

**An exploration of the motivation to attend for spectators of the Lexmark Indy 300 Champ Car
Event, Gold Coast**

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ABSTRACT: *The perceptions of spectators (N = 36) at the Lexmark Indy 300 Champ Car event were assessed via qualitative methods to evaluate their internal and external motivations to attend. The most common reason to attend was the atmosphere that the event created, and entertainment. Other reasons included the race, enjoying the company of friends, and group affiliation. The characteristics of the majority of attendees were predominantly male, 26 to 35 years old, from Queensland, who earned around AUD\$50,000 to \$75,000 per annum. The findings of the study have implications for sport marketers who wish to communicate to these individuals.*

Keywords: Motor sports events; Motivation to attend; Event marketing

With dwindling finances common among sporting events, the examination of the organization's relationships to its major stakeholder, its customer or sport spectator, is a critical management function (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Sport marketing researchers (Zhang, Pease, & Smith, Lee, Lam & Jambor, 1998) advised that the focus of strategic marketing efforts center on understanding the relationship with spectators and the motivating factors for spectator attendance. Attendance generates revenue from ticket sales and corporate boxes, which then drive other team revenue sources such as sponsorship, food and beverage concessions, advertising and media rights (Neale & Funk, 2006). The well-regarded, annual Indy 300 Champ Car event (hereafter referred to as Indy 300) on the Gold Coast, in Queensland, Australia has had relative success as evidenced by its average annual event attendance of approximately 300,000+ (over four days) spectators and economic and tourism impact values estimated to be AUD\$50+ million (Gold Coast Indy Car 300, 2007). Despite that, the Indy 300 was cancelled in 2009 because of the inability to find a long-term sponsor, and the Queensland government's desire to support a more international rather than American-centric event (Gold Coast Mail, 2008).

It has been noted that motorsports attendance has been growing, with attendance more than triple that of the National Football League, Major League Baseball, National Hockey League and the National Basketball Association, and being the fastest growing and most popular sport in the world (Business Wire, 2004; Gifford, 2006; Young, 2010). The motorsport industry is a global industry and is governed by The Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and has various members that represent a diverse range

of auto racing (Young, 2010). It is a collection of sports that primarily involve motorized vehicles, and success, is often determined by the performance of vehicles. In 2005, motorsports was valued at 50 billion pounds sterling (Henry, Angus, Jenkins, & Aylett, 2007) and, within the US, motorsport brought in revenues of around US\$25 billion (Young, 2010). Indy racing is the primary type of motorsport racing in America and was founded in 1994 (Young, 2010). Considering the economic size of the entire motorsports industry, the marketing and the sponsorship of motorsport events is important because of the source of funding that they provide. Sponsorship is important for manufacturers who wish to associate their products with fast and powerful cars. In addition, sporting events such as Formula 1 or Indy Car racing have an important economic impact on their host cities by generating employment opportunities and fan spending (McDaniel & Mason, 1999).

Within Australia, the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) has been the governing body member affiliated with FIA since 1970 and is “held in high regard at the FIA for the quality of its sporting administration and the contribution it makes” (CAMS, 2010). According to their 2009 Annual Report (p. 1), events make up the largest source of revenue and, overall, motorsport in Australia made over AUD\$14 million. Their success was attributed to the involvement of various stakeholders such as “employee[s], competitor[s], official[s], participant[s] or spectator[s]” (CAMS Annual Report, p. 1). V8 Supercars are the most popular form of motorsport in Australia (CAMS, 2010), however the Indy 300 has been able to generate a substantial economic impact for the Queensland community (AUD\$50+ million) (Gold Coast Indy Car 300, 2007). The purpose of this current study is to understand the motivations of spectators to attend a motorsports event, with a view to enhancing strategic sport marketing for targeted marketing communication, sponsorships and insight for management efforts. Finding out what motivated spectators to attend the Indy 300 event maybe relevant for other motorsports events such as the A1 Grand Prix on the Gold Coast (Gold Coast Mail, 2008) or the Formula 1 (F1) Grand Prix in Melbourne, in designing their event structure.

