

WHY DO FANS ATTEND WORLD WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT?

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the travel motives of South African World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) fans at a live Smackdown event in July 2011, which was part of the WWE's world tour. Based on these motives, different market segments at the events were identified and profiled. This was the first time that the motives of WWE fans in this country were identified and compared to previous research. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, of which 414 were completed and included in the analysis. The results showed that WWE fans in South Africa are motivated by four reasons: Unique experience and entertainment, Socialisation, Wrestling enjoyment and Known-group affiliation and novelty. Based on these motives, three distinct clusters of fans were identified: Recreational fans, Avid fans and Aficionados. The travel motives and behavioural characteristics of these fans differ significantly and results showed that WWE fans are a heterogeneous market. Therefore, marketing campaigns directed at these fans should be designed according to their individual needs and preferences in order to sustain the WWE's success and popularity in South Africa.

Key words: World Wrestling Entertainment; Fans; Motives; Sport entertainment; South Africa.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Amateur wrestling, as a sport, is probably one of the oldest athletic competitions in history and has a very rich heritage dating back to before Ancient Rome (Ashley *et al.*, 2000; Waxmonsky & Beresin, 2001). Amateur wrestling was an honoured sport during the Greek and Roman periods, while in the early 19th century different European countries developed wrestling styles unique to their region (Ashley *et al.*, 2000). In later years, wrestlers who participated in amateur competitions would often take part in paid matches, as part of wrestling shows, which led to professional wrestling becoming a distinct and separate entity from amateur wrestling (McQuarrie, 2006). Professional wrestling dates back to the carnival circuits of the 1920s, where wrestlers would perform in front of local audiences (Waxmonsky & Beresin, 2001). According to Smith (2008), professional wrestling is a passionate re-enactment of a violent fight between good and evil. The performers' objective is not to win the match but rather to attain a strong emotional connection with the audience. Although largely discounted as a legitimate sport (Jones, 2001; Atkinson, 2002), professional wrestling is a form of popular culture entertainment that is at least conceptually comparable to professional sport, such as football, hockey and soccer (Atkinson, 2002).

The World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), formerly the World Wrestling Federation (WWF), is an integrated media and entertainment company based in Stamford, Connecticut (McQuarrie, 2006). The WWE is often referred to as “fake”, “a sports opera”, “a soap opera for men”, “a melodrama where story twists and turns occur abundantly” and “a live action movie with wrestlers playing dual roles as leads and stuntmen” (Jenkins, 1997:65; Mazer, 1998:3; Ebinger, 1999; Sehmy, 2002:6). However, whether ‘sport’ or ‘entertainment’, this debate is irrelevant for many wrestling fans (Jones, 2001). The WWE is a multi-million dollar enterprise (Ashley *et al.*, 2000), has an international fan base (Rosellini, 1999; Atkinson, 2002; Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004; McQuarrie, 2006), is broadcast in over 162 countries, is translated into 11 different languages and draws more than 500 million regular viewers (Campbell, 1996; Rosellini, 1999; Media and Entertainment Industry WWE, 2002). The WWE’s flagship showing Raw and Smackdown are extremely popular television shows that consistently rank among the most popular weekly television ratings (Ashley *et al.*, 2000; Burke, 2001). Smackdown was the second-highest rated network television show, while Raw is ranked as the most watched cable television programme in the United States, viewed by five million households weekly (DeVine, 2000; Burke, 2001; McQuarrie, 2006). Spin-off products, which include t-shirts, video games, books, toys and CDs, all attest to fan loyalty (Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004).

However, what makes WWE of interest to consumer researchers is not its size and popularity, but rather the cohesive nature of its fan base (Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004). WWE fans appear to be avid, involved and loyal even though ‘pure’ sports fans denounce wrestling, claiming it is entertainment and not a ‘real’ sport (Ashley *et al.*, 2000). Nobody is really fooled into being a WWE fan; “most fans, from grade school up, know that the winner is predetermined and that the physical combat is at least partially embellished” (Waxmonsky & Beresin, 2001:127). WWE’s appeal comes from its stories rather than its pseudo athletes (Waxmonsky & Beresin, 2001). Fans consider the tension between the forces of good and evil, explore various interpretations for concepts, such as justice, fairness and patriotism, and create their own endings for mythic struggles (Burke, 2001).

The WWE is popular as both a television programme and a live event to which fans go to participate as both spectators and performers (Pratten, 2003; Ford, 2007). Wrestling demands viewers situate themselves as legitimate sport spectators (Sehmy, 2002). As Ford (2007:30) explains, “the pro-wrestling is unique as a massively popular live fictional performance that invites the audience to participate directly with the text; in fact, without audience participation, the text of pro-wrestling performance cannot be completed”. At live events, fans have an active and vocal role in the show, and their behaviours include chanting along the name of favoured wrestlers, booing the antagonists and bringing the shows alive with ‘audience heat’, which is a term used by people in the wrestling industry to describe the fact that the most vocal audiences lead to the most impressive shows (Ford, 2007). Due to the unique nature of these live events, WWE events consistently rank among the top-grossing, pay-per-view events and sell out on almost every world tour (Pratten, 2003).

