduced the concept of relationship marketing, as opposed to transaction marketing, to describe such a long-term approach to marketing strategy. He contends that attracting customers is merely the first step in the marketing process. Cementing the relationship, transforming indifferent customers into loyal users, and serving customers as clients are intrinsically important, but often neglected aspects of the marketing process. Accordingly, the long term nature of this approach is an important aspect to be considered.

Grönroos (1990) extends Berry's description, stating that, taking such a relationship approach to marketing transforms the process of marketing to establishing, maintaining, enhancing and commercialising customer relationships, by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises. This notion of promise has been stressed by Calonijs (1988) as an integral part in establishing, developing and maintaining customer relationships. In essence, the seller gives a set of promises concerning, eg. goods, services, transfer of information, social contracts, and a range of future commitments. On the other hand, the buyer gives another set of promises concerning his commitment in the relationship. These promises have to be kept on both sides, if the relationship is expected to be maintained and enhanced for the mutual benefits of the parties involved.

Finally, Gummesson (1994, p.3) defines relationship marketing as "marketing seen as relationships, networks, and interaction". He contends that relationships require at least two parties who are in contact with each other. Networks emerge when the relationships become many, complex and difficult to oversee. In these relationships, the parties enter into interaction with each other, where the core interaction consists of an exchange of values and supporting joint activities.

The relationship marketing concept has a number of progenitors. In particular, the concept has been inspired by new thinking in the services marketing literature, the network perspective to business to business marketing and the total quality management literature. However, Grönroos (1990) contends that the practice of relationship marketing is most applicable to a service firm when each of the following conditions apply:

- There is an ongoing desire for service on the part of the customer
- The service customer controls selection of the service supplier
- There are alternative service suppliers

These conditions allow the opportunity to not just attract customers but to build relationships with them. As a result, Grönroos (1990) highlights a number of relationship marketing strategies that can be considered in the development of customer relationship. Firstly, a key strategy in relationship marketing is the design of a 'core service' around which a customer relationship can be established. Besides its ability to attract new customers the 'core service' should be long term in nature, and have multiple parts that provide a basis for selling additional services over time. Secondly, a strategy of customisation should be possible. Thirdly, a strategy of service augmentation which involves building 'extras' into the service to differentiate it from competitive offerings should be possible. Finally, a strategy of relationship pricing, where a better price for better customers operates as a means of pursuing customer loyalty.

A Relationship Marketing Approach to Spectators as Consumers

The development of marketing thought has been marked by an expanding domain within which the application of marketing principles is deemed appropriate. This broadening scope for marketing, which generated considerable contentious debate (Luck, 1969), moved from a very narrow view, which regarded marketing as properly applicable only to goods (Nystrom, 1954), to the "goods and services" view which existed until the meta-marketing schism heralded by Kotler and Levy (1969). The eventual acceptance of this position officially sanctioned the diffusion of marketing technology to exchange situations previously ignored by theoreticians. This paper which examines the phenomenon of spectators as consumers builds on the notion of meta-marketing and draws its theoretical sustenance from relationship marketing rather than the traditional marketing mix theory, as a richer source of ideas to capture the dynamics of the interactions and relationships of spectators as consumers.

The Sports Market

While the origins of the sports product are probably lost in time, it is evident that the consumption of this product has long generated a mass consuming public. Greek civilisation, regarded as "the cradle of enlightened sports spectatorship" (Zillman and Paulus, 1993) gave us the oldest and most venerable sports/spectator institution, the Olympic Games, which continued from 776 BC to 393 AD. Greek reverence for artistic grace and participation were replaced by the Roman desire for "blood sports" and a "must win" orientation. The Coliseum, the centre piece of Roman sports spectatorship, accommodated more than 40,000 sports spectators while Rome's largest racetrack drew crowds to chariot races of approximately 250,000 sports consumers (Harris, 1972).