Motivation to Attend

The purpose of this study is to garner a greater understanding of the motives of individuals who are willing to invest time, money and emotions in following and watching sports, known as sport spectators (Trail & James, 2001). Motivation has been defined as the “drives, the urges, wishes or desires” that initiate behavior (Bayton, 1958). Consumers are driven by a state of tension that exists as a result of an unfulfilled need or want (Schiffman, Bednall, Cowley, O’Cass, Watson, & Kanuk, 2001). Wann's (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) was designed to "document empirically the motives [of sports fans] and establish the relative importance of each" (p. 378). Eight underlying factors, represented by 23 items that motivate fan behavior, were identified from the conceptual literature: eustress, self-esteem benefits, escape, entertainment, economic factors, aesthetic qualities, group affiliation, and family demographic, as well as accessibility, entertainment, performance, attractiveness of the game or in terms of motorsports the race itself and individual preferences (Schofield, 1983).

Research on attendance has been examined from two broad perspectives (Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas, & Aiken, 2001). The psychological perspective looks at elements that are internal to consumers such as expectations, satisfaction and motivation to attend, while the peripheral perspective looks at factors such as event comfort and features, weather, and spectator income. Most attendance research has found a mix of internally and externally driven factors for attendance including, catharsis, drama, entertainment, escape, social interaction and vicarious achievement (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Sloan (1989) noted that the theories underlying spectators' attraction to sporting events "aren't mutually exclusive and competitive. Any number of non-contradictory overlapping theories conceivably could be valid and may have additive or multiplicative influences on fan responses" (p. 202). For this study a conceptual model based on the literature was created and five major categories were developed (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

External Motivational Factors

The entertainment value of the event has been noted as an important motivator (Al-Thibiti, 2004), where spectators are concerned with the overall quality of the entertainment experience (Hall & O'Mahony, 2006), which includes fun, excitement and general levels of enjoyment. Hall and O'Mahony (2006) found this entertainment to be the most important aspect of attendance motivation for both males and females. Roy, Goss and Jubenville (2010) found similar findings in their core racing values and marketing mix scales, respectively. The ease and ability to get to an event, along with geography and climate have been identified as motivators. For example, Krohn, Clarke, Preston, McDonald, & Preston (1998) and Pan et al. (1997) found that driving distance was influential for motivation to attend, and the closer the better. Therefore for the Indy 300, it is expected that proximity of attendees will be influential for their motivation to attend. In addition the Gold Coast (Australia) is an attractive location, due to its pleasant climatic conditions, and therefore attendance would be attractive. Work by Hansen and Gauthier (1989) addressed external motivating factors including economic, socio-demographic and attractiveness of the game. Other external factors include action in the game and the opportunity to escape from everyday life. Similarly, Pan et al. (1997) listed sixteen motives under five total constructs: athletic event, economic factors, the schedule offered, social factors and team success. Of these constructs, it was found that economic factors, athletic event and team success were crucial to motivate individuals to purchase season tickets.

Internal Motivational Factors

Although demographic factors are not a motivator, they are characteristics that have been used in consumer behavior research to descriptively present a profile on the types of individuals who attend sporting events, and allow sports marketers to determine who they will target for sporting events. This is especially salient since segment and target marketing have become much more important for the sport industry. Pan et al. (1997) found that factors such as gender, age, household income, and family size, were potential influential factors of collegiate basketball game attendance. Past research has found a link between income and spectator attendance for some sports such as cricket, but not for others such as football (Neale & Funk, 2006). For Indy 300, it is proposed that there will be a link between income and

spectator attendance, as it is reasonably costly to attend, and costs increase for attendees coming from interstate or overseas.

Schurr, Wittig, Ruble and Ellen (1987) compared business to non-business majors of attendees and concluded that individuals who were studying business were more likely to attend sporting events. Researchers such as James (2002) and Kwon and Trail (2001) have seen the value in identifying relationships between sport consumption and motivations of groups, such as female versus male, and international (non-American) versus American consumers. In particular, James (2002) compared the sport consumption motives of female and male sport fans in regards to basketball. They found that male consumers were classified as both a general sport fan and a fan of a specific sport at a significantly higher level than female consumers. In addition, knowledge and aesthetics were reported at a significantly higher level for male fans than for female fans. Based on this line of research there may be some demographic characteristics of those individuals who wish to attend the Indy 300.

