

**DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION WITH THE
SEASON TICKET SERVICE OF
PROFESSIONAL SPORT CLUBS**

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Linda Van Leeuwen

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is associated with numerous positive business outcomes (Kotler, 1994) and is recognised as an important field of study. However, only limited research has addressed the satisfaction of the sport customer with even fewer studies (Madrigal, 1995; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994) examining the determinants of this satisfaction. Furthermore, no customer satisfaction research has addressed the determinants of satisfaction with the season ticket service. Season ticket holders are among professional sport clubs' most important customers. Professional sport clubs need to be cognisant of those factors that influence the satisfaction of their customers, particularly season ticket holders. This research empirically tested the determinants of customer satisfaction with the season ticket service of professional sport clubs.

Two research models were developed and tested in this thesis: the Expectations Model and the Non-Expectations Model. The models were grounded in the disconfirmation of expectations theory of customer satisfaction, sport marketing theory, social identity theory and services marketing theory. Specifically, the models extended the Disconfirmation of Expectations Model (DEM) to incorporate club identification and the win/lose phenomenon as determinants of sport customer satisfaction. The initial inspiration for the inclusion of the two sport-specific determinants arose from the work of Mullin (1985). The models also included the outcome variable of repeat purchase intention as commonly suggested by the literature. Furthermore, the models accounted for customer satisfaction arising from both the core (i.e., the actual game) and peripheral (i.e., factors external to the game) dimensions of the season ticket service, in accord with services marketing theory.

Season ticket holders from 10 of the 11 clubs in the Australian National Basketball League (NBL) participated in the research. The research employed a two-stage design whereby season ticket holders who returned useable questionnaires from the pre-season survey were later administered with a post-season questionnaire. Of the 808 questionnaires distributed in the second survey, 577 useable questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 71.41 percent.

Structural equation modelling was the dominant mode of analysis employed in this thesis. The data analysis together with existing theory indicated that the Non-Expectations model was the superior representation of the customer satisfaction process. The superiority of the Non-Expectations model put in question the utility of the DEM as a useful paradigm of customer satisfaction determinants.

The research findings indicated that club identification, followed by the win/lose phenomenon, had the greatest influence on customer satisfaction. All other determinants were also found to influence customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the results indicated that customer satisfaction arises from the core as well as peripheral dimensions of the season ticket service. Importantly, these results revealed that professional sport clubs do have control over the satisfaction experienced by season ticket holders irrespective of whether the team wins or loses.

This thesis examined relationships that had not previously been subjected to empirical investigation. The research findings considerably aid our understanding of the determinants of sport customer satisfaction, particularly satisfaction with the season ticket service of professional sport clubs. Furthermore, the findings have significant managerial implications for professional sport clubs.