

REPEAT ATTENDANCE AS A FUNCTION OF LIMINALITY, COMMUNITAS AND TEAM IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to empirically explore the linkages among liminality, communitas, team identification, and repeat attendance intention. Due to the lack of scales with which to measure liminality, this study developed a scale to represent liminality in spectator sports, using Churchill's suggested procedure for developing quality marketing constructs. Through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (n=92) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (n=261), the liminality scale was confirmed as a reliable, valid instrument of the liminal experiences of sport attendees. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships among the liminality, communitas, team identification, and repeat attendance intention. The study found that liminality had a direct impact on both communitas and team identification, while it had an indirect impact on repeat attendance intention via its effect on communitas. The study also revealed that communitas had a direct impact on both team identification and repeat attendance intention and that team identification had a direct impact on repeat attendance intention. In order for marketers to maximise team identification and repeat attendance intention, they need to develop specific strategies that foster transcendental experiences.

Key words: Transcendental experiences; Stadium; Spectator behaviour; Scale development.

INTRODUCTION

The tendency to 'deviate' from routine life is a characteristic of modern people (Cohen & Taylor, 1992). Sport consumers are no exception. Recently, the importance of transcendental experiences, such as liminality and communitas that sport consumers' encounter has been recognised in sport consumer research (Chalip, 2006). These transcendental experiences provide sport consumers with something special that transcends the sport. For example, by entering liminality, sport consumers experience a sacred or magical world that differs from outside society (Handelman, 1990; Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). Furthermore, in the transcendental world, sport consumers can share communal energy and feel a heightened sense of community (Chalip, 2006). In spectator sport, creating personally meaningful experiences is important to sport marketers because it can mitigate the impact of a team's on-field performance (Hill & Green, 2000). Indeed, such transcendental experiences might play an important role in what sport fans experience in a sport venue and serve as a key factor in attracting and retaining sport fans.

Despite the importance of the transcendental experiences, little attention has been focused on the effect of such experiences on sport consumer behaviour in the context of spectator sport. A few insightful studies on transcendental experiences have been conducted in the context of participant sport (Kemp, 1999), sport anthropology (Gaffney, 2008), sport tourism (Green & Chalip, 1998) or mega sport events (Chalip, 2006). However, since even these studies have relied primarily on conceptual modelling or qualitative methods (observation) in exploring the transcendental experiences, a scale has not been developed that measures them empirically. In the case of 'communitas', only McGinnis *et al.* (2008) empirically measured communitas in the context of participant sport (golf). Accordingly, with the absence of scales that directly measure the 'liminality' and 'communitas' of sport fans, the transcendental nature of sport fans remains largely unexplored. In this regard, comprehensive research regarding the role transcendental experiences play in spectator behaviour is required.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liminality

Previous literature on anthropology first introduced the concept of liminality (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969). Turner (1969:95) defined liminality as the state of being betwixt and between and liminal individuals or entities as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial". In the liminal state, "social rules and social distinctions seem less important, and are sometimes suspended altogether" (Chalip, 2006:110). According to Van Gennep (1960), the liminal experience goes through three phases: separation, transition and incorporation. This liminality has been well studied and documented, mainly according to two realms of sport, such as participant sport (Kemp, 1999) and mega sport events (Chalip, 2006). For example, Kemp (1999) reported that sled dog racing serves to detach racers from their everyday lives (separation) and then to experience the transition from the previous status to another status as a racer by entering a liminal state in which they become ambiguous relative to their normal roles and status (transition). Eventually, after experiencing a new identity as sled dog racers, they are returned to mundane life (incorporation).

In the context of spectator sport, spectators might experience liminality, due to the ritualistic, quasi-sacred nature of a stadium (Gaffney, 2008). By entering a liminal space (stadium) in which spectators can engage in the ritualistic, quasi-sacred activities (cheering and supporting their home teams by wearing the same uniforms), they might be able to close off the outside world, escape from their everyday realities, feel like they are in a 'different' world, and experience a new self as a spectator. Furthermore, the liminality of the stadium enables spectators to experience energy and excitement shared by other spectators, which makes sport events more fun (Chalip, 2006). It is reasonable to expect that the liminality spectators experience in the stadium plays a positive role in spectator behaviour.