The psychological perspective includes elements that are internal to consumers, such as expectations, satisfaction, personality types (Pan et al., 1997), individual preferences (Schofield, 1983), personal objectives (Krohn et al., 1998) and vicarious achievement (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Emotions are also important and this includes the inspiration associated with watching an exciting/vigorous sporting event, enjoyment, eustress (Hall & O'Mahony, 2006; Wann, 1995) and escape from everyday life (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Krohn et al. 1998, Wann, 1995). Others include group affiliation (Sloan, 1989; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000), family needs and traditions. These are important where children and family members are socialized into attending sport (Krohn et al. 1998) from a young age. Wakefield (1995) found that community acceptance, identification and reference group acceptance were important, and Kahle and Riley (2004) found that sports events provide opportunities for groups to socialize which enhances their overall experience. Similarly, Melnick (1993) has suggested that many spectators seek social interaction and entertainment through sports encounters. Hall and O'Mahony (2006) found this to be a moderate influence on people's desire to attend the F1, Grand Prix (in Melbourne, Australia). Attending sporting events has been associated with the opportunity to socialize with friends

and family (Wann, Melnick, Russell & Pease, 2001), and therefore, it is expected that attendance at Indy 300 will be for group affiliation reasons.

One other element of motivation has been labeled the “true fan factor,” which refers to attendees for whom the enjoyment of the “*game itself*” is most important. True fans are interested in the competitive nature of the game, the process, the outcomes and the performance of the team or individuals that they support (Hall & O’Mahony, 2006). The “true fan” is described as a loyal follower, a purist, and is prepared to attend every event, and even go when the event is some distance from where they live. True fans are concerned with the enjoyment of the event itself and are not dissuaded from attending the event by the outcome of the event, the venue, social dimensions, entertainment or financial considerations (Brokaw, 2000). This was an identified factor that influenced spectator attendance across various studies (Brokaw, 2000; Hall & O’Mahony, 2006; Krohn et al., 1998). Given the past research findings on spectator motivation to attend sports events, the research question for this study is “what factors influence motivation to attend for spectators at the Indy 300”?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews were utilized to determine why people attend the Indy 300. Spectators were approached randomly inside the event (every fifth person that passed the researchers immediately inside the gates), and were asked for their participation in the study. Based on their agreement, the spectator was interviewed by the researchers for a period of twenty-minutes. All interviewees agreed to their interview being tape-recorded, and these recordings were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then analysed using thematic analysis and the NVIVO 6 software was used. Thematic analysis identified major themes to illustrate the interviewees’ explanations, resulting in exemplary quotes being given. Sommer and Sommer’s (1991) procedure was used where (1) themes were identified in the text using guidelines, and categories were developed so they can be scored; (2) a count of the categories were made to identify which ones are relatively important; and (3) the themes were interpreted in relation to the research question.

In terms of the sample, thirty-six spectators were interviewed, most of whom ($n = 28$) were male (see Table 1). The demographic make-up is reflective of the gender of people attending motor sports events, as males have been cited to be attracted to exciting events (e.g., Wann et al., 2001). In the sample, the majority were young, with nine being in the 21 to 25 age bracket, and six in the 26 to 30 age bracket. Most spectators ($n = 21$) had a partner or were married, a little more than half of the respondents did not have children ($n = 18$), and came from Queensland ($n = 21$), which is reflective of the event being held on the Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. The largest group of spectators ($n = 10$) was in the income bracket of AUD\$50,000 to \$75,000 per annum, in the building and construction sector, with occupations such as plumbers, electricians, builders, laborers and project engineers.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results of the Study

A summary of the main results of the study is presented in Table 2. The themes are split up into external and internal factors.

Insert Table 2 about here

External Motivational Factors

As indicated in Table 2, nine participants stated they attended the event because of the exciting and exhilarating atmosphere the event created. In particular, the results of the study found that entertainment, excitement, inspiration and generally feeling good were indicative of an enjoyable atmosphere: *“Just the atmosphere... It just makes the Gold Coast alive. It brings it to life. It makes it alive. Everything is happening. It’s good.”* (Spectator, Male, Gold Coast, 37 years, 17 times attended). Eight spectators attended the event because of the cars. This theme was related to the “game itself”, as highlighted in the

following quote: *“Pretty much to see the races, so the V8 races and the Porsche races. So anything else that happens at the same time, it’s all a bonus”* (Spectator, Female, 20-25, 1st attendance). Participants also attended for entertainment-related experiences. For example, they wanted to attend so that they could drink alcohol, and have a good time during the event. The following quote is indicative, *“It is good to have a few drinks and enjoy myself”*, which was related to entertainment. Similarly, participants mentioned they attended the event to have a good time, enjoy themselves, have fun and party, *“To have a good time with all the tourists and the big crowds and have a lot of fun, basically. Just to feel the vibe”* (Spectator, Female, Gold Coast, 24 years, 3 times attended) and this theme was related to entertainment.

