



# **Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction among South African football fans: The role of social interactive motive**

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## REMARKS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The editorial style in the first and last chapters of this mini-dissertation follows the format prescribed by the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus).
- The referencing as well as the writing style used in this mini-dissertation ensures compliance with prescriptions by the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Vaal Triangle Campus) to use the APA style in all scientific documents and publications.
- This mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* is used in the second chapter.

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“Knowledge is power, but enthusiasm pulls the switch”

## DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I, Elizma Stander, hereby declare that “**Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction among South African football fans: The role of social interactive motive**” is my own work and that both the views and the opinions expressed in this mini-dissertation are my own and those of the authors as referenced in the text and indicated in the reference lists.

I furthermore declare that this work will not be submitted to any other academic institution for qualification purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Standar', is centered on the page. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**ELIZMA STANDER**

May 2018

## DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I hereby declare that I was responsible for the language editing of the mini-dissertation **Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction among South African football fans: The role of social interactive** submitted by Elizma Stander.

A handwritten signature in black ink. The first part is a stylized monogram 'ED' enclosed in a circle. To the right of the circle, the name 'iedericks' is written in a cursive script.

**DR ELSABÉ DIEDERICKS**

30 May 2018

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## SUMMARY

### **Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction among South African football fans: The role of social interactive motive**

**Key terms:** Fan engagement, meaning, life satisfaction, social interaction motive, football fans, South Africa

The exponential growth of the global sport industry has led to extensive research concerning the role of sport fan engagement regarding the commercial development. Sport fan engagement drives commercial development, due to the fact that services and products relating to fans and favourite sport teams lead to business growth. The forecast for growth is made and can contribute to employment, development of the leisure and entertainment sector, as well as merchandise expansion. It was found that 54% of the South African population follows football as a sport, contributing to levels of engrossment that drive the psychological connection. Despite the significant research into the psychological underpinnings of sport consumerism and the association that the emotive engrossment of sport fans has proven with the commercial prosperity of the industry globally, no work has evaluated how the intensity of the fan engagement experience translates into favourable personal outcomes.

Understanding the engendering outcomes associated with fan engagement can assist in directing practical strategies that support the well-being of sport consumers. The objective of this study was to evaluate the influence of sport fan engagement on the personal, well-being related outcomes of meaning and life satisfaction amongst a sample of South African football fans. A secondary aim was to examine this relationship through introduction of social interaction motive.

A cross-sectional, exploratory design was implemented amongst 565 football fans attending matches at a stadium in the Gauteng province. The Fan Engagement Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale and Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption, together with a biographical questionnaire were utilised as measuring instruments. Structural equation modelling analysis was conducted, specifying regression paths between variables. The results of the study suggested a direct effect of sport fan engagement on meaning and life satisfaction. The

results revealed a positive predictive relationship between sport fan engagement and life satisfaction. This was further supported by correlations of high practical significance between all three of the dimensions of fan engagement and satisfaction with life. Results further revealed the existence of indirect paths to meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive.

A number of recommendations were made to further enhance the study. The sport fan engagement experience can be explored relating to personal outcomes, apart from meaning and life satisfaction only. The study can be extended towards other popular sporting codes in South Africa to support the results from the study and enhance the commercial development of the sport industry. Future studies can also focus on the specific elements of sport fan engagement to comprehend which dimensions predict the greatest levels of meaning and life satisfaction. Recommendations for future research included undertaking longitudinal research designs to evaluate the impact of fan engagement over time.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This mini-dissertation explores the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction. The specific focus is to ascertain whether fan engagement predicts meaning and life satisfaction amongst sport fans. A secondary objective is evaluating the effect of this relationship through social interaction motive as a driver of sport consumption.

In this chapter the problem statement is formulated. The general and specific research objectives of the study are highlighted. The research design and method are explained and an overview of the chapters is provided.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The important role of sport fan engagement in driving the commercial development and expansion of the global sport industry is well documented. Vale and Fernandes (2018) comment that the engrossment of fans in interacting with their favourite sport teams or athletes has led to the commercialisation of various offerings, services and products, herewith maturing the sport industry and leading to business growth. Through continued engagement of fans, professional sport teams have been able to build portfolios of value, leveraging products, merchandising, tickets to matches and various other leisure offerings (Giulianotti & Numerato, 2018; Hoyer, Smith, Nicholson, & Stewart, 2015; Parganas, Liasko, & Anagnostopoulos, 2017). Sport fan engagement has played a critical role in sustaining the commercial growth of the sport industry, regardless of challenging and volatile economic circumstances (Koortzen & Oosthuizen, 2012; Lee & Yuan, 2017). Industry forecasts remain optimistic, with PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017) projecting a 6.4% growth rate for the global sport industry into the future. This will also be replicated in South Africa, where an annual compound growth rate of 5.9% over the long term is predicted (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011), and the contribution of the sport sector directly and indirectly is estimated at 2% to the overall gross domestic product (GDP) (Chan, 2010). Sport fan engagement plays a prominent role in the commercial expansion of the sport industry, herewith contributing to

employment, evolution of the entertainment and leisure sector, infrastructure development and expansion of merchandising (Giulianotti & Numerato, 2018; Madrigal, Hamill, & Gill 2013).

The economic and business growth value of the sport fan engagement experience has thus clearly been proven. The inherent commercial value of a community of engrossed fans remains undisputed. A major research gap, however, exists with regards to the personal outcomes of engagement amongst fans. Knowledge is required in understanding how the sport engagement interaction relates to personal experiences of fans. Whilst it has been established that sport consumption and the motives that inform that consumption could lead to components of well-being [including for example intrinsic psychological reward (Stander & van Zyl, 2016), positive emotions (Potter & Keene, 2012), heightened sense of identity (Chun, Gentry, & McGinnis, 2005) and positive affect (Stander & de Beer, 2016)], no research has explored how the extent of a sport fan's engrossment with his/her favourite team could lead to desired outcomes on a personal level.

The great organisational value that is rendered through the engagement experience of fans has necessitated an exploration of the individual level factors associated with the construct (Doyle, Filo, Lock, Funk, & McDonald, 2016). Kim, Kim, and Rogol (2017) comment that an opportunity exists to leverage fan engagement to create positive personal outcomes amongst a large group of stakeholders. This view is supported by Wheatly and Bickerton (2017), who state that engagement in directed activities such as sport consumption has the potential to enhance subjective well-being and requires further research. Through understanding of the personal outcomes attainable through sport fan engagement, the experience can be utilised in the pursuit of enduring, meaningful exchanges. This research will seek to explore the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction.

Sport fan engagement is conceptualised as a fan's affective commitment to a particular sport team, brand or code and is characterised by a number of behavioural actions that demonstrate loyalty, passion, engrossment and affinity (Bernthal, Koesters, Ballouli, & Brown, 2015; Shank & Lyberger, 2014; Smith & Stewart, 2007; Wakefield, 2016). Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) describe fan engagement as the decision fans make to invest financial or energy resources in consuming the services and products offered by their favourite sport team. When sport fans are

engaged, they actively partake in the various activities offered by their preferred sport teams, making an effort to acquaint themselves with the developments of that team and seeking to partake dynamically in a community of fans who share allegiance to the team (Casper, Pfahl, & McCullough, 2014; Ioakimidis, 2010).

Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, and Biscaia (2014) conceptualise sport fan engagement through three dimensions, namely management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance. Management support suggests an active effort on the part of the fan to promote the interests of the team or club and to assist the management and executive body of such team or club to position the entity for success. Auh, Bell, McCleod, and Shih (2007) describe this as the willingness of a fan to invest effort in directing the progress of the sport club or team. Prosocial behaviour refers to those ambassadorial actions that fans engage in to emphasise their support for a particular team in allegiance with others. Stander and de Beer (2016) describe this as the fellowship that emerges when fans support their preferred teams in cohesion with others. Performance tolerance implies that fans remain loyal and committed to their team regardless of the team's actual performances and win/lose track record (Yoshida et al., 2014). It alludes to fans' long term commitment to support their favourite teams through different seasons and successes (Kanosue, Oshimi, Harada, & Kogiso, 2015).

Sport fan engagement has been directly related to a number of positive commercial outcomes, including revenue growth, enhanced match attendance, increased merchandise expenditure and repeat loyalty purchases (Auh et al., 2007; Norris, Wann, & Zapalac, 2015; Pronschinske, Groza, & Walker, 2012; Stander & de Beer, 2016; Yoshida et al., 2014). More knowledge is required on the potential individual effects of fan engagement. This study will address the existing research gap insofar the relationship between sport fan engagement and personal outcomes is concerned, by focusing on the outcome variables of meaning and life satisfaction. Meaning refers to the experience of purpose and significance (Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). It constitutes the perception on the part of the individual that the activities he/she is participating in are worthwhile and important (Martela, Ryan, & Steger, 2017). Life satisfaction is the general judgement of one's life circumstances as being favourable (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). It is directly associated with happiness (Tay, Kuykendall, & Diener, 2015; van Zyl &

Rothmann, 2012). Meaning and life satisfaction are both constructs associated with subjective well-being (Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010) and are therefore regarded as favourable personal outcomes.

Two theoretical models are utilised to suggest the predicted relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction. The attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), which is a mature framework in the customer engagement literature, holds that consumers often develop a strong emotional affinity to a particular product or service. Consumers' decision to purchase is driven by the internal reward they perceive associated with the offering and stretches beyond their cognitive evaluation of the utilitarian value of the product (Guttman, 2013). The intensity with which consumers experience the internal reward will moderate the regularity by which they engage with the brand or offering (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). Within the domain of sport fan consumption, fans often find congruence in their own identity and the values represented by their sport team, aligning themselves to the brand presentation of the team and experiencing the activities offered by the team as purposeful. This creates a significant emotive bond between the sports fan and the team. Based on the attachment theory, this study postulates that fan engagement will lead to a heightened experience of meaning and life satisfaction.