Communitas

Communitas is regarded as a temporary process whereby the relationships between individuals are not based on social roles or status, but on the existential ground of a human being (Turner, 1969). It is characterised by an intense community spirit that is associated with

the feeling of equality, solidarity and togetherness among members (Turner, 1969). With *communitas*, individuals with different backgrounds within an existing social order tend to share an extraordinary experience and bond with other human beings without considering one's social status as a divide (Deegan, 1998).

Communitas experiences have been largely studied in participant sports such as whitewater rafting (Arnould & Price, 1993), skydiving (Celsi *et al.*, 1993), motorcycle riding (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), golf (McGinnis *et al.*, 2008), and sled dog racing (Kemp, 1999). Other works were conducted in sport tourism (Green & Chalip, 1998) and mega sport events (Chalip, 2006). These studies identified the *communitas* experience as a key driver for sport or event participants.

In the context of spectator sport, spectators also might experience *communitas* as they support their team (Chun *et al.*, 2004). As spectators enter a liminal state in which social roles and status disappear, they are more likely to engage in social interactions and develop an intense feeling of comradeship in the process of supporting their team (Chun *et al.*, 2005). In the context of professional baseball, Holt (1995) argued that the sense of community emerges from the consumption practice of 'play' that is characterised by communing and socialising among fans and that to some fans the interpersonal actions (and associated *communitas*) are autotelic in their baseball consumption. It is reasonable to expect that the *communitas* that spectators experience in the stadium play a positive role in spectator behaviour.

Team identification

Team identification is regarded as a specific instance of social identity theory whereby the object to which a sport consumer identifies is a particular team (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined team identification as sport fans' tendency to connect to their teams and to identify the teams' success and failures with their own. These psychological connections, that sport consumers form with specific teams, have been explained by a variety of psychological terms, such as attraction (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989), attachment (Funk *et al.*, 2000), and loyalty (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). However, Funk and James (2001) distinguished attraction from attachment in terms of an individual's level of team identification, implying that attraction is characterised by low team identification while attachment is defined by moderate or high team identification. A sport consumer at the level of 'attraction' only tends to acknowledge having a favourite team while a sport consumer at the level of 'attachment' tends to have a more stable psychological connection to the team. Considering Ashforth and Mael's (1989) definition of team identification, 'identification' seems to work better for operationalising attachment rather than attraction. In addition, Lee *et al.* (2013:205) differentiate team identification from team loyalty in that "team loyalty represents a more resistant, persistent, biased cognition associated with sport teams and is also more solid in the level of commitment to the teams". Although each term mentioned represents the relational construct between sport consumers and sport teams, team identification seems to express a stronger (weaker) relational construct compared to attraction (loyalty).

Team identification has been studied as a key determinant of a variety of sport consumer behaviours such as BIRGing or CORFing (Wann & Branscombe, 1990), game attendance

(Fisher & Wakefield, 1998) and licensed product consumption (Kwon & Armstrong, 2006). As demonstrated in the studies listed above, team identification is expected to play a positive role in spectator behaviour. Taken together, it is expected that liminality, communitas and team identification all positively affect spectator behaviour. A theoretical framework that provides an underlying basis for developing a conceptual model for this study is shown in Figure 1.

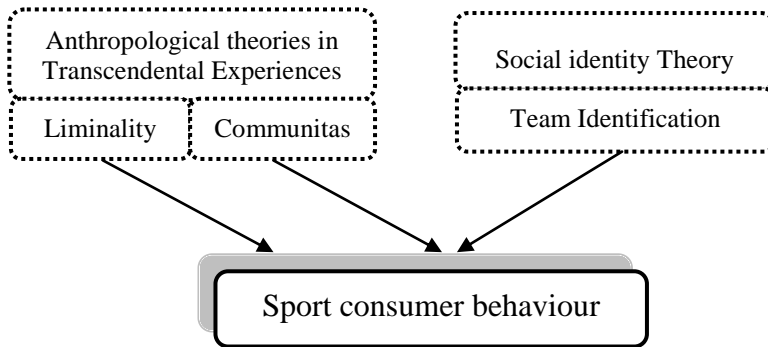


FIGURE 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF LIMINALITY, COMMUNITAS, AND TEAM IDENTIFICATION

Relationships among liminality, communitas, team identification and repeat attendance intention

As shown in Figure 1, liminality, communitas and team identification have been identified as potential key constructs affecting sport spectator behaviour. Yet the three constructs seem inextricably related. This section examines potential relationships among the three constructs, and then research hypotheses will be derived regarding the relationships among them and their impacts on spectators' intentions to return to the stadium for other games.