Burke (2001) suggests that a deeper understanding of spectator motives is required in order to begin to understand the popularity of televised and live professional wrestling events.

Therefore, what is it that makes WWE so popular among the public, or in other words what motivates fans to attend these live events? Are WWE fans in, for example, Indonesia, India, Australia and South Africa motivated by similar values? Research is needed to determine if motives to watch and support the WWE transcend national boundaries, and if so how they are affected by different core cultural values (Burke, 2001; Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004). Ashley *et al.* (2000) add that given the amount of money spent in the sport industry each year and the popularity of televised sport, it has become common to characterise sport as entertainment. Mullin *et al.* (2000:378) agree and find that all of those involved in the sport industry could claim that they “are providing entertainment and escape for the everyday people of the world”. However, professional wrestling is able to heighten this entertainment by manipulating some of its components, such as the format and the players, to add a greater appeal to the audiences (Pratten, 2003). Public reactions to events can be judged very quickly as events modified to please the viewers and as characters changed to suit the story lines. All this contributes to the success of what is now openly described as sport entertainment. It is the result of recognising the key components that attract the fans and developing each facet of a particular sport to its fullest level (Pratten, 2003). Professional wrestling is a commercially successful business and industry that has marketed itself most effectively and its success is the result of careful analysis of what the public enjoys, and more specifically, what motivates them to watch and attend wrestling matches (Pratten, 2003).

A motivation is often viewed as an internal factor that directs and integrates an individual’s behaviour (Park *et al.*, 2008). In other words, a motive is a need that is sufficiently stimulated to move an individual to pursue satisfaction, since an unsatisfied need might cause disappointment, dissatisfaction and feelings of disequilibrium (Park *et al.*, 2008). Wrestling fans, therefore, choose an event to satisfy their internal needs (Crompton & McKay, 1997). Motivation is a dynamic concept that may vary from one person (fan) to another, from one market segment to another, from one event to another, as well as from one decision-making process to the next (Uysal *et al.*, 1993). Marketers should therefore have knowledge of the needs that visitors (fans) are seeking to satisfy (Park *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, as Fodness (1994) warns, effective marketing is impossible without identifying, understanding and prioritising visitors’ (fans’) motivations.

In marketing sport or entertainment, the fans’ perception of the event is very important (Ashley *et al.*, 2000; Ford, 2007). Understanding different spectator motives can be of significant benefit to the sport marketer and organiser looking to increase revenue and ticket sales (Wann *et al.*, 2008). Of particular interest, for both the marketing manager and event organiser, is to understand the specific motives that drive a spectator or fan to consume sport (Bernthal & Graham, 2003) and the subsequent development of marketing communications based on these motives (McDonald *et al.*, 2002). These effective marketing communication plans can often help build groups of ‘die-hard’ fans, thus expanding the customer base for a sport (Pease & Zhang, 2001). Spectator and fan motivation could be used as an effective psychographic segmentation method that can result in more effective marketing campaigns (Wann *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, a comprehensive marketing model that includes motivation and other important spectator and fan variables, such as identification or loyalty, can be very useful in marketing a team or sport (Trail & James, 2001; Trail *et al.*, 2003).

Specifically with regard to the WWE, identifying the motives of fans can play a crucial role in the success and popularity of the show. Although already successful in marketing WWE-related products, information on the motives and values of its fans would allow marketers to effectively target a large market via promotions that illustrate how products coordinate with these values (Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004). The size and accessibility through its media outlets (magazines, pay-per-view television and regular television shows) of WWE fans make them an attractive target market (Deeter-Schmeltz & Sojka, 2004).

Previous research has focused on the demographic composition of wrestling audiences (Griffin, 1937; Bogardus, 1952; Ball, 1990); the effects of watching wrestling matches on the aggression levels of viewers (Kingsmore, 1970; Arms *et al.*, 1979, Russel *et al.*, 1988; Williams, 2002; Tamborini *et al.*, 2005); the views of children when watching and discussing wrestling (Lemish, 1999; Nichols, 2001; Durant *et al.*, 2001; Strand, 2002; Bernthal, 2003; Oppliger, 2003); and the observations of wrestlers at wrestling matches (Winningham, 1972; Freedman, 1988; Williams, 1989; Berger, 1990; Turko, 1991).

Various studies have been conducted into the motives of WWE fans, but they have focused mainly on fans in the United States (US). Saunders (1998) identified several types of wrestling fans in the US: nostalgic fans who watch wrestling because of their love of it as children; fans who attend events as an activity the whole family enjoys; fans who enjoy observing violence; fans who enjoy wrestling for the spectacle/fantasy; and fans who enjoy wrestling for athletic exhibition. Feigenbaum (2000), on the other hand, identified US wrestling fans on a spectrum running from those who believe the event is real to those long-time fans who have extensive knowledge of the wrestling production and its history.