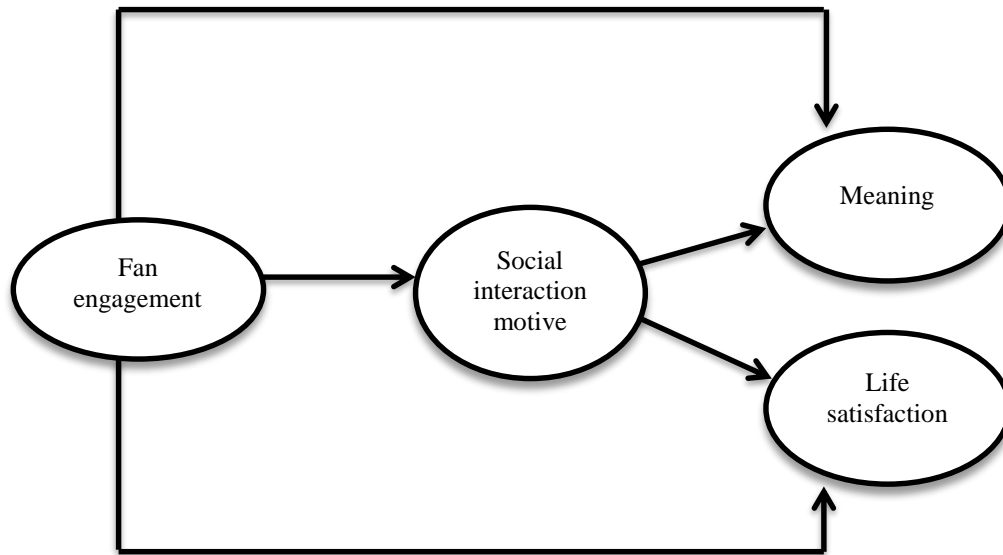
The broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2005) is a second theoretical model utilised for conceptualising the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction. This theory suggests that, when particular actions are met with the experience of internal reward, this will lead to patterns of repeated engagement, building thought action repertoires that over time lead to sustainable well-being. When a fan engages vigorously with the properties of a particular team or sport, and experiences this as rewarding, the fan is most likely to seek repeated engagements (Stander, de Beer, & Stander, 2016). In a study by Hewer, Gannon, and Cordina (2015), this was supported, as it was found that the passion and fandom experienced by fans mobilise them to seek frequent interactions with the brand of the team. When there are no engagement opportunities available, these fans become dissatisfied. This is also supported by Wann, Hackathorn, and Sherman (2017), who relate that team identification in sport engagement effort creates a sense of belonging and contributes towards feelings of internal reward on the part of fans. Engagement on the part of the fan presents an individualised and unique experience to

every fan (Yoshida, Gordon, James, & Heere, 2015). It is therefore plausible to argue that favourable individual personal outcomes can be attainable through repeated and frequent engagement with a particular sport team or sport.

When arguing that a research gap exists pertaining to the relationship between sport fan engagement and personal outcomes, this is extended in terms of the environments required to facilitate this relationship. The second objective of this research is to examine how the social motive that exists amongst sport fans may indirectly affect the relationship of sport fan engagement to meaning and life satisfaction. Rhee, Wong, and Kim (2016) regard social identity as a critical driver of sport fans' decision to consume sport with fellow spectators. The authors argue that there is often a common identity, shared value system or culture that exists amongst the fans of a particular sport club. This creates a meaningful and engaging community to which people affiliate. Fans find enjoyment in supporting their favourite sport team with others – it creates unity and shared experiences (da Silva & Las Casas, 2017; Karakaya, Yannopoulos, & Kefalaki, 2015; Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014; Trail, Anderson, & Lee, 2017). Based on the motivation for sport consumption theory (Trail & James, 2001), it is possible to suggest that social interaction motive, a major driver of sport consumption, will influence the relationship between engagement and personal outcomes.



The hypothesised model of the research is provided below.



*Figure 1.* A hypothesised model of sport fan engagement, meaning, and life satisfaction, with the possible indirect effects through social interaction motive

## 1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to address the stated research problem:

- How is the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction conceptualised in literature?
- Does fan engagement have an influence on the experience of meaning and life satisfaction amongst sport fans?
- Does an indirect effect exist in the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive?
- What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

## **1.3 Research Objectives**

### **1.3.1 General Objective**

The general objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction and to evaluate the potential indirect effect of this relationship through social interaction motive.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- determine how the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction is conceptualised in literature;
- establish whether fan engagement has an influence on the experience of meaning and life satisfaction amongst sport fans;
- investigate whether an indirect effect exists in the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive; and
- make recommendations for future research and practice.

## **1.4 Research Design**

### **1.4.1 Research Approach**

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was implemented for this study, suggesting data was collected at a single point in time (Salkind, 2011). Harwell (2011) defines quantitative research methods as an “attempt to maximize objectivity, replicability, and generalise ability of findings, and are typically interested in prediction” (p. 149). The advantage of using a quantitative research approach is that the findings of the data may be generalised to the population (Maree & Pietersen, 2013). Convenience sampling method was used to gather responses. The research was descriptive and exploratory.

### **1.4.2 Research Method**

A literature review was conducted, followed by an empirical analysis through quantitative statistics.

### **1.4.3 Research Participants**

The study was conducted amongst a sample of South African football fans at the home stadium of a major football club based in the Gauteng province. The rationale for selecting football was that it is the most popular fan consumer sport, globally as well as in South Africa (Giulianotti, 2012; Saayman & Rossouw, 2008). For the purpose of this study, a sample of 565 South African football fans participated (N = 565). There were no specific requirements pertaining to demographics of the participants. Byrne (2012) comments that sample size for structural equation modelling should be at least 200 or higher to deduct meaningful statistical analyses.

### **1.4.4 Measuring Instruments**

A biographical questionnaire and four measuring instruments were used to measure the constructs of sport fan engagement, social interaction motive, meaning and life satisfaction.

*Biographical questionnaire.* A biographical questionnaire probed information regarding participants' gender, age, race and level of education. Furthermore, information was sought on key indicators of interaction with the fans' preferred sport team, for example, number of matches attended physically at the stadium per year, extent of expenditure on team merchandise and related leisure products and involvement in formal and organised supporters' branches.

*Fan Engagement Scale (FES; Yoshida et al., 2014).* The three dimensions of fan engagement are measured through the FES, namely management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance. Example items include, "I try to make my team's event management easier" (management support), "I often interact with other fans to talk about issues related to my team" (prosocial behaviour), and "I display the logo of my football team on my clothing even if they do

not perform well” (performance tolerance). There are nine items for the FES in total, which are scored on a 7-point Likert type scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability for the FES has been established as  $\alpha = 0.86$  through Cronbach alpha coefficients by Yoshida et al. (2014).

*Meaning in Life Questionnaire* (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006). The MLQ establishes the levels of perceived meaning of a participant. Three items were used from the scale to measure meaning levels of participants. Responses to the MLQ are captured on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely true) to 7 (absolutely untrue). Kashdan and Steger (2007) reported a reliability of 0.97 for the measure. Example items include, “My life has a clear sense of purpose”, “I have a clear sense of what makes my life meaningful” and “I have discovered a satisfying life purpose”.

*Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a self-evaluation of the individual respondent’s life circumstances. It is scored on a 7-point Likert type scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example item is “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”. The SWLS has been used reliably in various studies globally. Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006) reported an alpha coefficient of 0.86 for the scale.

*The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption* (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001). The MSSC comprises various dimensions that explore the different motives of why sport fans consume sport. One of these dimensions is social interaction motive, which is measured by three items. An example item includes “I support my team because I enjoy talking to other people”. The MSSC uses a 7-point Likert type scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Trail and James (2001) reported Cronbach alpha values of between 0.75 and 0.91 for the MSSC. Internal consistencies of the MSSC are represented by Cronbach’s alpha values higher than 0.70 (Diener et al., 1985; Pavot et al., 1991; Steger et al., 2006; Temane, Khumalo, & Wissing, 2014).

### **1.4.5 Research Procedure**

The research was done in partnership with a professional football club based in Johannesburg, Gauteng. This club provided permission for the research to be conducted. A research station was made ready at the home stadium of the team – this was used as a basis from where the questionnaires could be distributed during a number of identified matches. Before participating in the survey, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. Their voluntary and anonymous participation in the study were clearly explained to them. Respondents could withdraw from the research at any stage. Completed response sheets were collected and used for data capturing before the statistical analyses could commence.

### **1.4.6 Statistical Analysis**

Statistical analysis of the data was conducted with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). In terms of the statistical analyses process, demographic variables and characteristics of participants were summarised. Descriptive data was analysed. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine the measurement model of best possible fit. A robust maximum likelihood estimator was utilised for estimation of the data. Fit indices were considered at the following parameters: comparative fit index (CFI, acceptable  $\geq 0.90$ ), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, acceptable  $\geq 0.90$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, acceptable  $< 0.08$ ) and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR, acceptable  $< 0.08$ ) (Van De Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). A value of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for factor loadings in the confirmatory models, since confirmatory factor analysis and not exploratory factor analysis was used (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010).

Covariant relationships between the study variables were analysed by making use of a correlation matrix. In terms of relationships of correlation between the specified variables, values of 0.30-0.49 were considered medium effect sizes and values of 0.50 and above were considered large effect sizes (Cohen, 1992). Structural paths were added to the best fitting measurement model in the study to test the proposed hypotheses of the study. This enabled analysis of statistical significance, size and direction of standardised beta estimates. Bootstrapped resampling was used with redraws

set to 5000 (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011) to test the indirect paths specified in the research model. The level of statistical significance for this study was set at the 95% level that is  $p < 0.05$  to be considered significant.