Liminal states, in which ordinary social roles are suspended, tend to produce a strong sense of community that is engendered communitas (Turner, 1969; Kemp, 1999). This is possible because as normal social structures disappear, individuals tend to interact in equal levels of status (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), which can be a foundation for communitas. In the context of mega sport events, Chalip (2006) suggest that the celebratory nature of sport events engenders liminality that can foster communitas. In a similar vein, the liminal experience of spectators in the stadium seems to serve as fodder for communitas within the stadium.

Although there is no empirical research regarding the direct effect of liminality on game attendance or repeat attendance, a few studies conceptually suggest that the liminal nature of sport events enable spectators to experience energy and excitement shared by all and that this can make the events attractive and enjoyable (Handelman, 1990; Chalip, 2006). These positive experiences associated with liminality might serve as a key driver to facilitate spectators' repeat attendance. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the liminal experience of

spectators is an important factor of their repeat attendance.

In addition, liminality seems to involve identity reconstruction (Beech, 2010). As an individual enters a stadium (a liminal space), he or she would experience a new self as a spectator (Van Gennep, 1960). Although this new identity is a temporal self that one can experience in the stadium, as studies in brand experience suggest (Schmitt, 1999), repeated positive experiences (here experiencing a new identity) with a brand (team) would contribute to the development of a more stable, brand (team) identification that spectators have beyond the stadium. Hence, the liminal experiences of spectators are expected to facilitate their team identification.

The literature suggests that a sense of community among sport fans is essential in building team identification (Sutton *et al.*, 1997; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003). Finn (2005) argues that major conditions to be a 'true' fan are to have some shared identification not only with a team but also with other fans. While *communitas* in this study is a sense of community that spectators can experience within the stadium rather than more stable, psychological connections among fans even outside the stadium suggested by the previous works, it is not surprising to suggest that *communitas* as a stadium experience also serves as vital input for the development of team identification.

As stated earlier, Holt (1995) suggests that interpersonal actions (communing and socialising) among spectators in the stadium and associated *communitas* are an important autotelic drive for baseball consumption. Hence, considering the autotelic function of *communitas* in sport team consumption, it is not surprising to expect that to some spectators, the *communitas* experience in the stadium could play a key role in their repeat attendance.

Volumes of studies in sport consumer behaviour have shown that team identification is a significant predictor of various sport consumer behaviour, particularly in the area of continuing game attendance. For example, die-hard fans rather than fair-weather fans showed higher intention to attend the future games of their teams (Wann & Branscombe, 1993; Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Kim & Trail, 2010).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore how the transcendental experiences that sport fans encounter in a stadium affect their behaviour. Specifically, the study empirically examines the linkages among liminality, *communitas*, and team identification and their effects on spectators' intentions to return to the stadium for future attendance. Furthermore, it was intended to determine the validity of the liminality scale.

Based on the discussions on *liminality*, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1: Liminality will have a positive and direct impact on *communitas*.
- H2: Liminality will have a positive and direct impact on intentions to return to the stadium in the future.
- H3: Liminality will have a positive and direct impact on team identification.

Based on the discussions of *communitas*, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: *Communitas* will have a positive and direct impact on team identification.

H5: *Communitas* will have a positive and direct impact on intentions to return to the stadium in the future.

It is expected that a higher level of *team identification* could lead to a greater intention of repeat attendance, thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Team identification will have a positive and direct impact on future intentions to revisit.

The six hypotheses have been combined to form a conceptual model specifying the expected relationships among the constructs. The constructs and the relationships among them are depicted in Figure 2.