Ashley *et al.* (2000) found that wrestling fans at the World Championship Wrestling (WCW) event held in Texas, were serious about their sport and motivated to watch because it is fun and entertaining. Most fans were introduced to wrestling by their families and consider wrestling as fun for the whole family. They are loyal to professional wrestling and support it financially and emotionally. They consume wrestling by attending matches, watching it on television, ordering pay-per-views and buying videos and other wrestling-related products. The findings by Ashley *et al.* (2000) refute the argument that the majority of wrestling fans are uneducated and mostly low income with little disposable income.

Burke (2001) found that television viewers of the WWE in the US truly enjoy wrestling and their motivation for watching is group affiliation. These fans also suggested that professional wrestling narratives are unlike other television fare offered. Deeter-Schmeltz and Sojka (2004) found that WWE fans in mid-Western cities in the US are motivated to watch the WWE because they experience the values of belonging, self-respect and fun/enjoyment/excitement, while James and Ross (2004) concluded that wrestling fans were mainly motivated by eustress (drama), self-esteem (achievement) and family togetherness. Ford (2007) identified the following motives of wrestling fans at wrestling events in Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, Georgia, Massachusetts and Toronto, US: they enjoy the athletic abilities, love the characters, a loved one asked them to come along, they wanted to be pro-wrestlers themselves, and the wrestling arena was a place to meet up with other fans they

knew. When asked to describe their experience at wrestling shows, fans identified the shows as ‘entertaining’ and ‘unpredictable’, relating specifically to the plot of the particular matches. Furthermore, fans engage in the text as a spectator because they want to be told a story, to be entertained and surprised. Investigating the motives of college students located in the Mid-South and South, Wann *et al.* (2008) found that wrestling fans were motivated by escape, eustress, group affiliation, entertainment and aesthetics.

The afore-mentioned studies collectively show that WWE fans in the US are mainly motivated by eustress, entertainment, group affiliation and family togetherness. However, no studies have attempted to identify the motives of WWE fans outside the US. This research would thus contribute to the literature about the motives of WWE fans from different countries, and the similarity between South African and US fans’ motives. The research could provide WWE organisers and marketers with valuable information that could be used to market their live events to different markets in different countries, according to their distinctive needs and preferences. This will ultimately lead to a greater fan base, sold-out shows and increased fan loyalty.

The purpose of this research was to attempt to provide possible answers to the above-mentioned questions by analysing the travel motives of South African WWE fans at a live Smackdown event during the WWE tour to the country in July 2011, as part of a world tour. Based on these motives, it would be possible to identify and profile different market segments at the event. This is the first time that motives of WWE fans in this country will be identified and compared to previous research.

RESEARCH METHOD

As this was a quantitative research study, a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. This section describes the questionnaire, the sampling method and survey, and the statistical analysis conducted.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A, captured demographic details (gender, home language, age, occupation, home province, country of origin, level of education, marital status and when the decision was made to attend the event) and spending behaviour (number of persons paid for, length of stay and expenditure). Section B, captured motivational factors, measuring 26 items on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1= ‘not important at all’ to 5= ‘extremely important’. The motivational statements included in this section were based on the work of Ashley *et al.* (2000), Burke (2001), Deeter-Schmeltz and Sojka (2004), James and Ross (2004) and Wann *et al.* (2008). In this section, information was also requested specific to visitors’ behaviour during the event (preferred accommodation, initiator of attendance, times attended, mode of transport, media sources), as well as their wrestling show preferences. Section C, captured respondents’ preferred leisure activities, sport participation and personality type. For the purpose of this research, information from all three sections was used.

Sampling method and survey

To undertake this destination-based survey, questionnaires were distributed at the WWE's Smackdown World Tour event held at the Coca Cola Dome in Johannesburg on 9 July 2011. The venue is divided into blocks, which determine the value of the different tickets purchased. For example, seats near the ring are more expensive than those further from the ring. Therefore, a stratified sampling method was used, within which a simple random sampling method was used in order to limit bias: the trained fieldworkers followed specific guidelines, handing out questionnaires to different non-homogeneous age groups, gender groups and ticket holders. Questionnaires were distributed to all visitors who were willing to participate before the event, while they were sitting and waiting in and outside the venue. Fieldworkers approached the respondents and explained the goal of the survey and the questionnaire to ensure that visitors participated willingly and responded openly and honestly. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed and 414 completed questionnaires were administered. In a population of 25 000 (N), 394 respondents (n) would be seen as representative and result in a 95% level of confidence with a $\pm 5\%$ sampling error (Israel, 2009). Therefore, since approximately 20 000 visitors attended the event in Johannesburg, the number of completed questionnaires (n = 414) was more than adequate.