In more recent times large numbers of sports spectators were to be observed at soccer matches in the industrialised nations of Europe. In 1901 some 110,000 soccer fans attended the Cup Final between Tottenham Hotspur and Sheffield United (Midwinter, 1986). More recently the communications/transportation revolution has elevated the

sports product to a global level, with the result that the sports product is more likely to be delivered to the consuming public via broadcasting developments. For example the 1986 World Cup in soccer was seen in 166 different countries with a gross cumulative audience of 13 billion consumers while the 1992 Barcelona Olympics was seen by a cumulative audience of 1.26 billion viewers in Japan alone (Sports Marketing Surveys, 1992). Worldwide the appeal of sports as a product is evidenced by the ever increasing percentage of total broadcast hours dedicated to sports programming.

Spectators As Consumers

While the marketing discipline recognises the concept of product in both functional and symbolic attributes, the sports product in terms of what it is that the sports consumers buys, is largely concerned with the symbolic aspects of purchase. However, relationship marketing provides an alternative source of ideas that captures the interactions and relationships that spectators have as consumers. To date research in the marketing tradition has paid scant attention to spectators as consumers and it is therefore necessary to go outside this tradition to provide the necessary contextual backdrop to this paper.

Concepts developed in other disciplines, especially psychology and sociology are particularly useful in attempting to understand spectators as consumers. These traditions have written about the symbolic aspects of sports and about the various emotional and social functions it serves in modern society (Dunning, 1973; Elias, 1971; Guttman, 1978; Sloan, 1979).

The existing empirical research on spectators (sports fans) focuses on both emotional reactions and cognitive distortions. Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) studied the phenomenon of "basking in reflected glory", showing the differential use of "we" and "they" among fans. Sloan (1979) showed the effects of winning and losing on fans' moods and emotional reactions. Goldstein and Arms (1971) examined the effects of winning and losing on fans' hostility. Zillman, Bryant and Sapolsky (1979) analysed fans' satisfaction and disappointment in reaction to specific plays in a game. Mann (1974) wrote "on being a sore loser" - how fans react to their team's failure by distorted judgements which serve to rationalise and reduce the bitterness of defeat. With the exception of the above studies, relatively little other research focuses directly on spectators (sports fans) and that which does concentrates on manifestations of violence.

Various insights are provided by both the sociology and psychology disciplines into spectators as consumers. Inevitably in such a complex area of buyer behaviour a variety of overlapping views of what it is the sports consumer buys are debated. However, these disciplines highlight a number of ways in which spectators interact and form relationships with sport along a continuum which views sport as a physical product and, in addition, a service which makes available a product. Indeed, spectator sports are considered a form of vicarious combat. However, although the contest is so vicarious, removed and peripheral, the spectator is personally involved and interacts in many other

ways. He participates through his identification with specific heroes and particular teams, his assumption of expertise in folklore and a multiplicity of statistics, his experiences in mock rational arguments and his efforts at mock administration (Spinrad, 1981).

Vicarious Combat

Spectator sports represent a particular kind of “playful” experience, vicarious combat, which can satisfy the needs of the spectators (Spinrad, 1981). The most obvious is that spectator sports allow an immersion in vigorous physical contest in which one is never personally hurt. The delight in physical destruction may be a dominant part of the appeal, as in automobile “demolition derby’s”, and personal annihilation may be an ever present danger, as in the case of auto racing. However, the spectators at most sports possess neither the desire for bloodletting of the gladiatorial enthusiast nor the fascination with death of the bull fighting audience. They want to see the opponent bested. This may involve some physical violence, but maiming for its own sake is not the typical objective. Home team fans will applaud when an injury to an opposing player turns out to be minor.

These comments capture the uniqueness of spectating. Unlike what is typical of many other rivalries, one wants the opponent to be as capable as possible in order for victory to be meaningful. The spectator is indeed vicariously involved in a public drama, but one without a precise script, and thus, one with an element of genuine suspense. It is in this sense, more akin to the real world than any prewritten drama.