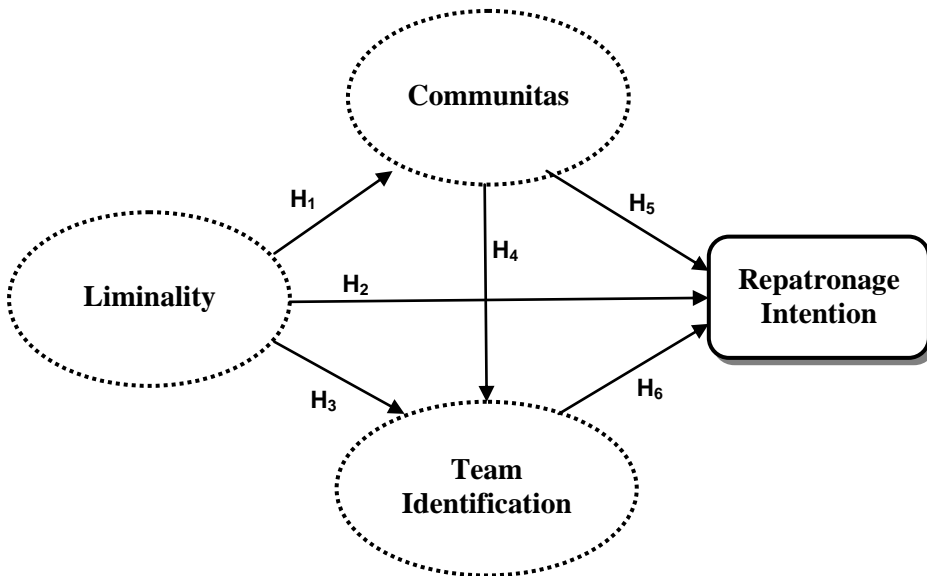


FIGURE 2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL: EFFECTS OF LIMINALITY, COMMUNITAS AND TEAM IDENTIFICATION ON REPATRONAGE INTENTION

METHODOLOGY

Sampling procedure

Like the scale development stage, the sample for the main study was recruited from the same minor league baseball team in Texas. The sampling was stratified by seating section. Spectators were approached randomly until an intended number of surveys were fulfilled. The survey participation was voluntarily. A total of 303 responses were obtained from the minor league baseball team site survey. Of the 303 surveys collected, 42 surveys were

eliminated due to their incompleteness. Therefore, 261 usable surveys in total were analysed for the main study. Males were 57% of total sample, and respondents ranged in age from 11 to 85 years (39.6±16.0).

Measurement for liminality scale development

Since the authors could not find any previously validated scale to measure perceptions of liminality in the context of spectator sport, the study developed a scale to measure spectators' liminal experience. Initial items were derived from anthropological work, as well as associated work in sport (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Handelman, 1990; Kemp, 1999; Chalip, 2006; Gaffney, 2008). Common themes of liminality described by these works were: disappearance of social boundaries or limits; relative freedom associated with such disappearance; experiencing an ambiguous world that differs from outside society; and experiencing a new identity as a member in the liminal state. In terms of mega sport events, Chalip (2006) noted that a key characteristic of liminality is experiences of energy or excitement shared by other event participants.

Based on the common themes listed above, the study developed the 5 items regarding liminality that spectators might experience within the stadium. Specifically, 4 of the 5 items were derived from 5 different works in anthropology and sport anthropology mentioned above (Van Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1969; Handelman, 1990; Kemp, 1999; Gaffney, 2008), while the last item was derived from Chalip's (2006) work.

Utilising Churchill's (1979) 5-step procedure for developing quality marketing constructs (construct specification, item generation, data collection, scale purification, and scale validation), this study was conducted in 2 stages: scale development and validation. The scale development stage consisted of the first 4 steps of Churchill's suggested procedure, while the scale validation stage examined the relationships among liminality, *communitas*, team identification, and repeat attendance intention using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

In order to ensure content validity, an expert panel review was conducted. A 3-person panel of experts who consist of 2 faculty members and a graduate student in sport management and anthropology examined the 5 items that were identified from the literature. They all agreed that those items represent liminality well in the context of spectator sport.