Attractive promotional girls were also a motivating reason for some of the (male) spectators to attend the event. ... *“The girls”* were the main reason one participant attended the Indy 300. While another spectator noted that, *“.... everyone is friendly. I love the beer and I especially love the girls* (Spectator, Male, Beenleigh, 45 years, 10 times attended). The weather was also mentioned by four participants as a motivating factor. For instance, the following spectator (Male, 46, Hervey Bay, 4 times attended), stated *“... the weather is just perfect for us as well...it’s nice and sunny for us”*. Two participants noted that they attended due to having received a work bonus. As stated by one participant, their organization had given them a trip to Indy 300 as a reward for working hard:

“It was a corporate thing. They shouted me the trip and said I could come up. So we get a corporate box...I won my ticket at work. My name got pulled out of a hat ... It’s a motivator to do well at work and get picked to come to Indy” (Spectator, Female, Sydney, 40, 1st time attended).

In terms of location other spectators mentioned that they live in the area, which attracted them to attend, pointing out that it was such a fantastic event it would be a waste not to come: *“We live here. You’d be mad not to come, wouldn’t you? People come from all around the world to come and see it and we live right here, so what else are you going to do”* (Spectator, Male, Gold Coast, 25 years, 1st time attended).

Internal Motivational Factors

Internal reasons for attendance included social reasons, which was related to group affiliation, as indicated in the following quote: *“All the boys are going. Everybody’s going so...you’ve got to go too!”* (Spectator, Male, Gold Coast, 27 years, 1st time attended). It seemed that it was important that if a group of friends were going then other friends also attended. Other group affiliation reasons were mentioned by participants, for example people noted that they attended because of *“the people”* at the Indy 300 event: *“I love the people; they’re great. We’ve had not much trouble. Everyone is friendly.”* (Spectator, Male, Gold Coast, 47 years, 10 times attended). Others attended for *escapism reasons* as they liked getting away from everyday life, *“to get away”* ... or *“going on a holiday”*. Attending the Indy 300 was a way for attendees to escape from the stresses of everyday life. Some participants reasons were categorized into the ‘true fan factor’, for example one participant stated that he had attended the event for seventeen years, and commented *“My life is motor sport. We have a rally-driving school, so it’s every day we’re racing cars around the track... This is my passion...”* (Spectator, Male, Gold Coast, 37 years, 17 times attended). Or similarly another participant stated that they came to the event because they are a fan of the sport, *“I am a motor sports fan”* (Spectator, Male, Bayside, 20, 2 times attended).

DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of this study was to determine why spectators attend the Indy 300, and it was found that both external and internal factors were influential. The external factors that motivated Indy 300 spectators were mainly entertainment-centered (e.g., the atmosphere, the cars, alcohol consumption, having a good time and party, and to view the attractive promotional girls). The most-cited external motivating factor was the atmosphere of the event (25%), which was also influenced by other entertainment-related factors such as alcohol consumption and having a good time and party. The way in which event organizers manage various aspects of “entertainment”, such as alcohol distribution and the “promotional girls”, should be examined more closely as it may have an impact on how the event is perceived. Their impact on future attendance as entertainment motives have been cited as a means to acquiring sport attendance loyalty (e.g., Hall & O’Mahony, 2006; Neale & Funk, 2006; Schofield, 1983). For example, the event managers should ensure that there are relatively sufficient opportunities to “feel”

and “experience” the entertaining components of the event. These opportunities may be cultivated through experiential tents, music and other atmospheric factors. The cars and, hence, the “*game itself*” were also cited as an important external motivator and supports the work of Hansen and Gauthier (1989) and Roy et al. (2010), specifically in their core racing values (i.e., “love of auto racing”). The excitement of watching cars racing around a track is an influential motive for people to attend, and having a variety of events such as Champ Car, Super V8’s and Drifting events, should make the overall event more attractive.

Weather was also given as a reason to attend, as the weather is warm during the time in which the race is scheduled. Therefore, location and scheduling (time of year) are important considerations in management and marketing of the event (Kahle et al., 2001). The location of the Indy 300 has been strategically placed on the Gold Coast where the weather is conducive to outdoor events. It is also placed within the tourism zone in Surfers Paradise, on a major highway (Fredline & Faulkner, 2002), and is set amongst high-rise apartment buildings that increase the visual spectacle of the event. This location, creates a ‘destination image’ for Indy 300, which creates an overall perceptions of the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2006). These perceptions are influenced by the quality of services provided, price and attractions. Destination image can also influence whether people will attend in the future (Chen & Tsai, 2006). Placing the Indy 300 on the Gold Coast at Surfers Paradise thereby creates a destination image for prospective participants, which may attract them to attend the Indy 300. In addition, the study results indicated proximity was a motivator for people living close by, as individuals felt compelled to attend because it was right on their door-step, which supports the work of Pan et al. (1997).