Hero Identification

Much of the popularity of spectator sports is obviously based on psychological gratification derived from identifying with sports heroes as well as with particular teams. One widespread interpretation emphasises the common objects of identification for many - the “super star” who is a folk hero, frequently extolling the person from a humble background who achieves widespread fame (Andreano, 1965). This does not explain the heroes of the genuine “fan”, whose personal heroes may not even be celebrities under any definition. The fan’s choice of heroes is actually quite personal, even idiosyncratic. The supposed basis is achievement, which, as a presumed expert the fan is supposed to know something about. Hero identification is specific rather than diffuse. It is, in most instances, completely situational. The hero is not a model for anything apart from the contest itself, and the vicarious empathy is usually limited to his supposed achievements. However, one generic basis of personal hero identification does exist; the ethnic factor. It can perhaps be considered a special manifestation of the humble background theme. The psychic gratification that comes from having a similar background to the great performer is very widespread. That professional athletics often offer one of the most available methods of upward social mobility for a relatively

deprived group has been sufficiently noted. Boxing champion Joe Louis was probably the most important symbol for many young American Blacks in his day.

A variation on the hero identification theme is that of "basking in the reflected glory" which proposes that spectators/fans affiliate themselves with particular performers/teams to satisfy motives of self-presentation and image management. More specifically it is argued that persons in need of enhancing their public image may accomplish their goal by associating themselves with other successful persons, in this case, sports performers and teams (Cialdini et al 1976).

Participation in Folklore

The fan participates in a special sub-cultural folklore, which is media induced and reinforced by personal conversations. This includes an acute awareness of particular contests, particular players and teams, the organisation of the sports themselves throughout their histories and vast numbers of statistical details. A serious mistake about time factors is a mark of incompetence in fandom. An important feature of history is the list of legends, about a season, a game, a series of game or a particular moment. The contest itself contains its intrinsic lore - the rules, the rituals and the inside details. The fan participates, or feels he participates, in all of this.

The Comprehensive Lore of Statistics

Without the complex and varied set of statistics, a sport does not possess a sufficient hold for genuine fandom. The rest of the folklore is insufficient. The basis for conversation and argument is reduced. Media discussion is limited. Efforts at mock rational appraisals become more difficult.

Statistics describe the individual game, the player, the team, the season and the long range trend. Furthermore, each statistic is more than an entity unto itself. It becomes part of the historical lore of players and teams and provides the legitimation of mock rational arguments. Some statistics however, assume a transcendental aura because they become a "record", i.e. a mathematical expression for some all-time achievement.

Mock Rational Argumentation

Statistics provide the life blood for engaging in mock rational argument. Indeed, they supply the objective rational justifications for sentimental choices of players and teams. No matter who your favourite is you can find the appropriate statistics. Arguments include more than mere affirmations of faith or personal idiosyncrasy. They assume the character of rational dialogues, conducted with playful fervour but typically without any sense of genuine ego involvement in the outcome. Some rational justification is always available. If the statistics seem to bolster the other side's position one can always find some less measurable but seemingly rational argument.

Playing at Mock Administration

The fan participates in one other mock experience. He plays at being an administrator. He simulates running the team, tries to design the appropriate strategy of the game or moment, decides which players should be playing, who should be dropped or transferred for whom. A more elaborate form of mock administration is the selection of “all star” teams, permitting the realisation of the functions of both mock administration and mock rational argumentation.

The Research Study

This research study was concerned with identifying the motives for attendance at the All-Ireland semi-finals games in Gaelic Football and Hurling in Ireland. The attendance at particular sports events represents a key element in the on-going sports spectator's relationship with the product. At the level of the sports code Gaelic Games represent the dominant sport product in Ireland. These Games pervade all corners of the island of Ireland with 32 county teams involved in a Championship in both Hurling and Gaelic Football. Winning teams from each of four provinces meet in an All-Ireland semi-final to decide eventual finalists. In order to examine the motives for attendance at the semi-stage games a prepared questionnaire based on issues generated in informal research, was administered at each provincial final. A total of 1800 questionnaires were administered to attendees at the four Provincial venues. The total number of returned questionnaires was 493, giving a response rate of 27%.