Data collection and scale purification

The survey questionnaire for the scale validation stage included the 4 research measures: liminality; *communitas*; team identification; and repeat attendance intention. *Liminality* was measured with five items developed from the EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis). Respondents rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). In order to measure *communitas*, McGinnis's *et al.* (2008) 4 items were utilised with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). However, since their scale was developed to measure *communitas* in the context of participant sport (golf), the items were changed to fit into the context of spectator sport. *Team identification* was measured using Trail and James' (2001) 3 item Team Identification Index (TII) also with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). TII was chosen for the study because it has shown good internal consistency and validity in

various studies of spectator behaviour (Fink *et al.*, 2002; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2013). *Repeat attendance intention* was measured with a single item again using a 7-point Likert scale. A summary of the measures and their items is presented under the 'Results' section (Table 2). Demographic information included gender and age.

Data analysis

To identify underlying dimensions of the liminality items, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. The survey questionnaire for the scale development stage included the five items for liminality developed from the item generation step and general demographic questions, such as age and gender.

Data were subjected to a principal-components analysis with varimax (orthogonal) rotations. Item-to-total correlations were also investigated as a means of deleting and retaining items before confirming the liminality scale's structure (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, in order to assess the internal consistency of the liminality construct, average inter-item correlation and Cronbach's alpha were tested.

The measurement model was tested through a first order confirmatory factor analysis with the 4 latent constructs (liminality, communitas, team identification and repeat attendance intention), using AMOS. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed to examine the structural model - the relationships among the 4 constructs. The reliability of the 3 constructs (liminality, communitas, and team identification), was assessed via Cronbach's alphas greater than 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The study examined convergent validity for the 3 constructs with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) suggestion that a construct has convergent validity if AVE is at least 0.50. The study also tested discriminant validity with Kline's (2005) recommendation that construct correlations lower than 0.85 display the discriminant validity. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommend using a combination of indicators to assess model fit. Therefore, cut-off criteria employed in this study were the following: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than 0.95, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than 0.06 and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) less than 0.08.

RESULTS

As a result of the EFA, one component was extracted based on eigen values greater than one. The one component extraction accounted for 69% of the total variance. Total variance close to 70% is deemed very appropriate (Stevens, 2002). Item loadings were strong, ranging from 0.666 (liminality_1) to 0.924 (liminality_3) (Comrey & Lee, 1992). Furthermore, the scale exhibited very strong item-to-total correlations, ranging from 0.532 (liminality_1) to 0.864 (liminality_3) (Tian *et al.*, 2001). As Cronbach's alpha and average inter-item correlation were 0.882 and 0.599, respectively, the liminality measure was internally consistent (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Factor loadings, item-to-total correlations, average inter-item correlation, and Cronbach's alpha are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA)

Items	Factor loadings	Item-to-total r	Mean inter-item r	α
Liminality 1	0.666	0.532	0.599	0.882
Liminality 2	0.873	0.781		
Liminality 3	0.924	0.864		
Liminality 4	0.793	0.677		
Liminality 5	0.861	0.762		

Measurement model

The measurement model was tested to investigate how well each set of items measures its latent construct. This work is known as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) because a primary rationale that items correlate highly with one another is that they measure the same construct (Keith, 2006). The measurement model allows correlations between latent constructs by connecting each latent construct with all other latent constructs.

Overall, the measurement model shows an adequate fit to the data (CFI=0.947; RMSEA=0.088, SRMR=0.056) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Cronbach's alphas for 3 constructs were greater than the suggested cut-off value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, all 3 constructs exhibited AVE (Average Variance Extracted) greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). All items loaded significantly on their respective factors ($p < 0.01$), ranging from 0.557 (liminality_4) to 0.923 (liminality_3).

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF MEASURES AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY

Constructs/Items	Loadings	α	AVE*
<u>Liminality</u>			
1. Attending [team] games makes me feel like I am in a place where social boundaries or limits disappear.	0.685	0.860	0.571
2. Attending [team] games makes me feel like I have freedom from the restrictions of my ordinary life.	0.831		
3. Attending [team] games makes me feel like I am in a new kind of world that differs from outside society.	0.923		
4. Attending [team] games makes me feel like I experience energy and excitement shared by all spectators at the stadium.	0.557		
5. Attending [team] games makes me feel like I experience a new kind of self as a spectator.	0.729		

Continued

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF MEASURES AND CONVERGENT VALIDITY (cont.)

