

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEASON TICKET HOLDER SATISFACTION, SPONSOR RECALL AND SPONSOR-RELATED BEHAVIOURS

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## Context

Determining the value and impact of sponsorship has proved a complicated task, and the factors that lead to a good return on sponsorship investment are not well understood at present (Walliser, 2003). In a sporting context, it has been acknowledged that fan attention and responses to sponsorship will be affected by several variables including length of sponsorship and fan commitment. Sponsorship is a widely used and expensive tool, though, and managers are increasingly seeking to identify what impact sponsorship has, so as to judge its value (Farrelly and Quester, 2003). The satisfaction of customers has consistently been linked to a range of attitudinal and behavioural outcomes including retention, loyalty and advocacy (word-of-mouth) (Oliver, 1997). The relationship between fan satisfaction with a sporting team and attitudes towards its sponsors, however, has not been studied previously. It seems reasonable to assume that satisfied season ticket holders will pay more attention and be more positive in their responses to sponsors than unsatisfied ones. This paper therefore combines the two research streams to investigate whether the satisfaction level of season-ticket holders is related to their recall of sponsors, and their intended responses to them.

## Method

This study looks at season ticket holders of a professional Australian Rules Football (hereafter AFL) Club. AFL is the largest sporting code in Australia, with attendances of over 6.3 million a year and over 460,000 paid club members (around one in every 40 Australians). These clubs rely on sponsorship and season ticket sales as major sources of revenue, and the clubs have negotiated increasingly significant sponsorship deals with multi-nationals including Toyota, HSBC, and Emirates Airlines. For this study, one AFL club with over 40,000 season-ticket holders (called 'members' in the AFL) was selected. The club has five major sponsors, who are promoted as such in club communications (newsletters, website, stationary etc.). As 'members', AFL season ticket holders receive a range of goods and services from the club including magazines, entry to games, social functions, voting rights for board elections and free merchandise. In-depth interviewing was conducted to identify relevant components of the membership offering and to develop a questionnaire to test satisfaction and sponsor attitudes. Undertaking a mail census of the full membership lists was not feasible; instead, all members on the email list (9,600 in 2004) were invited to complete an embedded email questionnaire, sent directly to each member once permission was received. Submission of the questionnaire was secure, with members needing to enter their membership numbers and surnames.. The email list was compared to the overall population of members on key demographics and found to be a good representation. The survey ran for three weeks and 3,179 completed questionnaires were received by the due date, a response of just over 33%. The returned sample was checked for non-response bias using two different methods (first and last comparison and comparison to overall population details) and no evidence was found. Incidence of missing data was low, and Little's test results suggested that gaps were completely random.

## Results

For this study, the 'semi-global' measures of satisfaction with the seven key components of the membership offering were regressed against the overall measure of satisfaction, which in turn was regressed against the measure of sponsorship recall. Sponsorship recall was unprompted, asking "can you name the major sponsors of the Football Club". Responses were checked for accuracy and scored (0-5 scale). All satisfaction questions were measured on a 0 –10 scale, with 10 as "extremely satisfied". The results of the regression are shown in Table 1, with breakdown of mean satisfaction levels related to the number of sponsors recalled shown in Table 2. Similarly, Table 3 shows the responses to a question asking about the members' behaviours in regards to major sponsors, and the mean overall satisfaction.

**Table 1: Relationship between Satisfaction with components and the overall offering**

	Mean	Beta
Overall, how satisfied are you with the TICKETING?	7.33	0.30
Overall, how satisfied are you with the SERVICE?	7.78	0.20
Overall, how satisfied are you with the COMMUNICATIONS?	8.25	0.09
Overall, how satisfied are you with the ON-FIELD PERFORMANCE?	5.18	0.04
Overall, how satisfied are you with the level of PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT?	6.72	0.24
Overall, how satisfied are you with the ADMINISTRATION?	8.19	0.08
Overall, how satisfied are you with the HOME GROUND?	8.51	0.12
Overall Satisfaction	7.44	

$r = 0.81, r^2 = 0.65, n = 3,039$  (listwise deletion used)

**Table 2: Number of Sponsors recalled and Mean Overall Satisfaction**

Number of Sponsors Recall	Frequency	Percent	Mean Satisfaction
Zero	799	24.5	7.18
One	725	22.9	7.40
Two	513	16.1	7.34
Three	372	12.2	7.66
Four	472	15.6	7.72
Five	258	8.6	7.80
Total	3139	100	7.44

$r = 0.123, r^2 = 0.015$

**Table 3: Reported Sponsor Behaviours and Mean Overall Satisfaction**

Which best describes you?	Frequency	Percent	Mean Satisfaction
I pay little attention to the sponsors	1797	56.5	7.25
I know little about the sponsors but would like more information	234	7.4	7.53
If I think all brands are the same, I try to use the sponsors products	858	27	7.70
I actively seek out and use the sponsors brands whenever possible	186	5.9	7.88
Total	3075	96.7	7.43

*Differences significant at the 0.01 level.*

### Discussion/Implications

The relationships all trend in the manner expected, that is as member satisfaction rose so too did the number of sponsors they could recall and the likelihood of using the sponsors' products. The relationships are significant (at the 0.01 level) but weak, and satisfaction alone explains only a very small amount of the variation in recall of sponsors. This is partially an artefact of the low degree of variability in overall satisfaction. Overall Satisfaction was a better predictor, though, of sponsor recall than either the measure of how well expectations were met ( $r = 0.09$ ) or the number of games attended ( $r = 0.08$ ), two other factors we might expect to be correlated with sponsor awareness. Despite the weak relationships found in this research, the results suggest that more satisfied season ticket holders will be able to recall more sponsors and seek to use their products, and this is yet another reason to manage the satisfaction of customers.

### References

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