## **1.5 Ethical Considerations**

All due ethical considerations were made. The research purpose was clearly explained to the participants and letters of informed consent were signed. They were briefed on the voluntary nature of their participation and the purpose of the research. Completion of the questionnaires took place at a football stadium and no discrimination took place. Participants could withdraw at any stage and their responses were kept anonymous. The researchers refrained from causing the participants harm. The completed questionnaires were kept at a secure location and only authorised professionals have access to them. The research was conducted as part of a bigger research study and with ethics approval from the North-West University under the number ECONIT-2016-006.

## **1.6 Contributions of the Study**

The contributions of the study for the individual, organisation and field of Industrial Psychology are herewith outlined.

### **1.6.1 Contribution for the Individual**

The consumption of sport is a significant economic activity and an important part of the leisure and entertainment sector, with many participants actively involved as fans. Knowledge on engaging with one's preferred sport team in a way that is engrossing, meaningful and impactful can increase one's subjective well-being, contributing to internal rewarding experiences and building sustainable well-being states over time. Through responsible and active engagement with a sport team in the community of others, positive citizenship, solidarity and partnership can be fostered. This can enhance well-being and support the positive outcomes available through the consumption of sport at an individual level.

### **1.6.2 Contribution for the Organisation**

In terms of value to the organisation, the executive management teams, key decision-making bodies and policy makers within the sport management fraternity can adapt and leverage their engagement strategies to support the attainment of personal well-being and favourable outcomes. Through interventions that support this relationship, more fans can benefit directly from supporting sport and their favourite teams. This provides a significant social responsibility opportunity on the part of professional sport teams, which can mobilise individual and social well-being through focused engagement strategies with their body of passionate fans. This will also create enhanced economic value in a virtuous cycle - fans that are more engaged, experiencing this engagement as internally meaningful, will likely seek enhanced interaction opportunities in their sport consumption activities.

### **1.6.3 Contribution for Industrial-Organisational Psychology Literature**

The study will support much needed work in the field of consumer psychology and well-being, a key branch of industrial and organisational psychology. The focus of the study is on the underlying psychological motives that drive sport consumption and lead fans to engage with the properties, activities and developments of their favourite teams. This is a specialist field in which industrial psychology scholars can support the executive management and marketing teams of professional sport teams. The industrial psychology domain offers companies or sport organisations the platform to engage with the needs of their supporters, together with the business drive for commercial success. The study will address a significant research gap pertaining to knowledge required on the potential personal outcomes associated with high fan engagement. It will augment the established work in relating fan engagement to favourable commercial outcomes and growth of the industry. The study will further address a required research need pertaining to the role of social interaction motive in the relationship between fan engagement and personal outcomes.

## **1.7 Chapter Division**

The chapters in this mini-dissertation are outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Research article

Chapter 3: Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

## **1.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a discussion of the problem statement as well as research objectives. The research method and measuring instruments were explained, followed by a brief overview of the chapters that will follow.



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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction of South African football fans: The role of social interaction motive**

Extensive research has been done on the role of sport fan engagement in the commercial development of the global sport industry. However, research pertaining to the potential personal effect of sport fan engagement remains limited. Understanding the engendering outcomes associated with fan engagement can assist in directing practical strategies that support the well-being of sport consumers. The objective of this study was to evaluate the influence of sport fan engagement on the personal, well-being related outcomes of meaning and life satisfaction amongst a sample of South African football fans. A secondary aim was to examine this relationship through the introduction of social interaction motive. A cross-sectional, exploratory design was implemented amongst 565 football fans attending matches at a stadium in the Gauteng province. The Fan Engagement Scale, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale and Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption were administered. Structural equation modelling analysis was conducted, specifying regression paths between variables. Results suggested a direct effect of sport fan engagement on meaning and life satisfaction. Results further revealed the existence of indirect paths to meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive. Results are discussed and recommendations made.

**Key terms:** Fan engagement, meaning, life satisfaction, social interaction motive, football fans, South Africa.



## INTRODUCTION

The global sport industry has continued enjoying positive and sustained growth rates despite challenging economic circumstances (Schwarz, Hall, & Shibli, 2015; Shank & Lyberger, 2014; Yoshida, James, & Cronin, 2013). Giulianotti and Numerato (2018) observe that the business of sport has benefitted from a mature consumer culture which has evolved continually throughout the financial crisis, volatile fiscal circumstances and declining growth rates in major economies around the world. Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2012) argue that sport consumers have maintained and enhanced their level of monetary spending in supporting, following and investing in their favourite teams. PricewaterhouseCoopers (2017) forecasts a 6.4% growth rate for the global sport industry in future. This is driven by a range of diverse offerings, including but not limited to retail, merchandising, ticketing, social media consumption, events and general diversified entertainment offerings (De Burca, Brannick, & Meenaghan, 2015; Madrigal et al., 2013). The global outlook for commercial consumption of sport remains optimistic, with scholars agreeing the industry will further mature, contributing to economic development, the creation of employment opportunities and general economic growth (Lee & Yuan, 2017; Madrigal, Hamill, & Gill 2013; Manoli, 2018).

The commercial success of the sport industry has kindled various studies in recent years, aimed at understanding the psychological underpinnings that drive behaviour and lead to sustained expenditure on the part of sport consumers. Wann, Hackathorn, and Sherman (2017) have established that sport fans form a strong sense of identification with their chosen teams, leading to a rewarding sense of belonging and facilitating repeated consumption in turn. Wakefield (2016) argues that sport fans form a passionate affinity with their preferred teams and sport, which creates a powerful social connection and drives enhanced engagement with the brand of that team/sport - directly and indirectly. Stander, de Beer, and Stander (2016) revealed a positive relationship between sport fan identification and purchasing decisions on the part of sport spectators in a study based on the customer engagement theory.

The sport industry has benefited from an engaged and engrossed group of consumers, driven by interaction motive and emotive connection to chosen sport teams (Larkin, Fink, & Trail, 2015; Onwumechili & Akindes, 2014; Stander & van Zyl, 2016). It is this active engagement and emotive

connection that have directly contributed to enhanced financial sponsorship and relevant investment on the part of corporate stakeholders in sport (Crompton, 2015; Stander & van Zyl, 2016). This in turn has led to enhanced commercialisation of sporting industry properties (Koenderman, 2013) and increased formalisation and economic organisation of the industry in general (Madrigal et al., 2013; Wann, Grieve, Havard, Zapalac, Peetz, & Lanter, 2017).

Although the commercial effects and positive relationship of sport fan engagement to the growth of the sport industry are clearly documented and well-researched, a research gap exists insofar knowledge regarding the personal outcomes of such sport fan engagement is concerned. However, as undisputed as the sport fan engagement movement is in its effect on the economic prospects of the sport industry at large, it is also necessary to understand whether this engagement holds inherent value to the carrier of such engrossment – the sports fan him/herself. Doyle, Filo, Lock, Funk, and McDonald (2016) argue that the extensive organisational value yielded by an engaged sport fan base necessitates an enquiry into the individual level factors that are created through engagement of fans with their favourite sport brands or teams. This point is also underlined by Kim, Kim, and Rogol (2017), who suggest that there is a unique opportunity to leverage the high levels of engagement of sport fans to heighten social and personal well-being. A key question is whether the high levels of sport fan engagement prevalent within the sport industry globally and beneficial to the financial and economic growth of the business, hold the potential to equally contribute to individual well-being and personal value. This study addresses this question by exploring the effect of sport fan engagement on meaning and life satisfaction in a sample of sport fans. No empirical evidence exists in terms of the relationship between sport fan engagement and personal outcomes such as meaning and life satisfaction.

## **Literature Review**

### *Fan Engagement*

Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease (2001) describe a sport fan as an individual that invests, either financially or emotionally (or both), in a certain sport, team or athlete. This investment is driven by a particular interest in the properties of such a team/athlete. Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, and

Biscaia (2014) were the first authors to specify and study fan engagement as a structured phenomenon, proposing the concept as an extension of the customer engagement theory. This theory specifies that consumers make both a cognitive and behavioural decision when deciding on a buying action (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011).

Within the sport domain, these consumers refer to the fans that willingly invest in the commercial offerings of a particular team or sport (Stander & de Beer, 2016). The investment of resources can include the purchasing of a team's products, attending important events or following a social community of fellow-fans (Stander & de Beer, 2016; Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003). Yoshida et al. (2014) refer to fan engagement as "a consumer's spontaneous, interactive and co-creative behaviours primarily in consumer-company exchanges to achieve his or her individual and social purposes" (p. 400). Fan engagement can be divided into three dimensions, namely management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance (Yoshida et al., 2014).

*Management support* is described by Stander and de Beer (2016) as "the willingness that sport fans display to make a cooperative and constructive contribution to the management of their preferred sport teams" (p.188). Their displayed willingness includes constructive feedback for enhancing fans' club experience and displaying a positive image during matches (Auh, Bell, McCleod, & Shih, 2007). Fans attempt to support their club's management through various methods of involvement, almost as if they form part of the club's management team itself.

*Prosocial behaviour* refers to the interaction that sport fans have with fellow fans and can be described as a network of fans that is formed either through attending matches together or via social platforms (Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Stander & de Beer, 2016). Prosocial behaviour is established through building networks with fellow fans (Brodie et al., 2011) and has significantly increased during recent years, particularly with the rise of social media platforms (Stander, de Beer, & Stander, 2016).

*Performance tolerance* refers to sport fans' willingness to engage with their favourite sport teams irrespective of the team's performance (Kanosue, Oshimi, Harada, & Kogiso, 2015). The

willingness can be observed through the display of the team logo, regardless of a bad season (De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000).

Fan engagement has become an actively researched phenomenon, since it acts as a key driver in consumer behaviour and can further economically strengthen the sport industry (Chang, Kang, & Connaughton, 2017; da Silva & Las Casa, 2017; Stander, de Beer, & Stander, 2016). Its ability to create favourable personal outcomes, however, remains largely unexplored, indicating a clear research gap. In this study, the effect of fan engagement on meaning and life satisfaction of sport fans is examined.