Constructs/Items	Loadings	α	AVE*
<u>Communitas</u>			
1. When I attend [team] games, I feel a sense of harmony with other spectators.	0.814	0.918	0.739
2. When I attend [team] games, I feel a sense of sharing with other spectators.	0.845		
3. When I attend [team] games, I feel a sense of camaraderie.	0.896		
4. When I attend [team] games, I feel a sense of belonging with other spectators.	0.881		
<u>Team identification</u>			
1. I consider myself to be a “real” fan of [team].	0.881	0.894	0.748
2. I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of [team].	0.793		
3. Being a fan of [team] is very important to me.	0.916		
<u>Repatronage intention</u>			
How interested are you in attending [team] game(s) in the future?			

* AVE = Average Variance Extracted

TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS AMONG LATENT CONSTRUCTS

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1 Liminality	—			
2 Communitas	0.462	—		
3 Team identification	0.393	0.476	—	
4 Repatronage intention	0.370	0.482	0.675	—

All correlation coefficients are significant at $p < 0.01$ level.

These results provided support for evidence of convergent validity of the measurement model. Discriminant validity was also established because the correlations between the latent constructs were lower than 0.85 (Kline, 2005). As a result, the measurement model provides strong evidence of both convergent and discriminant validity among the latent constructs. The factor loadings, Cronbach’s alphas, and AVE are shown in Table 2. The correlations among the constructs are provided in Table 3.

Structural model

The hypothesised relationships among liminality, communitas, team identification, and repeat attendance intention were tested via SEM using AMOS. The structural model displays an adequate fit to the data in the main study (CFI=0.947, RMSEA=0.088, SRMR=0.056). Five of the proposed 6 paths were significant while only the path from liminality to repeat attendance intention was not significant. Therefore, H₁, H₃, H₄, H₅, and H₆ were supported while H₂ was not supported.

However, inspection of the standardised indirect (mediated) effects of the variables used in this study showed that liminality had a moderate, and positive, indirect effect on sport consumers' repeat attendance intention (0.332) (Kline, 2005). The structural model indicated that liminality explained 20.9% of the variance in communitas and that liminality and communitas predicted 32.5% of the variance in team identification. It also showed that liminality, communitas and team identification explained 54.2% of the variance in repeat attendance intention. Standardised estimates of the final structural model are shown in Figure 3.

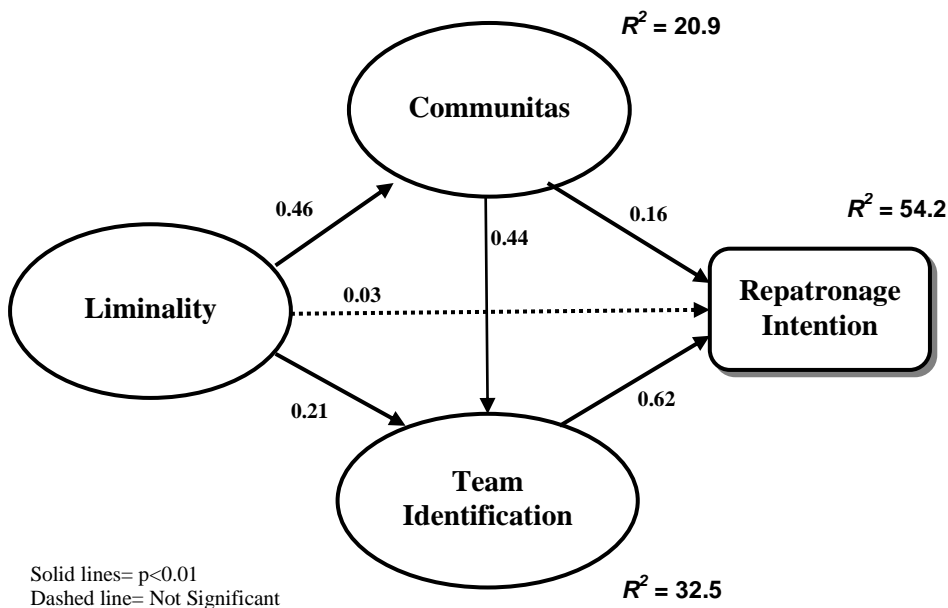


FIGURE 3. RESULTS OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

DISCUSSION

This study began with recognition that transcendental experiences, such as liminality and communitas, serve as key drivers of sport consumer behaviour in various realms of sport (participant sport, sport tourism, mega sport events), and extends this discourse to the context of spectator sport. With the development of a scale to measure liminality and adaptation of a