Statistical analysis

The data was captured using Microsoft[®] Excel[®] and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (SPSS, 2011). The analysis was done in three stages: a factor analysis; a cluster analysis; and an analysis of significant differences between motivational clusters of fans at the WWE event.

Firstly, a principal axis factor analysis, using an Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalisation, was performed on the 26 motivation items, to explain the variance-covariance structure of a set of variables through a few linear combinations of these variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was used to determine whether the covariance matrix was suitable for factor analysis. Kaiser's criteria for the extraction of all factors with eigenvalues larger than one were used because they were considered to explain a significant amount of variation in the data. All items with a factor loading greater than 0.3 were considered as contributing to a factor, and all items with loadings less than 0.3 as not correlating significantly with this factor (Steyn, 2000). Any item that cross-loaded on 2 factors both with factor loadings greater than 0.3, was categorised in the factor where interpretability was best. A reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was computed for each factor to estimate its internal consistency. All factors with a reliability coefficient above 0.6 were considered as acceptable in this study. The average inter-item correlations were also computed as another measure of reliability. According to Clark and Watson (1995), these should lie between 0.15 and 0.55.

Secondly, a cluster analysis, using Ward's method with Euclidean distances, was performed on the scores of the motives to attend the event. A cluster analysis is a multivariate interdependence technique, whose primary objective is to classify objects into relatively homogeneous groups based on the set of variables considered, and is mostly an exploratory

technique (Hair *et al.*, 2000). Hierarchical clustering makes no assumptions concerning the number of groups or group structure. Instead, the members are grouped together based on their natural similarity (Johnson & Wichern, 2007). This research did not take an *a priori* view of which data points should fall into which segment, rather, a hierarchical cluster analysis was used to explore the natural structure of the data, by means of Ward's method with Euclidean distances.

Thirdly, ANOVAs and Tukey's multiple comparisons, as well as two-way frequency tables and chi-square tests, were used to investigate any significant differences between the motivational clusters. The study used demographic variables (gender, home language, country of origin, age, occupation, and province of origin) and behavioural variables (length of stay, type of accommodation, transport, preferred type of music, expenditure, other events attended, initiator of attendance and when the decision to visit was made) to examine whether there were statistically significant differences between the groups.

RESULTS

This section discusses the results of the factor analysis (travel motives) and presents the results of the t-tests and cross-tabulations with chi-square tests to investigate significant differences.

Factor analysis

The pattern matrix of the principal axis factor analysis using an Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalisation, identified four factors, which were labeled according to similar characteristics (Table 1). These factors account for 63% of the total variance. All factors had relatively high reliability coefficients, ranging from 0.77 (the lowest) to 0.94 (the highest). The average inter-item correlation coefficients of between 0.41 and 0.62 also imply internal consistency for all factors. Moreover, all items loaded on a factor had a loading greater than 0.3, and the relatively high factor loadings indicate a reasonably high correlation between the factors and their component items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (0.94) indicates that patterns of correlation are relatively compact and yield distinct and reliable factors (Field, 2005). Barlett's test of sphericity reached statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix (Pallant, 2007).

Factor scores were calculated as the average of all items contributing to a specific factor in order to interpret them on the original 5-point Likert scale of measurement. As Table 1 shows, the following motives were identified: *Unique experience and entertainment* (Factor 1); *Socialisation* (Factor 2); *Wrestling enjoyment* (Factor 3); and *Known-group affiliation and novelty* (Factor 4). *Unique experience and entertainment* (Factor 1) obtained the highest mean value (4.36), was considered the most important motive for attending the event, had a reliability coefficient of 0.94 and an average inter-item correlation of 0.58. *Known-group affiliation and novelty* (Factor 4) had the second highest mean value (4.01), followed by *Wrestling enjoyment* (3.90). *Socialisation* (Factor 2) had the lowest mean value (3.06) and was rated as the least important motive for attending the WWE.

TABLE 1: VISITORS' MOTIVES: FACTOR ANALYSIS OF WWE SHOW

Motivation factors and questionnaire items	Factor loading	Mean value	Reliability coefficient	Mean inter-item corr.
Factor 1: Unique experience and entertainment		4.36	0.94	0.58
To be part of this unique and exciting event	0.81			
The event is a unique experience	0.77			
It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience	0.75			
Because I enjoy these type of events	0.75			
It is an exciting thing to do	0.75			
WWE Smackdown is a well-known international brand	0.74			
I always wanted to see WWE Smackdown wrestlers perform live	0.71			
These events are entertainment at its best	0.70			
Watching them on television made me want to see them perform live	0.64			
To have fun	0.62			
This is value for money entertainment	0.60			
To see my favourite Smackdown wrestler(s)	0.56			
Factor 2: Socialisation		3.06	0.75	0.43
To meet new people	0.71			
It is a sociable event	0.63			
Because I got tickets for free or as a present	0.52			
I try to attend as many of these events as possible	0.46			
Factor 3: Wrestling enjoyment		3.90	0.89	0.62
I enjoy the aggressiveness of the wrestlers	0.81			
I enjoy watching women wrestle	0.72			
I enjoy watching men wrestle	0.69			
I enjoy the rivalry and interaction between the wrestlers	0.67			
I enjoy watching their skills and abilities	0.42			
Factor 4: Known-group affiliation and novelty		4.01	0.77	0.41
For a chance to be with people who are enjoying themselves	0.58			
Because of curiosity	0.49			
To share the event with someone special	0.47			
To experience new things	0.42			
To spend time with family and friends	0.40			
Total Variance	63%			