### *Meaning*

Meaning refers to individuals using their strengths towards something bigger than everyday life (Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010). Feelings of meaning are constituted in the elements of purpose, direction and significance (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Martela, Ryan, and Steger (2017) attribute meaning to a coherent understanding that the activities with which one busies the self are worthwhile. From the perspective of self-determination theory, it is formulated that people will actively seek activities that facilitate and craft such meaning, often known in the literature as meaning making (Bauer, King, & Steger, 2018; Shin & Steger, 2016).

In a sporting context, Stander and van Zyl (2016) argue that fans find meaning in the support of their teams, because it provides a feeling of community with other people. Fans also experience a higher purpose and a sense of direction (Auh et al., 2007; Brodie et al., 2011), since they can express themselves and adapt to the culture of their team (Smith & Stewart, 2007; Trail & James, 2001). Wann et al. (2001) state that this meaning or purpose contributes towards the individual's intrinsic psychological reward associated with sport consumption.

### *Life Satisfaction*

Van Zyl and Rothmann (2014) argue that meaning and life satisfaction are closely related due to the inherent gratification associated with both these constructs. Life satisfaction refers to the

satisfaction of individuals' needs and desires, physically and psychologically (Rice, 1984). The desires and needs that are experienced are found in several domains of life. Satisfaction with life contains an appraisal of one's life circumstances and a consequent conclusion on whether one's circumstances are favourable – it is therefore generally related to happiness (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003; van Zyl & Rothmann, 2012; van Zyl & Stander, 2014). Life satisfaction can be assessed globally or domain-specifically and forms the criterion of whether a good life has indeed been met (Suldo, Heubner, Freidrich, & Gilman, 2009).

Both meaning and life satisfaction are important constructs relating to the well-being of people (Park et al., 2010). According to Funk and James (2001), sport provides a universal platform for interaction where social exchanges lead to meaning, positive emotional experiences and fulfilment. Life satisfaction and meaning together constitute intrinsic psychological reward (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and was therefore chosen as well-being constructs. Park, Park and Peterson (2010) argues that various factors attribute to the experience of intrinsic psychological reward, but that the presence of meaning or purpose and the experience of life satisfaction appear to be the strongest predictors.

### *Theoretical Frameworks for the Relationship Between Sport Fan Engagement, Meaning and Life Satisfaction*

A number of theoretical frameworks are used to examine the effect of sport fan engagement on the experience of meaning and life satisfaction amongst fans. Firstly, the *attachment theory* (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) holds that positive affect is often a result of a consumer's regularised interactions with purchasing a particular service or product which such consumer experiences as rendering internal reward. When the consumer relates such product/service to a rewarding experience, the buying behaviour is reinforced and the purchasing action is repeated (Thomson, MacInnes, & Park, 2005). This experience is beyond the utilitarian outcome of using the particular product or service and more directly associates with the essential positive affect the buyer experiences when engagement in the purchasing action occurs regularly (Guttman, 2013).

The more intense the positive affect, the more likely that consumer will seek frequent engagement opportunity in the consumption action (Botha, 2013). In the domain of sport, this is particularly apparent, as passionate fans will demonstrate their loyalty by frequently actioning consumption of their favourite teams' products, services and offerings (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). Due to the emotional affinity often associated with sport fandom, these fans will utilise their engagement with the brand of that team to reinforce their expressed passion (Potter & Keene, 2012). Their engagement is influenced by the level of identity congruence experienced between sport fan and team (Rees, Haslam, Coffee, & Lavallee, 2015; Stander et al., 2016), the social community shared between fans who support the same team (Wilson, Grieve, Ostrowski, Mienaltowski, & Cyr, 2013), and the perception of self-representation that fans often relate to their team's values and ethos (Stander & van Zyl, 2016). An engaged fan will likely demonstrate heightened behaviours associated with the engagement construct, in turn engaging more emotively with the associated sport brand and leading to enhanced levels of intrinsic reward. That is, a fan that is engaged will likely demonstrate greater management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance during times of challenge for his/her favourite sport team. This in turn will lead to a closer engrossment with the various properties of the team in question; beyond the utilitarian purpose of consumption towards a place where the consumption effort is experienced as inherently meaningful and enduring.

A second theoretical framework that is used to postulate a relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction is the *broaden-and-build theory* of Frederickson (2005). This theory describes the attainment of sustainable well-being as repeated actions of positive affect delivery, which over time culminates in deeply meaningful exchanges that provide the individual with intrinsic reward (Frederickson, 2005). That is, in the context of sport consumption, when a fan is truly engaged with the products/offerings of a particular sport team, this engrossment will lead to positive affect. Over time, this harnesses sustainable intrinsic reward and kindles further engagement opportunities. Early evidence for this is contained in the work of Hewer, Gannon, and Cordina, (2015), Martin (2013), and Stander and van Zyl (2016). Yoshida, Gordon, Heere and James (2015) argue that customised product use, team brand equity and enhanced offering interaction are all direct outcomes of sport fans' positive affect for the team that they support. Fans form an inherent loyalty due to the positive emotions they experience as a result of their

engagement with the commercial properties of the team (da Silva & Las Casa, 2017; Yoon, Petrick, & Backman, 2017). This creates thought action repertoires, where fans seek repeated experience of positive affect through their interaction with the sport brand, leading to repetitive actions of engagement which ultimately create enduring affect.

### *The Indirect Effect of Social Interaction Motive*

A secondary objective of this research is to evaluate the extent to which the introduction of a social environment factor affects the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction. Literature contains many examples of how sport is consumed within the domain of a particular community. Yannopoulos and Kefalaki (2015), for example, indicate that fans form communities of allegiance, expressing their affinity as a collective in order to strengthen their individually articulated passions. Zagnoli and Radicchi (2009) commented that major sport clubs globally form supporters' clubs, to nurture this shared bond and affiliation. It is well established that the social cohesion, experience of belonging and shared loyalty associated with supporting a sport team are some of the most striking drivers of sport consumer behaviour. Trail, Anderson, and Lee (2017) stated that team fan role identity is entrenched in supporting a team within a community of other people, sharing a universal passion beyond demographical variables. These authors conducted a longitudinal study in which the emergence of a defined culture amongst fans was the result of sustained shared experiences and identity. Rees et al. (2015) hold that social identity often leads people to engage with sport consumption to begin with and that acceptance to a defined social community further establishes engagement behaviours.

The motivation for sport consumption theory (Trail & James, 2001) has differentiated social interaction motive as a major driver of the decision to consume sport amongst fans. These authors described this motivational driver as the need for affinity, shared community and exchange of interactions between fans. Fans seek to experience their favourite sport teams in the sphere of other fans, forming close alliances and sharing a passion. This relational value often manifests in experiences of reward, loyalty, belongingness and identity (Brodie et al., 2011; Shank & Lyberger, 2014).

Sport is often consumed within the context of a social environment. Fans engage in the sport consumption action together, seeking a multitude of differentiating outcomes through these key negotiated exchanges. This is in line with social exchange theory, which has often been utilised in sport consumer studies and holds that sport consumer exchanges are negotiated experiences where fans consider the value and mutual utility of their engagement with a sport team in relation to their fellow fans (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015; Rees et al., 2015; Wakefield, 2016). These negotiated experiences between sport fan community members directly influence their decision to frequently engross themselves with their preferred sport team/brand – herewith enhancing their affect and enduring experiences. Socially motivated consumers base their purchase decisions on the social effects that they perceive are linked to their purchases and therefore provide them with positive social implications (Martin, 2013). This study therefore seeks to evaluate whether the motive for social interaction often related to sport consumption will indirectly affect the relationships between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction.

Based on the above discussion, the hypotheses for this study are outlined as follow:

*Hypothesis 1:* Sport fan engagement is a significant predictor of meaning.

*Hypothesis 2:* Sport fan engagement is a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

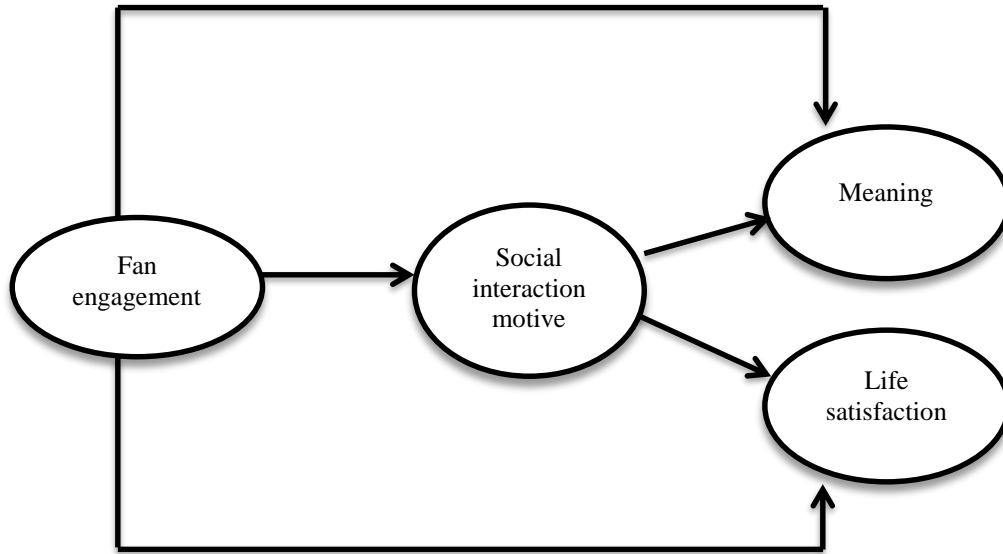
*Hypothesis 3:* Sport fan engagement engenders higher social interaction motive for the consumption of sport.

*Hypothesis 4a:* Sport fan engagement has an indirect effect on meaning through social interaction motive.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Sport fan engagement has an indirect effect on life satisfaction through social interaction motive.



The hypothesised research model is depicted below.