communitas scale for participant sport, the study empirically demonstrated that spectators' repeat attendance intention is a function of perceived liminality, a sense of community and team identification. Specifically, the study revealed that team identification is the strongest predictor of repeat attendance intention. Liminality had a positive and direct impact on both communitas and team identification. However, contrary to expectations, liminality did not have a direct impact on repeat attendance intention, as it only had an indirect impact on repeat attendance intention via communitas. Communitas had a positive and direct impact on both team identification and repeat attendance intention. In short, liminality, communitas and team identification all had a significant direct and/or indirect effect on repeat attendance intention.

The finding about the impact of liminality on communitas is consistent with the previous work in anthropology (Turner, 1969; Handelman, 1990), participant sport (Kemp, 1999), and mega sport events (Chalip, 2006). As spectators are more immersed in the liminal state that a stadium offers, they are more likely to feel a sense of community with other spectators. This result seems to be reasonable in that a sense of relative freedom from social restrictions and the realisation of a new identity (as a spectator) that spectators can experience in the liminal state of the stadium serve as fodder for the formation of a sense of camaraderie with other spectators.

Unexpectedly, the study revealed that liminality did not have an effect on spectators' repeat attendance intention. While there has been little empirical work exploring the impact of liminality on spectator (repeat) attendance, this study suggested such causality based on that shared energy and excitement associated with liminality provide spectators with exciting experiences (Kemp, 1999; Chalip, 2006) that in turn drives future attendance. This unexpected outcome may be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, while this study was conducted in the context of a (regular) spectator sport (baseball), previous works (Chalip, 2006; Kemp, 1999) were conducted with one- or four-year period sport events (sled dog racing, the Olympics). Since spectators in baseball more regularly experience liminality than the one- or four-year period event participants, and therefore, get used to the liminal experience, the effect of liminality on repeat attendance would be relatively weaker. Secondly, the study was conducted in the minor league sport context. Since the stadium atmosphere of minor league sport tend to be more lax than that of the major leagues, the minor league spectators' immersion into the atmosphere would be less (Mayo *et al.*, 2003), which can affect the immersion into liminality. Future research should examine why liminality does not have an effect on repeat attendance in the context of minor league sport and explore other sport settings (major leagues) in which liminality might be a significant predictor of repeat attendance.

The study found the effect of liminality on team identification, proving our logical extension that the spatiotemporally limited nature of liminality (experiencing a new kind of self as a spectator in the stadium), might contribute to the formation of team identification that sport fans have beyond the spatiotemporal limit. This result is in line with recent branding works suggesting that personal, meaningful brand experiences (here liminal experience) can lead to a variety of positive consumer behaviours, particularly brand identification (Gentile *et al.*, 2007; Brakus *et al.*, 2009). While liminality in this study is the spatiotemporally limited experience of spectators, considering its effect on team identification that is a more stable psychological construct, sport marketers should pay close attention to spectators'

transcendental experience. In this regard, both academics and practitioners should explore the antecedents of liminality.

The study also identified the effect of *communitas* on team identification. While previous studies in sport consumer behaviour suggested that a sense of community among spectators is crucial in building team identification (Sutton *et al.*, 1997; Finn, 2005), their primary focus on *communitas* was not an on-site stadium experience, but as a more stable, psychological connection among fans that exist beyond a sport venue. Considering the significant contribution of *communitas* on team identification, along with liminality, sport marketers should prioritise *communitas* as another transcendental experience in building team identification.

This research also revealed the effect of *communitas* on repeat attendance intention. This finding is in line with Holt's (1995) work finding that autotelic, interpersonal actions (communing, socialising) among baseball spectators and the subsequent sense of community are key drivers of sport consumption. Considering the effect of *communitas* experience on repeat attendance intention, in addition to liminality, sport marketers should identify and develop the ways that the sense of community among spectators is created, promoted and enhanced.