Compared to previous research, as discussed in the literature review, Ashley *et al.* (2000), Ford (2007) and Wann *et al.* (2008) also identified *Entertainment* as a motive of WWE fans. Ford (2007) was the only author to identify a similar motive to *Socialisation*, finding that US fans attend a wrestling event since it is a place where they can meet up with other fans. The motive *Wrestling enjoyment* corresponds with results obtained by Saunders (1998), Ashley *et*

al. (2000), Burke (2001), Deeter-Schmeltz and Sojka (2004) and Ford (2007), while Saunders (1998), Ashley *et al.* (2000), Burke (2001), James and Ross (2004) and Wann *et al.* (2008) identified known-group affiliation or family togetherness as a motive in their respective research. *Unique experience* and *novelty* have not previously been identified as motives of WWE fans.

Results from the cluster analysis

An exploratory cluster analysis based on all cases in the data was performed on the motivational factors. A hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's method of Euclidean distances, was used to determine the clusters' structures. Two- and 3-cluster solutions were investigated, and the three-cluster solution was selected as the most discriminatory (Figure 1). The results of the multivariate analyses were used to identify the three clusters and to indicate that significant differences existed between them ($p < 0.05$).

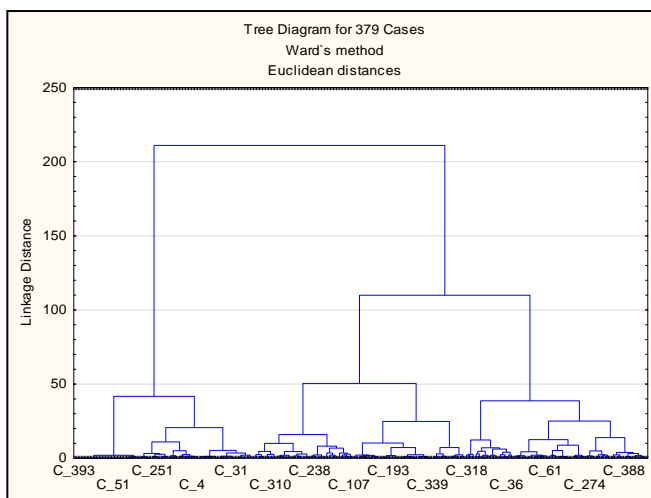


FIGURE 1: THREE CLUSTER SOLUTION: WARD'S METHOD WITH SQUARED EUCLIDEAN DISTANCE MEASURES

Identification of segmented clusters

As shown in Table 2, ANOVAs indicate that all 4 motivational factors contributed to differentiating between the three motivational clusters ($p < 0.05$).

Cluster 1 contained 120 respondents and had the lowest mean scores across the 4 motivation factors. It was thus labelled the *Recreational fans*. The large number of respondents in this cluster could be explained by the fact that these visitors accompanied members of either Cluster 2 or Cluster 3 to the event. Cluster 2 was labelled the *Avid fans*, contained 119 respondents and had the highest means scores across all four motivational factors, implying that these fans want the complete package when they attend these types of live events. Surprisingly this cluster had the fewest respondents. Cluster 3 contained the most respondents

(140) and was especially motivated by *Unique experience and entertainment* and *Wrestling enjoyment*. This cluster was labelled the *Aficionados* since they place a higher importance on the wrestling entertainment and skills than on socialisation and novelty.

TABLE 2: ANOVA AND TUKEY'S POST HOC MULTIPLE COMPARISONS FOR MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN THREE SUPPORTER CLUSTERS

Motives to attend	Cluster 1 Recr. Fans (n=120)	Cluster 2 Avid fans (n=119)	Cluster 3 Aficionados (n=140)	F-ratio	p-Value
Unique experience and entertainment	3.58 ^a	4.78 ^b	4.64 ^b	168.123	<0.05
Socialisation	2.37 ^a	4.45 ^b	3.39 ^a	328.090	<0.05
Wrestling enjoyment	2.65 ^a	4.59 ^b	4.38 ^c	336.378	<0.05
Known-group affiliation and novelty	3.43 ^a	4.63 ^b	3.91 ^c	72.640	<0.05

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

^a Group differs significantly from type (in row) where ^b is indicated

^c Group differs significantly from type (in row) where ^a and ^b are indicated

ANOVAs were used to determine whether significant differences existed between the 3 clusters of WWE fans based on other socio-demographic and behavioural variables.