*Figure 1.* A hypothesised model of fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction with the indirect effects of social interaction motive

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research Approach**

A quantitative research design was utilised to examine the relationship between the variables. A cross-sectional design was applied. This implies data was collected at a single point in time (Salkind, 2011). The research was descriptive and exploratory. A convenience sampling method was utilised to collect responses from the research participants. This method is a common and effective approach to gather data in social sciences research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015). Hypotheses were tested against the framework of theoretical models, examining the proposed relationships between variables.

## Research Method

### Research Participants

This study was conducted amongst a sample of South African football fans of a major professional football team based in Gauteng. Football provided the ideal context for the study, as it remains the most popular sport in South Africa and globally, both from a spectator (fan) and participatory perspective (Department of Sport and Recreation, 2014; Giulianotti, 2012; Saayman & Rossouw, 2008).

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of the Participants (N = 565)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Male	376	66.50
	Female	162	28.70
Race	Asian	6	1.10
	African	480	85.00
	Coloured	27	4.80
	White	12	2.10
	Other	5	0.90
Level of Education	Grade 11 and below	150	26.50
	Grade 12	208	36.80
	Degree	70	12.40
	Post-graduate degree	46	8.10
Matches attended at the stadium	On average one per annum	41	7.30
	On average two per annum	54	9.60
	On average three per annum	47	8.30
	Four or more per annum	391	69.20
Merchandise expenditure per annum	Less than R1000	199	35.20
	R1000 to R2000 per year	146	25.80
	More than R2000 per year	182	32.20
Part of supporters' branch	Part of supporter branch	317	56.10
	Not part of supporter branch	228	40.40

\* Discrepancies in allocations relate to missing values

Drawing from the table above, it is evident that the majority of participants were male (66.50%). In terms of the racial representation in the sample, the majority of participants were African (85%). Regarding educational background, 36.80% of participants held a grade 12 equivalent, followed by 26.50% who held a grade 11 or below. The level of consumption and interaction with their preferred sport team was an important consideration as part of the demographical data. In terms of matches attended at the stadium, 69.20% of participants indicated that they attended four or more matches physically at the stadium per annum. Jenny et al. (2018) indicate that physical attendance at the stadium is an important indicator of brand loyalty and connection amongst fans, particularly in contemporary settings where entertainment options to spectators are many and varied. The sample in question therefore demonstrated a strong inclination of brand loyalty.

Expenditure levels were well distributed, with 35.20% indicating they spend less than R1000 per year on merchandise related to their team, 25.80% indicating expenditure of between R1000 and R2000 rand, and 32.20% revealing expenditure levels of more than R2000 per annum. Regarding participation in a supporter's branch, 56.10% of the sample indicated that they form part of their favourite football team's organised supporter's branches. Parganas, Anagnostopoulos, and Chadwick (2017) describe supporter's branches as organised, formal communities of fans who seek to enhance and intensify their fan engagement experience by gaining greater frequency of access to club progressions, new developments and general information. It is therefore an important indication of level of engrossment with the sport team and the preferred choice of sport consumption.

## **Measuring Instruments**

A biographical questionnaire and four measuring instruments were used to measure the constructs of sport fan engagement, social interaction motive, meaning and life satisfaction.

*Biographical questionnaire.* A biographical questionnaire was used to elicit information regarding demographic variables of the participants. Information was obtained regarding participants' gender, race and level of education. A number of key metrics were measures concerning participants' interaction with their preferred sport team. This included the number of matches

participants attended physically at the stadium per annum, the level of fans' expenditure in merchandising and team-related products and whether or not participants were formally part of an organised supporter's branch of their favourite team. Theysohn, Hinz, Nosworthy, and Kirchner (2009) commented that supporter's branches, also known as supporter's clubs, have become a popular and commonplace method for professional sport teams to organise their sport fans and drive the engagement experience.

*Fan Engagement Scale* (FES; Yoshida et al., 2014). The FES assesses levels of fan engagement based on the three dimensions of the construct. The dimensions are management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance, and are measured by a 7-point Likert type scale with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The FES comprises nine items, with three items for each of the engagement dimensions. The dimension of management support is assessed by an example item of "The employees of my sport team get my full cooperation". The prosocial behaviour dimension is measured by an example item of "I often interact with other fans to talk about issues related to my team". An example item for the dimension of performance tolerance is "I wear clothing that displays the name of my sport team even if they have an unsuccessful season". Internal consistency for the original FES has been revealed as  $\alpha = 0.86$  through Cronbach alpha coefficients by Yoshida et al. (2014).

*Meaning in Life Questionnaire* (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). The MLQ assesses the levels of perceived meaning of a respondent, focusing on both the search and presence of meaning. To measure meaning levels of participants, three items from the scale were used. Responses to the MLQ are recorded on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (absolutely true) to 7 (absolutely untrue). A reliability of 0.97 for the measure was reported (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). An example item includes "I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life".

*Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a self-report measure of overall life satisfaction, based on an evaluation of the participant's perception of happiness with the status of his/her life circumstances. A 7-point Likert type scale is used with responses that range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example of an

item is “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing”. The SWLS has been used in various contexts. An alpha coefficient of 0.86 was revealed by Steger et al. (2006).

*The Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption* (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001). The MSSC is a multi-dimensional instrument assessing different motives that lead sport consumers to invest monetary resources in the consumption of their sport. The three items related to social interaction motive were used in this study. An example item included “I support my specific sport team because I like having the opportunity to interact with other people”. The MSSC uses a 7-point Likert type scale that range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Trail and James (2001) reported Cronbach alpha values of between 0.75 and 0.91 for the MSSC.

## **Research Procedure**

This research was conducted with the permission of a professional football team based in Gauteng, South Africa. The researcher gained permission to set up a research station at the stadium housing this team from where the questionnaires could be disseminated during matches. A number of matches were identified during which to conduct the study. Participants were thoroughly briefed on the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation and the anonymity of their responses. They were informed of the fact that they could withdraw from participating in the project at any stage, even after having started with completion of the questionnaire. After completing the research questionnaire, response sheets could be placed in an allocated box. Completed questionnaires were then captured in data sheets for the purpose of analyses. The research was conducted as part of a bigger research study and with ethics approval from the North-West University under the number ECONIT-2016-006.

## **Statistical Analysis**

Data was analysed with Mplus 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017). Specifically, descriptive statistics were presented and then confirmatory factor analysis was applied to the data to establish the best-fitting measurement model. For the estimation, the robust maximum likelihood estimator was used. To evaluate the fit, the following indices were considered: Comparative fit index (CFI,

acceptable  $\geq 0.90$ ), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI, acceptable  $\geq 0.90$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA, acceptable  $< 0.08$ ), and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR, acceptable  $< 0.08$ ) (Van De Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). Factor loadings were considered acceptable when they had values of 0.70 or above in the confirmatory models due to the use of confirmatory factor analysis as opposed to exploratory factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010).

A correlation matrix was also generated to determine the covariant relationships between the study variables. For the correlational relationships, values of 0.30-0.49 were considered medium effect sizes and values of 0.50 and above were considered large effect sizes (Cohen, 1992). In order to support or reject the specified hypotheses for this study, the structural paths were added to the best-fitting measurement model to establish statistical significance, size and direction of the standardised beta estimates. For the potential indirect effects in the model, bootstrapped resampling was used with redraws set to 5000 (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). The level of statistical significance for this study was set at the 95% level, that is  $p < 0.05$ .

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics for the Items Used in the Study*

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
Management support1	5.85	1.44	-1.58	2.23
Management support2	5.68	1.52	-1.29	1.12
Management support3	5.62	1.58	-1.18	0.64
Prosocial behaviour1	6.03	1.43	-1.88	3.25
Prosocial behaviour2	6.04	1.38	-1.85	3.28
Prosocial behaviour3	5.51	1.82	-1.17	0.20
Tolerance1	6.06	1.47	-1.91	3.13
Tolerance2	6.15	1.42	-2.16	4.29
Tolerance3	6.24	1.38	-2.32	5.08
Social interactive motive1	6.25	1.23	-2.20	5.22
Social interactive motive2	6.19	1.29	-2.14	4.62
Social interactive motive3	6.23	1.27	-2.13	4.54
Meaning1	5.98	1.45	-1.71	2.59
Meaning2	6.10	1.28	-1.82	3.32
Meaning3	6.06	1.38	-1.88	3.39
Life satisfaction1	5.72	1.57	-1.50	1.60
Life satisfaction2	5.90	1.42	-1.52	1.92
Life satisfaction3	6.05	1.38	-1.82	3.05

*Note: SD = standard deviation*

As can be seen from Table 2, most of the items showed signs of non-normality with skewness values being smaller than -1.00 in all instances, indicating a more negatively skewed distribution. This, along with the mean values, indicated that participants were more likely to answer on the positive end of the Likert-scale when participating in the study. To this end, given the violation of normality assumptions, it was considered more applicable to use the robust maximum likelihood estimator in the confirmatory factor analysis of this study as it is robust against non-normality of data by providing accurate standard errors for parameter estimates.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Three potential models were tested by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the most practical model for use in the analysis. First, *Model 1* where all of the constructs of the study were specified as one factor models (one latent variable indicated by all the applicable items to that variable); *Model 2* an extension of Model 1, but fan engagement was split up into three possible sub-components (management support, prosocial behaviour and performance tolerance); and finally *Model 3* where Model 2 was extended by creating a second-order factor for fan engagement, indicated by the three latent components of fan engagement in Model 2. Initial estimation revealed a problematic fan engagement item that was below the threshold of 0.70 for factor loadings set for this study and was removed from the analysis (0.52; ‘*I spend time on social media (Facebook, Twitter) sharing information with other fans of my football team*’).

Table 3 below presents the results of the subsequent analysis.