Findings

Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents were male, married and aged between 35-50. Membership of the GAA was high and a large number of respondents were past or present players of GAA games.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
<i>Sex</i>	86%		13%	
<i>Age</i>	U21	21-35	36-50	51+
	8%	31%	41%	17%
<i>Marital Status</i>	Single		Married	
	32%		66%	
<i>Membership of GAA</i>	Yes		No	
	70%		28%	
<i>Past/Present Player</i>	Yes		No	
	86%		13%	

The overall high level of attendance is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of Attendance

At Croke Park (National Stadium)		98%
At Semi-final in last 5 years		95%
With whom most often attended	<i>Family</i>	49%
	<i>Friends</i>	43%
Accompanied by children in last 5 years		50%
Average number of Semi-finals in last 5 years	<i>Football</i>	3.2
	<i>Hurling</i>	1.7

Spectators as Consumer Groups

While it is possible to examine the motivating structure of the individual spectator, it was decided instead to examine the motivating forces based on their commitment to a number of loyalty factors. Three groups were created by clustering a number of loyalty variables together and then categorising the spectators into groups based on their responses to these loyalty variables. The loyalty variables are shown in Table 3. Low loyalty was categorised as fulfilling commitments 1 and 2 only. Medium loyalty was categorised as those fulfilling commitments 1, 2 and 3. High loyalty was categorised as those fulfilling commitments 1 to 6.

Table 3: Spectator Groups

Loyalty Variables

1.	Membership of GAA Club
2.	Past/Present Player
3.	Ever attended Croke Park
4.	Ever attended Semi-final
5/6.	Number of inter-county games attended in football and hurling

A profile of the spectator groups is shown in Table 4

Table 4: Spectator Groups Degree of Loyalty by Gender

<i>Consumer Loyalty</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Gender</i>	
		<i>M%</i>	<i>F%</i>
<i>Low</i>	12.1	70	30
<i>Medium</i>	22.3	73	27
<i>High</i>	65.6	95	5

The majority of spectators (65.4%) indicated high product loyalty and this was predominately a male characteristic. Spectators' age was not related to their degree of loyalty.

Motivating factors for Attendance and Non Attendance

The main findings were as follows. The "*Game itself*" and "*County Team Support*" were the prime motivating factors for attendance and the "*County team not playing*" was the major motivating force for non attendance.

Table 5: Reasons for Attendance by Consumer Loyalty

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Game itself</i>	89.0	82.6	89.8	91.7**
<i>County team support</i>	79.4	82.1	78.2	78.6
<i>Entertainment</i>	31.1	28.4	35.2	30.1
<i>A day out</i>	13.7	20.5	11.5	10.8

* Percentage of respondents who ranked item 1st or 2nd

** Significant at the 10% level

The relative importance of the various reasons for attendance at games was similar for both the medium and high loyalty groups, with the "*Game itself*" being, by far, the most important motivating force. Despite the evident similarities across the three groups, respondents in the low loyalty group were twice as likely to consider "*A day out*" as an important reason for attendance.

Table 6: Reasons for Non Attendance by Consumer Loyalty

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Percentage*</i>			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>County team not playing</i>	48.6	62.3	51.4	33.9**
<i>Holidays coincidence</i>	34.5	34.0	43.2	29.3
<i>Working</i>	31.2	21.6	21.6	47.2**
<i>Too costly</i>	28.9	29.4	29.7	27.8
<i>Live TV coverage</i>	28.4	26.0	32.4	27.8
<i>Predictability of result</i>	16.3	10.0	10.8	25.9**
<i>Lack of interest</i>	12.5	19.6	8.1	8.9
<i>Poor facilities</i>	5.8	4.0	8.1	5.8

* Percentage of respondents who ranked item 1st or 2nd

** Significant at the 5% level (chi square statistic)

The most important reason for non attendance at games was "*County team not playing*" and the least significant reason was "*Poor facilities*". The analysis of reasons for non attendance by degree of product loyalty showed both great similarity and some diversity. Spectators with low and medium degrees of loyalty were more likely not to attend because "*their team was not playing*" and "*Holiday coincidence*". Consumers exhibiting high levels of loyalty were more likely not to attend a semi-final game because they were "*Working*" and the "*Predictability of result*".