TABLE 3: ANOVA AND TUKEY'S POST HOC MULTIPLE COMPARISON RESULTS FOR MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN THREE CLUSTERS OF SUPPORTERS

Characteristics	Cluster 1 Recr. Fans (n=120)	Cluster 2 Avid fans (n=119)	Cluster 3 Aficionados (n=140)	F-ratio	p-Value
Age	33 ^a	32 ^a	28 ^b	10.325	0.001*
Group size	3	3	3	0.530	0.589
No. of people paid for	3	3	3	0.520	0.595
Nights in area	3	5	5	0.512	0.602
No. of tickets purchased	3	3	3	0.379	0.685
No. attend similar events	3	2	2	0.070	0.932
Spending per person ^o	R656.28	R727.62	R700.16	0.241	0.786

^oExpenditure per person, which was calculated by adding the spending of the respondent on the various components asked, and dividing the total by the number of people respondents⁷ indicated they were financially responsible for.

* Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$

^a Group differs significantly from type (in row) where ^b is indicated.

As shown in Table 3, age was the only significant difference among the *Recreational fans*, *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* ($p=0.001$). *Recreational fans* and *Avid fans* were older (mean age of 33 and 32 year, respectively) than the *Aficionados*, who were the youngest visitors at the event with an average age of 28 years. Based on the other variables, there were no statistically significant differences between the 3 clusters. All 3 clusters travelled in groups of an average of 3 persons, were financially responsible for all 3 persons and purchased an average of 3

tickets. It seems that the *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* spend more nights in the area (an average of 5 nights) compared to *Recreational fans* (an average of 3 nights). However, *Recreational fans* were more inclined to attend more similar events a year (an average of 3 shows compared to 2 shows for the other 2 clusters). It is not surprising that the *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* were the higher spenders at the event (an average of R727.62 and R700.16 respectively), while the *Recreational fans* spent the least (an average of R656.28).

Cross-tabulations and chi-square test results

As Table 4 shows, there were statistically significant differences between the motivational clusters in terms of marital status ($p = 0.036$), level of education ($p = 0.001$), decision to attend ($p = 0.003$), television ($p = 0.001$), website ($p = 0.003$), magazines ($p = 0.001$) and newspapers ($p = 0.039$) as sources of information, reasons for not attending similar events (*there were no events I was interested in*: $p = 0.043$), Raw ($p = 0.026$) as preferred to the WWE programme and personality type being adventurous ($p = 0.024$). At a 10% level, word-of-mouth ($p = 0.066$) and Facebook ($p = 0.089$) as sources of information and Smackdown as preferred to the WWE show ($p = 0.077$) also showed significant differences. These significant differences are discussed below.

Marital status: More *Recreational* and *Avid fans* were married (57 and 51% respectively) compared to *Aficionados* who were mostly single or living together.

Level of education: For *Avid fans* and *Aficionados*, matric was their highest level of education, while *Recreational fans* seem to have a higher level of education (diploma, degree).

Decision to attend: More *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* made their decision to attend the event well in advance (when it was announced a year ago), while *Recreational fans* made their decision a month or two prior to the show.

Preferred sources of information: More *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* heard about the event from television, the website, magazines, newspapers, word-of-mouth and Facebook, which emphasises the fact that these two markets were enthusiastic supporters and followers of the WWE storyline, watched the shows regularly and kept up to date with the latest WWE news. With the exception of television, *Recreational fans* did not make intensive use of other media sources, which could be explained by these visitors probably accompanying *Avid fans* or *Aficionados* to the event.

Reasons for not attending similar events: More *Recreational fans* and *Aficionados* did not attend similar events because no events that interested them were available. It seemed that *Recreational fans* were not keen supporters of any type of event and once again stresses that these visitors just accompanied someone to the event. In the case of the *Aficionados*, this market seemed to be serious wrestling fans and therefore most likely to attend only these types of events. *Avid fans*, on the other hand, are more likely to attend a variety of events.

TABLE 4: CHI-SQUARE RESULTS OF VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS (N=414)