**Table 3**

*Results of the Measurement Models*

Model	df	$\chi^2$	SCR	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	BIC
1: One-factor engagement	113	446.93	1.81	0.89	0.86	0.07	0.07	26231.12
2: Three-factor engagement	104	207.05	1.72	0.97	0.96	0.04	0.04	25809.50
3: Second-order factor engagement	110	190.99	1.73	0.97	0.96	0.04	0.04	25799.64

Notes: df = degrees of freedom;  $\chi^2$  = chi-square; SCR = scaling correction factor; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; BIC = Bayesian information criterion

As can be seen from Table 3, Model 3 was the best fitting model. It is important to note that with MLR it is not possible to compare models directly as it is with normal ML and as such the scaling correction factor (SCR) has to be considered in the chi-square difference testing. This test showed that there was no statistically significant difference between Model 2 and Model 3 ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, based on the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) as model selection tool of choice (Bollen, Harden, Ray, & Zavisca, 2014), it was clear that Model 3 should be the preferred model (CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.04, BIC = 25799.64); therefore, this model was used in the remainder of the study to investigate the hypotheses.



## Factor Loadings and Correlations

**Table 4**

*Standardised Loadings for the Latent Factors*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Loading</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
Fan engagement (second order)	Management support	0.83	0.04	0.001
	Prosocial behaviour	0.95	0.03	0.001
	Performance tolerance	0.80	0.04	0.001
Management support	Management support1	0.79	0.04	0.001
	Management support2	0.82	0.03	0.001
	Management support3	0.81	0.03	0.001
Prosocial behaviour	Prosocial behaviour1	0.82	0.04	0.001
	Prosocial behaviour2	0.79	0.04	0.001
Performance tolerance	Performance tolerance1	0.89	0.03	0.001
	Performance tolerance2	0.89	0.03	0.001
	Performance tolerance3	0.86	0.03	0.001
Meaning	Meaning1	0.88	0.02	0.001
	Meaning2	0.89	0.02	0.001
	Meaning3	0.79	0.04	0.001
Life satisfaction	Life satisfaction1	0.81	0.03	0.001
	Life satisfaction2	0.83	0.03	0.001
	Life satisfaction3	0.80	0.04	0.001

*Notes:* SE = standard error; *p*-values < 0.001

Table 4 above shows factor loadings for each of the items per latent construct. All loadings were statistically significant above 0.70 and the standard errors were small, indicating accuracy in the estimation of the parameters.

Table 5 shows that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all of the variables were above the cut-off point of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the scales. In terms of the correlational relationships, it was revealed that the second-order fan engagement construct correlated highly positively with management support ( $r = 0.83$ ; large effect), prosocial behaviour ( $r = 0.95$ ; large effect) and performance tolerance ( $r = 0.80$ ; large effect), providing additional support for the decision to use the second-order model as the more valid and practical model in the regression

model. Furthermore, fan engagement was positively correlated with social interaction motive ( $r = 0.65$ ; large effect), meaning ( $r = 0.61$ ; large effect) and life satisfaction ( $r = 0.70$ ; large effect). Meaning and life satisfaction were also positively correlated as would be expected ( $r = 0.71$ ; large effect). Table 5 is presented below.

**Table 5**

*Reliabilities and Correlation Matrix for the Latent Variables*

Variables	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Management support	0.96	1.00						
2. Prosocial behaviour	0.91	0.78 <sup>b</sup>	1.00					
3. Performance tolerance	0.97	0.66 <sup>b</sup>	0.76 <sup>b</sup>	1.00				
4. Fan engagement	n/a	0.83 <sup>b</sup>	0.95 <sup>b</sup>	0.80 <sup>b</sup>	1.00			
5. Social interaction motive	0.81	0.54 <sup>b</sup>	0.62 <sup>b</sup>	0.53 <sup>b</sup>	0.65	1.00		
6. Meaning	0.96	0.51 <sup>b</sup>	0.58 <sup>b</sup>	0.49 <sup>a</sup>	0.61	0.52	1.00	
7. Life satisfaction	0.95	0.58 <sup>b</sup>	0.66 <sup>b</sup>	0.56 <sup>b</sup>	0.70 <sup>b</sup>	0.56 <sup>b</sup>	0.71 <sup>b</sup>	1.00

Notes:  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's reliability coefficient; All correlations statistically significant  $p < 0.001$ ; a = Medium practical effect; b = Large practical effect; n/a = Not applicable

**Structural Model: Direct Paths**

Table 6 below presents the results for the structural paths in the model.

**Table 6**

*Regression Results for the Structural Model*

Structural path	$\beta$	SE	$p$
Fan engagement → Social interaction motive	0.65	0.06	0.001*
Fan engagement → Meaning	0.47	0.08	0.001*
Fan engagement → Life satisfaction	0.58	0.08	0.001*
Social interaction motive → Meaning	0.22	0.08	0.007*
Social interaction motive → Life satisfaction	0.18	0.08	0.022*

Notes:  $\beta$  = standardised beta coefficient; SE = standard error;  $p$  = two-tailed statistical significance; \* = significant

As shown in Table 6, all of the structural paths were significant and in the expected direction. Specifically, fan engagement explained significant variance in meaning ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ; supporting  $H_1$ ), life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.58$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ; supporting  $H_2$ ), and social interaction motive ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ; supporting  $H_3$ ). Furthermore, social interaction motive explained significant variance in meaning ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ) and life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ).  $R^2$  explained the following variance for the constructs, social interactive motive (42.60%), meaning (40.00%) and life satisfaction (50.80%). These are all large effects according to Cohen's effect sizes.

### **Structural Model: Indirect Effects**

Results from the bootstrapping revealed a significant indirect effect from fan engagement to meaning through social interaction motive (estimate = 0.14, 95% CI [0.04, 0.25],  $SE = 0.05$ ;  $p = 0.008$ ) – supporting  $H_{4a}$ . Similarly, the indirect effect from fan engagement to life satisfaction was significant (estimate = 0.12, 95% CI [0.02, 0.23],  $SE = 0.05$ ;  $p = 0.024$ ) – supporting  $H_{4b}$ .

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of this study was to evaluate whether sport fan engagement can produce positive personal outcomes. The relationship between fan engagement and commercial outcomes is well documented, with a large number of studies outlining the important role that high levels of engagement amongst sport consumers play in terms of driving revenue growth and profitability in the sport industry globally. A number of authors have described engagement as one of the most critical elements of an industry that has sustainably evolved, regardless of complex and volatile global economic circumstances (Andrews & Ritzer, 2018; Giulianotti & Numerato, 2018; Schwarz, Hall, & Shibli, 2015; Smith, Stavros, & Westberg, 2017; Yoshida, James, & Cronin, 2013). However, limited research exists in terms of the potential role of sport fan engagement in leading to positive personally-related outcomes and experiences of well-being. To this end, a research opportunity exists. This study explored the potential role of fan engagement in engendering meaning and life satisfaction, related components of experienced well-being (Diener et al., 1985; Machell, Kashdan, Short, & Nezlec, 2015; Martela, Ryan, & Steger, 2017; Stander & van Zyl, 2016).

Departing from the theoretical model of the attachment theory, this study proposed that sport fan engagement will engender meaning and life satisfaction amongst a sample of sport consumers. The attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) argues that regular interactions with a particular brand, product or service offering often creates positive affect, beyond the utilitarian purpose of satisfying a basic economic need. In sport contexts, the theory has been well researched. For example, Rhee, Wong, and Kim (2016) found the attachment theory instrumental in the way sport fans relate their own identities to their sport teams, finding attachment in the team representing a particular region, a certain ideology or a set of values. Kirkup and Sutherland (2017) explored the important role of attachment in driving sport team loyalty, which leads to fans more often attending matches of their favourite teams on location at the stadium. Key reference points of attachment have been found to satisfy the emotive motives sport fans have when consuming products and offerings of their favourite team, leading to internalised feelings of satisfaction (Ballouli, Trail, Koesters, & Bernthal, 2016).

In support of the attachment theory, the broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2005) was used as basis to support the hypotheses that sport fan engagement will lead to greater levels of meaning and life satisfaction. According to broaden-and-build theory, the experience of meaningful exchanges and rewarding experiences develops through action repertoires, leading to sustainable feelings of positive affect over time. Da Silva and Las Casa (2017) describe sport fan loyalty as a direct result of repeated exchanges that fans experience as intrinsically rewarding and satisfying. This leads to fans seeking repeated opportunities to consume the offerings and services of the sport team in question. This is well supported by Witkemper, Hoon Lim, and Waldburger (2012), who found that the repeated search of sport fans for the experience of positive affect often leads to the creation of eco-systems where fans can frequently attain such feelings, for example, social media sites and sport fan communities or branches.

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that sport fan engagement could predict meaning and life satisfaction. Various motives for sport consumption was identified by Trail and James (2001) to reveal a close link with intrinsic psychological reward factors, namely meaning and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction and meaning form part of the Intrinsic Psychological Reward

Scale. Positive predictive relationships were revealed through regression analysis in paths from engagement to both well-being constructs.

Firstly, insofar as meaning is concerned, regression paths suggested the existence of a predictive relationship between fan engagement and meaning. When evaluating the elements of meaning, it is clear that this is a reasonable suggestion. Martela and Steger (2016) describe meaning as purpose, coherence and significance. The various components of sport fan engagement talk to these elements – by engrossing him/herself more into the consumption effort of a particular sport team or brand, the fan has the opportunity to experience significance through sharing community with other fans (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016), can purposefully participate in the shared pursuits and goals of the sport team (Watkins, 2014), and can find rewarding exchanges for monetary and energy investment in the properties of such a team (Bee & Dalakas, 2015, Chang, Yang, Sagas, & Splenger, 2017). Thus, when the fan demonstrates actions of management support, prosocial behaviour and tolerance with the performance of that team even during times of challenge and adversity, this fan is purposefully crafting meaning by participating in a cause that he or she deems worthwhile. This has great potential for internal reward and significance.