The spectator groups with different degrees of loyalty were significantly different in their attendance at other sports codes such as soccer and rugby internationals.

Table 7: Attendance at Soccer and Rugby Internationals by Consumer Loyalty

<i>Games</i>	<i>Percentage Yes</i>			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Soccer</i>	44.0	9.5	23.2	67.4
<i>Rugby</i>	44.7	9.3	22.2	68.5

Spectators with high product loyalty to the GAA were more likely to attend soccer and rugby internationals.

Table 8: Respondents' Company when attending Games by Degree of Loyalty

<i>Companions</i>	<i>Percentage Yes</i>			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Family</i>	49.0	53.3	53.6	43.5
<i>Friends</i>	43.2	39.0	36.8	50.0
<i>Alone</i>	7.7	7.7	9.6	6.5

Spectators with high levels of product loyalty were more likely to attend games with their friends whereas consumers with low and medium levels of loyalty were more likely to attend games with their family.

Conclusions

While the development of marketing thought has been marked by an expanding domain within which the application of marketing principles is deemed appropriate, there has been scant attention given to the phenomenon of spectators as consumers. This neglected area of marketing inquiry is somewhat compensated for in other disciplines. Various insights into spectators as consumers are provided by both sociology and

psychology disciplines. Studies from these disciplines indicate a number of ways in which spectators interact and form relationships with sport. Indeed, spectator sports are considered on one extreme as a form of vicarious combat. However, even though the contest is so vicarious, removed and peripheral, the spectator is personally involved and interacts in many other ways. In particular, he participates through his identification with specific heroes and particular teams, his assumption of expertise in folklore and a multiplicity of statistics, his experiences in mock rational arguments and his efforts at mock administration (Spinrad, 1981).

These forms of interactions reject the notion of a passive consumer and subscribes to the view postulated by Gummesson (1994) that customers do not buy goods or services in the traditional sense, they buy an offering which renders services, which create value for the consumer.

In addition, Grönroos (1990) highlighted how the marketing mix approach frequently does not cover all the resources and activities, especially during the consumption process. Spectators consume and interact with the product in ways identified both during the game or event and long after the game is over. The nature of the product allows them to continue to consume and provides the opportunity for a long term relationship to emerge. While the behaviour of the spectator is driven by a complex interplay of socio-psychological factor, the fact of attendance at particular games, often weekly, represents an opportunity to provide a tangible and public manifestation of loyalty. Afterwards the identification with specific heroes and particular teams, his use of statistics in arguments and efforts at mock administration provides an opportunity to demonstrate his expertise and express his loyalty. In addition, the media plays an important role in maintaining the life of the product. These forms of interactions provide the means by which spectators establish, develop and maintain relationships as consumers of sports.

The concept of relationship marketing enables these dynamics to be captured. The long term nature of the approach captures the on going nature of the consumption process. In addition, the nature of sport itself captures the notion of promises which has been identified by Caloniou (1988) as an integral part in establishing, developing and maintaining customer relationships. Teams and games are always full of promises in as much as team managers are. Spectators fulfil their side of the bargain by attending and supporting, and finding the right statistics to rationalise the team's behaviour in the event of broken promises.

Finally, the relationship marketing approach to spectators as consumers satisfies the conditions identified by Grönroos (1990) and which are applicable to spectators as consumers, namely that, spectators have an ongoing desire for service, they can control the selection process and there are alternatives from which to choose.

The attendance at particular sports events represents a key element in the on-going sports spectator's relationship with the product. Attendance at particular games represents an opportunity to provide a tangible and public manifestation of spectator

loyalty. The findings from this research shows that spectators are a diverse group of consumers in relation to their level of loyalty to the GAA product. Overall the evidence shows that depending on their level of loyalty the motivating forces differed, in relation to their reasons for attendance and non-attendance, their choice of company at games and involvement in sport spectatorship in general.

The overall conclusion of this paper is that given the nature of the consumption process and the complex interplay of motives responsible for actual behaviour of spectators as consumers the relationship marketing concept is better equipped to capture the dynamics of the interaction processes and the subsequent relationships that develop.

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