Lastly, some spectators noted that their employer had provided flights, accommodation and tickets to attend the Indy 300 as a work bonus and reward. This is unique to past research factors, as previous research has not examined this specific factor as a motivation to attend. Thus, consideration of the role employers may have in encouraging attendance should be considered by event organizers who could market “employee bonus packages” to corporate organizations as an extension to sponsor-related corporate incentives/attendance relationships. Incentives may be distributed through employers, and other promotional schemes that will entice the non-regular attendee.

Internal factors commonly mentioned by participants mainly related to group affiliation (friends are going and the people in attendance), which supports the work of recent researchers (Krohn et al., 1998; Pan et al., 1997; Roy et al., 2010; Wakefield, 1995) who found that the influence of others and the opportunity to interact is a motivator to attend the event. There is also a developing research area that examines the motivation of group-oriented travel behavior to large-scale events (Regan, Carlson, & Rosenberger III, 2009), and this could be relevant to events similarly to Indy 300. By advertising and marketing group packages and tickets, event organizers can manipulate this motivator, to their benefit. Previous studies have found that the chance to meet new people and interact with other spectators can influence attendance levels. Although already in existence, promoters may wish to further develop pre-, during and post-race functions to encourage this interaction, and to promote events using opportunities to enhance a social experience as it was found in this study to be a motivating factor.

Escapism was also found to be influential for attendees as the ability for people to get away from their everyday lives and the ability to have a good time was a motivator. Some researchers advocate that people need to break up the routine of their life, and discover, learn and fulfill their aesthetic desires (Getz, 2007), and they can do this by attending sport events. This is often referred to as a hedonic motive, and this finding supports past research on motivation to attend (e.g., Krohn et al., 1998; Trail, Anderson & Fink, 2000; Trail & James, 2001). The “true fan” factor or fan identification was another identified theme in the study. Therefore, people’s interest and obsession in motorsports, in particular Indy Car 300, is based around their fan identification (via “true fan” factor). Previous research has shown that the intensity of the connection between the sports fan and their team, club or player has a direct impact on fans’ consumption decisions. The ideas of team identification and commitment in sports consumer loyalty have been explained where “allegiance is the outcome of a process by which individuals develop stronger emotional reactions to, more functional knowledge about, and greater symbolic value for benefits and attributes associated with a sport team” (Funk & James, 2006, p. 189). Therefore, being committed and identified as a fan is an important motivator for the Indy 300 attendee. The stronger the fan identifies with sport the

more likely the fan will devote resources and time to engaging in fan-specific activities. A summary of the above findings is shown in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

As this study was exploratory in nature, and a qualitative approach was undertaken it is recognized that this research is not representative of all spectators who attend motorsports events, however, it is a starting point for exploring why these types of individuals attend motorsports events. The findings provide a preliminary snapshot of the factors that motivate these spectators, and further quantitative research on the topic could be conducted. Results can be further modeled to test relationships on behavioral and other attitudinal outcomes (e.g., commitment, identification, purchasing behaviors etc.). The results of the present study reflected that both external and internal factors were important in explaining attendance. The more commonly reported items were atmosphere, the cars, entertainment-related factors such as alcohol consumption, having a good time and party, promotional girls and location. The study also reported internal factors such as group affiliation; attendees were motivated to attend because their friends were going, and they enjoyed interacting with people at the event. Escapism, and being an identified as the “true fan” were also important. In addition, the gender, age, location and income were found to be characteristic of the spectators who were interviewed for the study. As advised by Hansen and Gautier (1989), the key to developing successful marketing plans is through understanding spectator motives and their impact on attitudes and behaviors. This will allow event organizers to better customize their marketing strategies towards those specific groups, and emphasize the motivators for attendees within the model of established relationships (on attitudes and behaviors), hence ensuring future event success.