Results further revealed a positive predictive relationship between sport fan engagement and life satisfaction. This was further supported by correlations of high practical significance between all three of the dimensions of fan engagement and satisfaction with life. The concept of life satisfaction is based on subjective evaluations of one's own circumstances, evaluating the conditions of one's life as being favourable or not (Diener et al., 2003; van Zyl & Rothmann, 2014). Whilst sport fan engagement is not the only driver of this experience, there is certainly evidence to suggest it may influence it. Inoue, Sato, Filo, Du, and Funk (2017) demonstrated in a study across multiple countries that sport fans often find emotional support from their fellow fans, who, in solidarity, share with them the success and trials of the team they collectively support. Mutz (2018) proved in a longitudinal study that a sample of German football fans experienced enhanced life satisfaction during the UEFA Euro 2016 competition, compared to life satisfaction levels before and after the event. Stander and van Zyl (2016) established positive relationships between sport consumption intent and life satisfaction. The results of this study suggested that regression paths exist between sport fan engagement and life satisfaction. This implies that, by

engrossing themselves more in the consumption effort of their favourite team's activities or offerings and by demonstrating behaviours associated with the sport fan engagement effort; fans can potentially experience greater levels of life satisfaction.

A secondary objective of this research was to explore the indirect effect of the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive. A major part of the sport fan experience revolves around the social interaction opportunity that exists within it (Karakaya, Yannopoulos, & Kefalaki, 2015; Stavros, Meng, Westberg, & Farrelly, 2014; Trail, Anderson, & Lee, 2017). Fans often view this opportunity as meaningful as it leads to experiences of solidarity with others, creates shared community and fosters a communal identity. Martin (2013) also found that fans will arrive at the game hours before it starts to participate in a ritual of tailgating referring to the socialising experience taking place in parking lots or stadium. They thus purposefully consume sport with the view of attaining these outcomes. Shilbury (2009) summarised five sport motives considering psychological benefits that sport consumers desire from a sport experience and social interaction was highlighted as one of those motives. Based on the motivation for sport consumption and social exchange theories, this research predicted a direct relationship between sport fan engagement and social interaction motive; also an indirect effect between sport fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction through social interaction motive.

Regression analyses revealed the existence of structural paths between sport fan engagement and social interaction motive, suggesting that fans experiencing higher engagement are likely to seek the opportunity for social interaction more frequently; seeking ways of engaging with their favourite sport team in the community and shared affinity of others. Through bootstrapping, results also revealed a positive indirect effect towards both outcome variables of well-being from sport fan engagement through social interaction motive. This suggests that the already positive relationships between sport fan engagement, meaning, and life satisfaction may be improved and strengthened when fans are provided an opportunity to engage with their preferred sport team in social community with others.

## **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

A number of limitations existed within the execution of this study. Firstly, the cross-sectional design of the research means results were captured at a single point in time, rendering the possibility of common method bias.

The study could have benefitted from adopting a multi-data source approach. Self-report measures were implemented to gather responses from fans. This can be well improved by structured and in-depth interviews in future, to ascertain insight into specific elements of the fan engagement experience. Richardson, Simmering, and Sturman (2009) propose the use of multi data sources to cross validate findings and provide a more complete perspective.

In future, the sport fan engagement experience could be explored in relation to more personal outcomes and not only meaning and life satisfaction. Opportunity exists to explore the effect of fan engagement on such outcomes as flourishing, esteem and the psychological capital constructs (self-efficacy, for example). This study was conducted in the domain of a single sport, namely football. A number of other popular sports exist in South Africa and globally, which can support and strengthen the early ideas proposed in this study.

Future studies should focus on particular elements of sport fan engagement in order to understand which of the underlying dimensions can predict greater levels of meaning and life satisfaction. This will provide targeted and focused sport marketing interventions, which can provide great levels of intrinsic reward being experienced.

Future research will benefit by adopting a longitudinal design, evaluating the impact of sport fan engagement on the well-being experiences of fans over time. This will well support the broaden-and-build theory, which suggests that positive affect has the ability to translate into sustainable well-being over the medium to long term, particularly when regular interactions of internal reward occur.

## **Implications for Management**

The study provides an interesting and provocative theme for sport marketers in the utilisation of sport fan engagement. Where the concept has traditionally been greatly associated with enhanced expenditure and commercial growth, this study suggests it also has the potential for fostering positive personal outcomes. This implies that there is a social responsibility on the part of sport industry executives and policy makers to design frameworks that encourage sustainable and responsible engagement of fans, with a view of providing personal benefits to these stakeholders. The role of sport in building communal and social value is well documented (Edwards, 2015; Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015; Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015), particularly in South Africa, where mega sporting events have had a legacy of building social cohesion and rapport (Giampiccoli, Lee, & Nauright, 2015; Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015). Empirical studies, however, have not been conducted that relate to sport fan engagement and its properties to create positive personal outcomes. This puts forward an opportunity for industrial and organisational psychologists to become more involved in the design and application of interventions that foster engagement amongst fans; through behaviourally-based initiatives that can deliver the greatest possible personal outcomes.

In terms of practical considerations, sport marketers and management teams are encouraged to design purposeful engagement strategies that deliver the fan engrossment experience in a way that is experienced as deeply meaning- and purposeful. To this end, customised experiences are proposed where the unique fan can truly express his/her own needs, identities and affiliations through the support of his/her team. For example, loyalty programs can acknowledge the efforts of unique fans; celebrating their personality and sharing of values with the sport team they support. Professional sport teams can launch communication platforms where fans can express their needs for specific products or offerings that will enhance their personal satisfaction and internal reward for consuming the offerings of the team. For example, sport fans with families may request a dedicated area in the stadium in which to watch the game, where entertainment options are inclined for children and where the atmosphere is generally beneficial to families.



Sport marketers can also do more to understand which interventions specifically support engagement dimensions, and reward displays of behaviours associated with these dimensions. Relating this to management support, fans can be offered the opportunity to enrol in management programs where they actively partake in marketing decisions of the sport team. Insofar as prosocial behaviour is concerned, prizes can be awarded to fans who lead community initiatives that are aligned to the sport team or club's values. In terms of performance tolerance, fans who have been active members of a supporter's branch for the largest number of years can be publicly celebrated.

Finally, drawing from the second objective of this study, stakeholders in management and the executive of professional sport teams can utilise social settings and community with other fans to enhance the sport fan engagement experience; thus offering fans greater personal rewards. Sport clubs and professional organisations are encouraged to motivate positive societal citizenship through the support of their teams. Fans experience greater internal reward when they collectively consume the activities of their favourite teams, thus providing a platform for creating shared solidarity and community building. This can be extended beyond the sport field to civil society, where supporter's clubs can be encouraged to conduct outreach programs and community building initiatives. This may lead to greater experience of purpose, meaning and life satisfaction, built on the shared platform offered by the sport team.

## **Conclusion**

The study provides a useful platform to conduct further research on the sport fan engagement experience, particularly as it pertains to creating favourable personal outcomes and influencing the well-being of individuals. The hypothesised research model was supported by the empirical results of the study, making a strong case for further research in the relationships between the variables. A number of practical suggestions were made, pertaining to the application of sport fan engagement and personal outcomes, at an individual and group level, through introducing social interaction motive.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the conclusions of the current study. Furthermore, limitations are discussed and recommendations are made for organisations and future research.

#### **3.1 Conclusions**

The objective of this study was to evaluate the effect of sport fan engagement on the personal outcomes of meaning and life satisfaction amongst a group of football fans. A secondary objective was to measure this relationship through introduction of the social interaction motive variable. Based on the theoretical model outlay, results are summarised and discussed.

For the conceptualisation of sport fan engagement, the definition of Wann, Melnick, Russel, and Pease (2001) was used. These authors describe sport fan engagement as the engrossment of an individual with the brand of his/her preferred sport team. It outlines the willingness of a sport fan to invest resources in the consumption of the properties of a particular sport or sport team. Yoshida, Gordon, Heere, and James (2015) describe the engagement experience of fans as an enduring, affective one that leads to particular engagement behaviours. Wakefield (2016) describes engaged fans as passionate, loyal individuals who seek repeated interactions with their favourite sport teams. The dimensions of sport fan engagement as described by Wann et al. (2001) include management support which is purposeful action to support the management of the sport team in advancing its properties and interests; prosocial behaviour suggests advocacy behaviours aimed at strengthening the value of the team; and performance tolerance which describes willingness by a fan to support his/her team regardless of positive or negative on field results. The relationship between fan engagement, meaning, and life satisfaction was explored from the perspective of the attachment and broaden-and-build theories.

The attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) was the first theoretical point of departure for the study. Trail, Anderson, and Fink (2005) described sport fan loyalty as a fundamental

indication of attachment and affect between sport fans and their preferred team of choice. This is supported by the work of Wann, Hackathorn, and Sherman (2017), proposing team identification as a definite component of the affect sport fans develop for their favourite team. The decision to consume the offerings, services and products of one's favourite sport team is a decision beyond the cognitive evaluation of value, towards an emotive reaction unlocked by the purchasing decision (Guttman, 2013). MacIntosh, Abeza, and Lee (2017) describe the experience of a sport team as a deeply personal, unique and personable one on the part of the fan. The more such fan engages with the brand of the team, the more intense this experience and its subsequent outcomes would be (Ruihley & Pate, 2017; Stander & van Zyl, 2016).

The broaden-and-build theory of Frederickson (2005) was the second theoretical model of the proposed regression paths between the variables. Hewer, Gannon, and Cordina (2015) as well as Yoon, Petrick, and Backman (2017) describe engaged fans as stakeholders who repeatedly purchase products and offerings of sport teams, are influenced directly by the positive emotions evoked by consuming these offerings. This leads to sustained positive feelings over time, informing a deep and meaningful experience of the sport team that fans experience as being rewarding (Dwyer, Mudrick, Greenhalgh, LeCrom, & Drayer, 2015; Stander & van Zyl, 2016). It was thus possible to argue that a heightened sense of engagement on the part of the fan would lead to experiences of satisfaction and meaning, as the sport engagement action is inherently an engrossing and purposeful one (da Silva & Las Casa, 2017). When the fan engrosses fully with the team and there is alignment in identity, values and social community; that fan will likely experience feelings of satisfaction and gratification. It creates positive reciprocal cycles that lead to enhanced engagement by the fan (Cunningham & Easten, 2017).