Characteristics	Motivational clusters			CHI Square value	df	p-Value	PHI-value
	Cluster 1 Recr. Fans (n=120)	Cluster 2 Avid fans (n=119)	Cluster 3 Aficionados (n=140)				
<i>Gender</i>							
Male	74%	76%	67%	5.843	4	0.212	0.125
Female	26%	24%	33%				
<i>Home language</i>							
Afrikaans	45%	46%	43%	3.549	6	0.737	0.098
English	47%	42%	46%				
Other	7%	12%	11%				
<i>Occupation</i>							
Professional	31%	27%	28%	17.955	20	0.590	0.220
Self-employed	17%	14%	13%				
Technical	15%	11%	9%				
Sales	7%	11%	10%				
Work at mine	4%	4%	1%				
Civil service	1%	0%	1%				
Housewife	1%	3%	1%				
Pensioner	0%	0%	1%				
Student	15%	15%	22%				
Unemployed	1%	2%	3%				
Other	9%	13%	9%				
<i>Province</i>							
Western Cape	1%	1%	0%	23.458	20	0.267	0.249
Gauteng	78%	79%	84%				
Eastern Cape	0%	1%	0%				
North West	5%	7%	6%				
Mpumalanga	7%	0%	3%				
Northern Cape	3%	1%	0%				
KwaZulu-Natal	3%	2%	1%				
Limpopo	2%	5%	4%				
Free State	1%	3%	1%				
Outside RSA	1%	2%	1%				

TABLE 4 (cont.)

Characteristic	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	CHI ²	df	p	PHI
<i>Live closer than 30km from venue</i>							
Yes	32%	31%	27%	1.015	2	0.602	0.052
No	68%	69%	73%				
<i>Marital status</i>				16.484	8	0.036*	0.211
Single	32%	40%	47%				
Married	57%	51%	38%				
Living together	8%	5%	13%				
Divorced	4%	3%	1%				
Widow/er	0%	1%	1%				
<i>Level of educ.</i>				34.613	12	0.001*	0.312
No school	3%	5%	1%				
Matric	27%	45%	49%				
Diploma, degree	46%	20%	25%				
Postgraduate	11%	5%	7%				
Professional	8%	12%	11%				
Other	6%	12%	8%				
<i>Decision to attend</i>				23.004	8	0.003*	0.247
Spontaneous	8%	12%	8%				
A month ago	24%	9%	9%				
Month+ ago	23%	18%	22%				
A year ago	39%	54%	58%				
Other	5%	7%	2%				
<i>Initiator of attendance</i>				15.613	12	0.210	0.211
Self	34%	52%	42%				
Friends	16%	11%	9%				
Media	1%	2%	3%				
Spouse	7%	9%	10%				
Family (kids)	35%	24%	30%				
Work	1%	0%	1%				
Boy/girlfriend	6%	2%	6%				
<i>Preferred accommodation</i>				10.089	10	0.433	0.180
Local resident	56%	52%	55%				
Family or friends	15%	20%	17%				
Guesthouse/B&B	8%	7%	6%				
Hotel	8%	6%	5%				
Rent full house	6%	6%	2%				
Other	6%	9%	15%				

TABLE 4 (cont.)

Characteristic	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	CHI ²	df	p	PHI
<i>Main sources of information</i>							
Television	Yes=68%	Yes=87%;	Yes=81%	15.159	2	0.001*	0.199
Radio	Yes=27%	Yes=28%;	Yes=25%	0.254	2	0.881	0.028
Website	Yes= 8%	Yes=21%;	Yes=22%	11.567	2	0.003*	0.175
Magazines	Yes= 4%	Yes=19%;	Yes= 9%	13.358	2	0.001*	0.188
Newspapers	Yes= 4%	Yes=13%;	Yes= 9%	6.476	2	0.039*	0.131
Word-of-mouth	Yes= 6%	Yes=14%;	Yes=17%	5.427	2	0.066**	0.120
Facebook	Yes= 6%	Yes=14%;	Yes=12%	4.828	2	0.089**	0.113
<i>Reasons not attending similar events</i>							
Restricted money	Yes=15%	Yes=21%	Yes=15%	2.164	2	0.339	0.076
Restricted time	Yes=22%	Yes=16%	Yes=14%	3.606	2	0.165	0.098
No events interesting	Yes=31%	Yes=18%	Yes=29%	6.272	2	0.043*	0.129
<i>Preferred wrestling programme</i>							
Raw	Yes=69%	Yes=77%;	Yes=84%	7.311	2	0.026*	0.142
Smackdown	Yes=62%	Yes=73%;	Yes=74%	5.126	2	0.077**	0.009
<i>Personality type</i>							
Sociable	Yes=65%	Yes=56%;	Yes=60%	2.270	2	0.321	0.077
Outgoing	Yes=46%	Yes=50%;	Yes=47%	0.347	2	0.841	0.030
Adventurous	Yes=45%	Yes=42%;	Yes=58%	7.481	2	0.024*	0.140
Shy	Yes=14%	Yes=11%;	Yes=15%	0.994	2	0.608	0.051

* Significance = 5% level

** Significance = 10% level

Preferred WWE programme: More *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* were avid supporters of Raw and Smackdown, compared to *Recreational fans* who watched occasionally.

Personality type: More *Aficionados* described themselves as adventurous compared to *Recreational* and *Avid fans*.