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Figure 1: Internal and External Factors that Influence Motivation to Attend

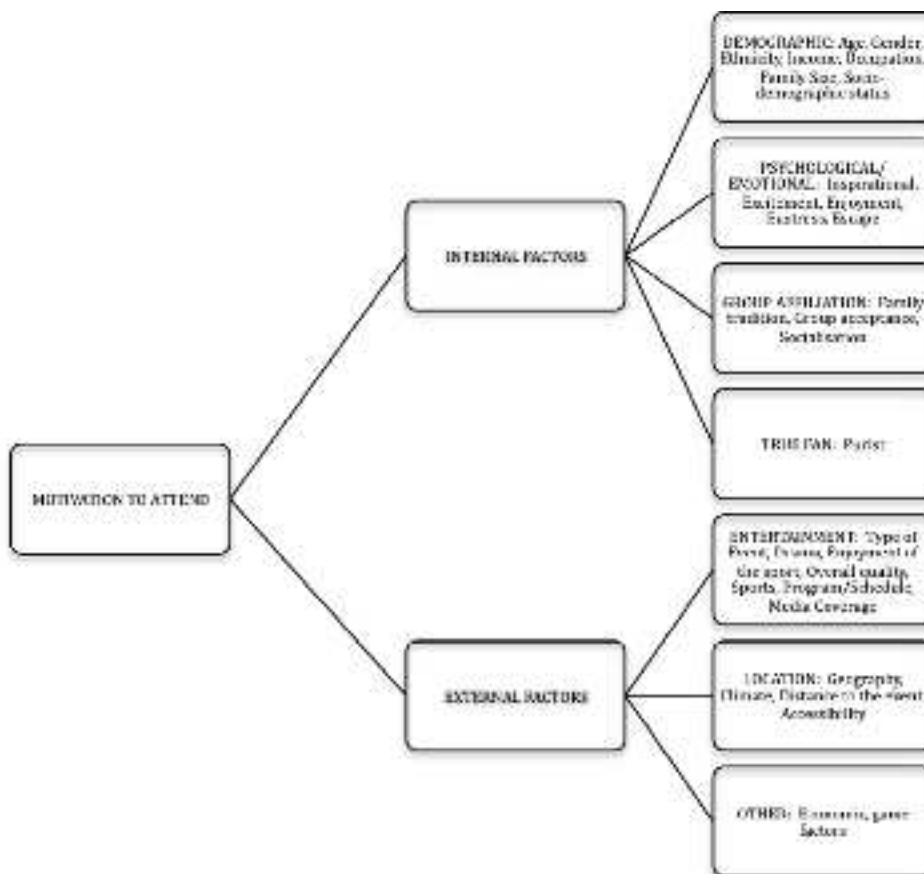


Table 1: Characteristics of the Spectators Involved in the Study

	N		N
Gender		Occupational Area	
Male	28	Sales and Marketing	2
Female	8	Building, Construction	10
		Entertainment	1
Age		Automotive and Transport	4
21-25	9	Accommodation and Restaurants	2
26-30	6	Medical	1
31-35	3	Retail	2
36-40	3	Service	1
41-45	3	Banking and Finance	1
46-50	2	Agriculture	1
51-55	4	Self-Employed	2
55+	0	Retired	1
Unspecified	6	Unspecified	8
Marital Status		Length of attendance	
Partner/Married/de Facto	21	One day	8
Single	11	Two days	7
Unspecified	4	Three days	1
		Four days	7
Children		Five days	3
Yes	15	Six days	0
No	18	Seven days +	2
Unspecified	3	Unspecified	8
Location		Times to Indy 300, Gold Coast	
Queensland	21	0-3	8
New South Wales	9	4-6	5
Victoria	5	7-9	5
South Australia	0	10-12	2
Overseas	1	13-15	0
Unspecified	0	16-18	1
Salary Level			
0-25,000	1		
25,001-50,000	4		
50,001-75,000	10		
75,001-100,000	5		
100,001+	5		
Unspecified	11		

Table 2: Motivation to Attend the Indy 300, Spectator ($n = 36$)

Motivation to Attend	Attendees (n)	Percentage (%)	Item in the literature	Internal/External
Atmosphere	9	25%	Entertainment, Emotions	External
Cars	8	22%	The Game Itself	External
Alcohol	5	14%	Entertainment	External
Have a good time, party	4	11%	Entertainment	External
The Girls	3	8%	Entertainment	External
Weather	4	11%	Location	External
Work Bonus	2	5%	Work benefits	External
I live here	2	5%	Location	External
Location	2	5%	Location	External
Friends are going	7	19%	Group Affiliation	Internal
The people	4	11%	Group Affiliation	Internal
Get Away	3	8%	Emotions (Escape)	Internal
I am a fan	1	2%	True Fan	Internal

Figure 2: Influences on Motivation to Attend the Indy 300