As expected, the study confirmed the previous work suggesting that fans that are highly identified with their teams are more likely to show continuing attendance (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Kim & Trail, 2010). This finding suggests the importance of die-hard fans as a key target segment for gate revenues and the necessity of continuous, keen interest in this segment. However, when considering the positive effects of liminality and *communitas* on team identification, sport marketers should identify the ways to promote such transcendental experiences among fair-weather fans, which can increase their repeat attendance. In other words, the means with which to enhance liminality and *communitas* could serve as key tactics to move people up the sport consumer escalator, from light users to heavy users (Mullin *et al.*, 2007).

Although the impact of team identification on repeat attendance intention was much greater than that of *communitas*, it is important to note that both constructs have a significant impact on repeat attendance intention. Further, by finding that liminality and *communitas* play a substantial role in the formation of team identification that has been regarded as a powerful determinant of sport consumer behaviour, the study demonstrated the importance of consumer experiences, particularly transcendental experiences in the context of spectator sport.

As with all research, this study has limitations. A primary limitation comes from the research target (a minor league baseball team) employed in this study. Some results of this study may not be able to be generalised to other sport settings (major league sport). Thus, future research should confirm the findings identified from this study across different contexts (sports, levels of sport). Secondly, this study considered repeat attendance intention, and not actual returning behaviour as an endpoint. Repeat attendance intentions are not always converted into actual returning behaviour, therefore, future research should examine how the variables used in this study influence actual returning behaviour.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights the ability of liminality and *communitas* to build team identification and to enhance repeat attendance. This suggests that sport marketers should consider spectators' transcendental experiences as a key factor in building a fan base. Yet, a more important consideration is how these experiences are created and designed to foster and enhance such a fan base. In this sense, three practical ways to leverage the transcendental experiences are suggested. A way to enable liminality and associated *communitas* is to encourage social interaction among spectators (Handelman, 1990; Kemp, 1999; Chalip, 2006). This can be generated and enhanced by sport venue designs (Chalip, 2006). For example, social interaction can be enabled in and around a stadium by providing appropriate spatial room of seats that allows spectators to turn and talk to one another, ample space with tables and chairs around concessions, or enough sites for picnicking and tailgating outside the sport venues (Chalip, 2006). In a similar vein, swivel seats and grouped seating arrangements can be important means to promote social interaction (Melnick, 1993).

Theming also can be an appropriate means to create liminality and *communitas* by providing spectators with a sense of celebration (Chalip, 2006). A stadium's architectural appearance, interior design or decorations that reflect its locality might provide spectators with visual cues that a celebration is taking place, which makes them feel as if they are in a liminal space (Chalip, 1992). However, theming is not necessarily limited to visual cues; it can appeal to all senses of the spectators (Lee *et al.*, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2013). The stadium can evoke the sense of locality through embellishing the stadium with local historic symbols or landmarks, playing local music and serving local menus (Lee *et al.*, 2012). If sport teams can establish stadium themes as their own heritages that can appeal to spectators' five senses, this might enhance the stadium's festive atmosphere, a significant antecedent to liminality and associated *communitas* (Garcia, 2001).

In addition, sport teams can leverage the presence of spectators in a stadium in order to enhance transcendental experiences. Recent work suggests an important role of other spectators in creating a unique stadium experience (Crawford, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2012). According to Lee *et al.* (2012), South Korean baseball and European soccer spectators are not mere passive crowds, but they play a crucial role in creating the spectacle and atmosphere within the sport venues through being part of a wave, dressing up, chanting and singing, playing musical instruments or balloon sticks. In the process of participating in these activities, spectators would experience liminality and *communitas*. The challenge to create a transcendental experience is not merely a matter of the spatial and physical arrangement of sport venues. Rather, it depends on how spectator participation in such activities is facilitated, designed and implemented.

CONCLUSION

Today's sophisticated spectators demand and anticipate positive and personally meaningful experiences in their consumption. Their ultimate end is an enjoyable experience in the stadium, and a transcendental experience seems to be an important part of such positive stadium experiences. A positive, transcendental stadium experience plays a vital role in the formation of team identification and repeat attendance. This transcendental experience-based

approach to understanding sport consumer behaviour offers a new direction for experience marketing in sport that leverages the liminality and *communitas* experiences of sport fans. By creating and enhancing the transcendental experiences, sport teams can build a more stable fan base and enjoy increased gate revenue.

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