There were no significant differences based on other socio-demographic and behavioural variables. All e clusters were predominantly male, either Afrikaans- or English-speaking, in a professional line of occupation (more *Aficionados* were students), local residents from Gauteng Province, live further than 30km from the venue, initiated their attendance themselves or were convinced by family (children) and described themselves as sociable and outgoing.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research set out to provide possible answers to two questions pertaining to the motives of WWE fans: (1) What motivates fans to watch and attend live performances of the WWE, and (2) Do WWE fans in different countries have similar motives. In answering these questions, the results showed that WWE fans in South Africa are motivated by four reasons: *Unique experience and entertainment*; *Socialisation*; *Wrestling enjoyment*; and *Known-group affiliation and novelty*. These motives in general correspond with most of the motives identified for WWE fans in the US by Saunders (1998), Ashley *et al.* (2000), Burke (2001), Deeter-Schmeltz and Soijka (2004), James and Ross (2004), Ford (2007) and Wann *et al.* (2008). However, the grouping and combination of these motives differ significantly, for example the combined motives: *Unique experience and entertainment*; and *Known-group affiliation and novelty*. In addition, this research generated two motives: *Unique experience*; and *Novelty* that have not previously been identified. It, therefore, shows that regional or location differences do exist, which implies that whatever is valid in one situation cannot necessarily be applied to another situation. It is clear that the WWE's success is based on its entertainment value. Therefore, spectator motives are significantly different to those of other sporting events.

WWE fans cannot be regarded as having homogeneous motives. Based on the travel motives, three distinct clusters of South African fans were identified: *Recreational fans*; *Avid fans*; and *Aficionados*. These clusters had significantly different motives for attending, with the *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* showing a greater interest in the 'sport' and 'entertainment' surrounding the WWE than *Recreational fans* who only watched the WWE occasionally and seemed to have accompanied either an *Avid fan* or *Aficionado* to the event. These clusters showed some similarities to the types of fans identified by Saunders (1998), and the differences between the clusters were not based on socio-demographic variables (with the exception of age), but rather on behavioural characteristics. These results differ significantly when compared to spectators of other sport events, as there is usually a greater combination of socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics. Once again, this can be ascribed to the entertainment phenomenon surrounding the WWE. Contrary to the stereotype surrounding WWE fans, the results support the findings by Ashley *et al.* (2000), that WWE fans are well educated in high-income occupations.

Based on the results and findings, this research has the following implications. *Recreational fans* are not committed fans of the WWE; they only watch it occasionally and, since they seem to accompany someone else to the event, watching the WWE on television is probably also unintentional. This cluster of fans is not a reliable market from an economic and sustainable point of view. However, marketers should focus their marketing efforts on the *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* markets. These fans are younger (therefore have long-term marketing potential), loyal to the WWE, serious about the sport, higher spenders and plan their attendance to these live events well in advance. In attracting these markets, the emphasis should be placed on the wrestling itself, the unique experience and entertainment surrounding the events, as well as group and family togetherness.

Since more *Avid fans* and *Aficionados* describe themselves as ‘adventurous’, the ‘extreme’ and ‘hardcore’ nature of the WWE should also be incorporated in the marketing messages. The WWE should continue to build on their current “I was there campaign” to encourage fans to attend live events. As these events are not regular occurrences in South Africa, this campaign can further grow their South African fan base, since these fans want to feel part of the event. Based on the fans’ preferred sources of information, marketing messages should be communicated via mass media (radio and television, especially during Raw and Smackdown), printed media (newspapers and magazines), as well as electronic media (the WWE website and social networks such as Facebook).

CONCLUSION

This research determined the travel motives of South African WWE fans attending a live wrestling event of the television programme Smackdown. Four travel motives were identified: *Unique experience and entertainment*; *Socialisation*; *Wrestling enjoyment*; and *Known-group affiliation and novelty* and, based on these motives, three distinct clusters of fans were identified: *Recreational fans*; *Avid fans*; and *Aficionados*. These fans differ significantly based on their travel motives and behavioural characteristics and results showed that WWE fans are a heterogeneous market. For this reason, the marketing campaigns should be designed according to their individual needs and preferences. In sport entertainment, the interactive nature of the shows and live performances mean that the spectators or fans are extremely important to the sustainability of WWE’s success and popularity.

This was the first time that WWE fans in South Africa were analysed and from this analysis several contributions were made. In particular, insight was gained in the profile of WWE fans and their travel motives in the country. According to the literature review, this is the only similar study conducted outside the USA, and the results were compared to the results of these studies. The research contributes to the field of knowledge, especially in the context of sport entertainment. Another important contribution is contextualising the important role that spectators play in sport entertainment, as without these spectators there most probably would not be a WWE.

It is recommended that further research explore the motives of fans at a live performance of Raw, since the superstars (wrestlers) and storylines differ from Smackdown. This will enhance insight into the demeanour of WWE fans. A greater understanding of sport interests of these fans would also give a greater understanding of sport entertainment versus sport in general. The motives of fans at other types of sport entertainment events, such as gladiator, dodgeball and poker tournaments, should also be analysed in order to compare results.

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