In the first instance, results revealed positive regression between sport fan engagement and meaning. Meaning describes an individual's perceived experience of direction, significance and purpose (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). It is associated with the perception that one's life is impactful, filled with intent and directed (Steger, 2016). As such, it is regarded as a state of well-being, as it has often been associated with internal rewarding experiences (Brodie et al., 2011; Park, Park, & Peterson, 2010). Regression analyses revealed fan engagement as a significant predictor of meaning ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); proposing that the engagement of sport fans can be

leveraged as a means of enhancing fans' experience of significance and purpose. This supports the ethical obligation on the part of professional sport management teams and executives to boost the sport fan experience in order to create internal rewarding experiences for fans, herewith promoting well-being.

Results of the study also indicated positive structural paths of statistical significance between sport fan engagement and life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Life satisfaction is a construct of happiness and general appraisal that one's life and circumstances are favourable (Diener, Diener, Choi, & Oishi, 2018; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; van Zyl & Stander, 2014). It is an important indicator of subjective well-being (Diener, Seligman, Choi, & Oishi, 2018). Results suggest that greater levels of sport fan engagement can contribute to the experience of life satisfaction and therefore re-emphasise the significant role that sport and engagement experience can play in harnessing intrinsically rewarding experiences, contributing to happiness and ultimately affecting personal well-being. It provides sound argument for the continuation of research that seeks practical methods to elevate the engagement experience in the pursuit of greater personal well-being states. It supports the work of Inoue, Sato, Filo, Du, and Funk (2017), Stander and van Zyl (2016), as well as Pan, Wu, Morrison, Huang, and Huang (2018) – all of which have found correlation between different elements of sport consumption and life satisfaction of fans.

The second broad objective of this study was to evaluate the relationship between sport fan engagement and social interaction motive. The research proposed that a) sport fan engagement will directly predict social interaction motive; and b) social interaction motive will have indirect effects on the relationship between sport fan engagement, meaning, and life satisfaction. Based on the motivation for sport consumption theory and the social exchange theory, the research hypothesised that social interaction motive would introduce a significant dynamic to the relationship between the latent variables. Regression analyses revealed a positive relationship from sport fan engagement to social interaction motive ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Further, indirect effects existed between sport fan engagement and meaning through social interaction motive (estimate = 0.14,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.04, 0.25]), and between sport fan engagement and life satisfaction through social interaction motive (estimate = 0.12,  $p < 0.05$ , 95% CI [0.02, 0.23]). This provides support for the work of Zagnoli and Radicchi (2009), who commented that social community,

affiliation with others and shared identity is a major driver for the sport fan experience. People find shared identity and commonality in values when they support their favourite teams in solidarity with others (Karakaya, Yannopoulos, & Kefalaki, 2015; Lim, Hwang, Kim, & Biocca, 2015). This research provides support for the role of social cohesion and commonality in the sport fan experience, providing early evidence that the motive for consuming sport together and within the social context of fellow fans can further leverage the engagement experience towards even greater personal and rewarding experiences.

### **3.2 Limitations**

The cross-sectional design of this study can be viewed as a limitation. Bell and Jones (2015) commented that longitudinal designs have the benefit of evaluating dynamic changes in relationships between variables over time. Future studies will benefit by examining the duplications in the relationship between sport fan engagement and personal outcomes over the course of a prolonged period. It will also support the work of Inoue et al. (2017), who established seasonal fluctuation and environmental factors as playing a big role in the experience of life satisfaction related to sport consumption of fans. The effects might be different during various time periods within a season of particular sport. Through evaluating the effect of sport fan engagement on well-being states and rewarding internal experiences over longitudinal periods, it will be more possible to introduce moderating and mediating effects that ensure enduring and sustainable well-being.

As the study made use of self-report measures, this can also be highlighted as a limitation. A multi-data source approach can benefit future studies greatly as it will provide the opportunity to explore the particularities of the sport fan engagement experience in finer detail. Examples of data collection may include depth interviewing or focus group discussions with particular groups of fans in order to generate deeper insights. This will also outline differences in the experience of fan engagement amongst different groups of stakeholders – fan engagement remains a subjective experience which is highly unique in the perception of different people (Yoshida, Gordon, Nakazawa, & Biscaia, 2014).

The study was conducted amongst a sample of football fans. The rationale for this is the fact that football remains the most popular sport – from both a participant and spectator perspective – in the world and locally, with estimations that up to 54% of the adult population in South Africa actively watch and affiliate with a football team (Saayman & Rossouw, 2008).

### **3.3 Recommendations**

This study puts forward a number of important considerations for future research as well as practice.

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations for Future Research**

The attachment theory holds that affective connection between a particular brand, offering, product or service and the consumer is built over time. Further, the broaden-and-build theory suggests that affective experiences lead to thought action repertoires which are practised continuously – leading to repeated engagements with the source of this positive affect. Consistent with these theories, it becomes clear that longitudinal research that examines the relationship of sport fan engagement with personal well-being states over time will greatly benefit literature. It supports the work of Inoue et al. (2017), who have commented that the sport fan engagement action and experience is dynamic, influenced by timing, environmental factors and fan groupings. A longitudinal design will thus add value in researching the relationship of fan engagement across a defined period, evaluating how changes in fan engagement behaviours affect personal well-being states.

A further research opportunity exists in expanding knowledge on the personal outcomes that are attainable through the sport fan engagement experience. These personal outcomes can include psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience); esteem, confidence etc. This study evaluated the relationship between the dimensions of fan engagement, meaning and life satisfaction. The consumption of sport is a personal action, experienced subjectively by the fan, and an opportunity exists to leverage this personalised interaction towards greater internal reward on the part of individual fans (Groene & Hettinger, 2016; Wang, 2015).



The sport fan engagement experience comprises several domains, which are differentiable. A suggestion for future research would be to explore the sub dimensions of fan engagement as they relate to personal outcomes, evaluating which of these dimensions are particularly relevant for specified personal outcomes. This will be useful on two levels. Firstly, to develop practical knowledge on the application of the sport fan engagement domains for the development of interventions that seek to promote particular elements of personal well-being. Secondly, it will contribute to a further understanding of the properties of the Fan Engagement Scale (Yoshida et al., 2014), as they relate to positive outcome variables within the nomological network.

As pertaining to the introduction of the social interaction motive as part of this research, future studies may benefit from a further understanding of the social context required for optimum expression of fan engagement towards favourable personal outcomes. This study suggested that fans can leverage their motive for experiencing their favourite sport team towards meaning and life satisfaction. Future studies can scrutinise which particular social elements will strengthen this indirect relationship; practical knowledge can then be developed to support the connection. Sport consumption often takes place in community and solidarity with other fans, and much research is required in understanding how the social fan environment can be utilised to support the personal well-being of fans (Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015).

This being said, future studies will benefit from adopting a broader approach and being conducted in broader application, to scrutinise whether the positive relationships established in this study are replicable in other contexts. The different contexts might offer results that can add to the growth within the sport industry. The different contexts may include hockey, cricket, rugby, athletics, netball, tennis etc.

Future studies in this domain will also benefit from adopting a segmented approach in which the different dimensions of sport fan engagement (management support, performance tolerance and prosocial behaviour) are explored in particular relation to the outcome variables. This will outline which particular domains of sport fan engagement relate most highly to such personal outcomes as meaning and life satisfaction, providing the added practical benefit of informing strategies and policy decisions to engage fans in a socially responsible and impactful manner. It is recommended

that this study also be expanded to other popular sporting codes with high numbers of fans. This could further contribute to the existing body of knowledge of the sport fan engagement experience as it relates to personal outcomes.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for Practice**

Importantly, this study supports a renewed emphasis on the role that management and executive teams of professional sport teams can potentially play in contributing value to society beyond the commercial growth of their teams' brands and the subsequent value to the industry in whole. The study supported a growing body of research which has outlined the deeply personable and unique experience of sport fan exchanges. It suggested that fan engagement, which is a direct driver of commercial expansion of the business of sport, can also be leveraged in a socially responsible way to enhance the intrinsic reward available to fans through the consumption of their favourite teams' offerings, products and services.

These management teams are encouraged to work actively in developing fan engagement policies that are geared towards the optimum personal experience of their fans, creating affective connection and over time contributing to sustainable well-being. In order to deliver on this, fan engagement experiences must be individualised, uniquely captured and presented to fans in an enduring manner. To this end, further research is required and industrial and organisational psychologists can play a significant role. Ultimately, fan experiences and interactions are driven by motive, which is a psychological expression in the consumer domain, and industrial and organisational psychologists are ideally positioned to understand this expression at a scientific level.

Considering the impact of social interaction motive, recommendations for practice following this study include the development of social communities in sport that actively promote well-being and encourage responsible behaviour. Examples include management teams of professional sport teams becoming more involved in their supporter's branches, encouraging the expression of values that build greater rapport amongst fans and leveraging experiences. The unique needs of particular fan groups can also be considered towards attaining greater personal well-being. This may include

having dedicated family sections in the stadium, or partnering with institutions and accessing fans who are interested in advancing their educational careers, using engagement with the professional sport team as a foundation. Finally, sport teams are encouraged to promote active and responsible citizenship through the fan engagement experience, making use of the passion that exists amongst loyal fan groups to enable greater personal outcomes, meaningful and rewarding experiences, and greater satisfaction.

### **3.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter summarised the empirical findings of the research, based on the theoretical models outlined, putting forward possible limitations of the study and making suggestions for future research and practice.

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