

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN A SPORT EVENT EXPERIENCE

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This study investigates whether emotions can be considered a suitable variable to segment spectators at a sports event, as well as to test their affinity with social identification, perceived authenticity, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions. A structured questionnaire was developed and responses from a convenience sample of 258 spectators were collected on-site at the 2013 FIA World Rally Championship, Sardinia (Italy). A series of descriptive analyses, dual process cluster analyses (hierarchical and non-hierarchical), factor analyses, independent t-tests and chi-square tests were performed. Findings identified two segments; the cluster with the higher levels of positive emotions reported expressing higher levels of social identification, food-based and culture-based event authenticity (as measured by factors and/or composing items), satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Significant differences were reported between the two segments based on gender and prior experience with the event. Contributions to the body of knowledge and managerial implications are discussed and suggestions for further research are given.

Keywords: *Emotions, segmentation, satisfaction, behavioural intentions, event experience, sports events.*

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INTRODUCTION

Sports events generate various economic impacts (direct, indirect, and induced) (e.g. Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris and McDonnel, 2006) as well as social, environmental and marketing benefits for the hosting destinations; among them, we can consider the economic expenditure of spectators, the increase in the number of visitors, the enhancement in the destination brand awareness and image (Brown, Chalip, Jago and Mules, 2004), and the broadening of tourism seasonality (Bowdin et al., 2006).

Given the various types of benefits that sports events can generate, any tourism destination nowadays is facing fierce competition in earnest for a share in this desirable market. This explains why policy makers, destination marketers and event managers are becoming increasingly market-oriented and interested in gaining a better understanding of the wishes and needs of sport spectators and the experience that they are in search of. Hence, it is clear why in the last two decades, academic research has been devoted to deepening the knowledge about what motivates individuals to attend a sports event (Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, and Soteriades, 2016; Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, and Yeh, 2016; Fotiadis, Xie, Li, and Huan, 2016; Slak Valek, 2015; Nella & Christou, 2016), what they expect when taking part in it, and what makes them satisfied with their experience and willing to come back and/or to recommend it to others (e.g. Grappi and Montanari, 2011).

Emotions have been recognised to be important components of tourism experiences (e.g. Tung and Ritchie, 2011). Within the research devoted to consumer satisfaction, emotions have been considered key drivers of a holistic understanding of post-consumption behaviour (Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). Specifically, similarly to what happens in other settings (e.g. Bigné and Andreu, 2004), Grappi and Montanari (2011) showed that event spectators who feel positive emotions express a higher level of social identification and are more satisfied with the event. Furthermore, prior studies showed that the higher the level of emotional affect, the

more consumers perceive their consumption experience as being fascinating and authentic (e.g. Del Chiappa, Andreu and Gallarza, 2014), and the more they identify themselves with others consumers (e.g. Grappi and Montanari, 2011).

The aforementioned considerations explain why recent research strongly suggests that environmental features and cues of the event (i.e. cognitive dimensions) and emotions (i.e. affective dimensions) should be simultaneously considered when evaluating the spectators' experience and their satisfaction (e.g. Grappi and Montanari, 2011). Furthermore, they also explain why the emotions have been considered as a useful segmentation variable (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Bigné et al., 2008a; Del Chiappa, Andreu and Gallarza, 2014).

Despite this, there is still little research aimed at specifically investigating the ability of using emotions as a segmentation tool for a better understanding of spectator satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Hence, further theoretical and empirical studies are needed to demonstrate the use of emotions as a segmentation variable, and to test their affinity with social identification, perceived authenticity, satisfaction (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997) and behavioural intentions in the specific context of events. This study was carried out to contribute to filling this gap, specifically with regard to sports events. Purposely, after having presented and discussed the main literature devoted to analysing the role of emotions in tourist consumer behaviour, an empirical analysis of a convenience sample of 250 spectators attending the 2013 Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) WRC in Sardinia (Italy) is presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The call for research on emotions and consumer experiences is certainly not new (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Marketing literature, after a long period in which consumer behaviour was assumed to be largely rational, has started to study emotions evoked by marketing stimuli, products, services and brands in the last two decades (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). In the specific context of events, such stimuli eliciting emotion are mainly represented by the eventscape that includes elements such as: content, staff, information, program content, facilities, souvenirs and food (e.g. Grappi and Montari, 2011; Lee, Lee, Lee & Babin, 2008; Mason and Paggiaro, 2012; Fu & Kapiki, 2016)

Traditionally, tourism decision models proposed in tourism-related literature have focused on tourist rationality with few affective elements of consumption (Swarbrooke and Horner, 1999). During the last few years, some comprehensive works devoted to understanding the emotions associated with tourism have been provided (e.g. Bigné, Mattila and Andreu, 2008b; Hosany, 2011; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat and Del Chiappa, 2015; Küçükaltan & Pirnar, 2016), and rationality is no longer the paradigm that dominates tourism studies.

Nowadays, researchers devoted to tourism studies acknowledge that multiple perspectives can be used to understand the nature and scope of the tourist experience (Laing, Wheeler, Reeves and Frost 2014). Among them, and in contrast with the information-processing paradigm (where consumer behaviour is considered as being objective and rational), the experiential approach presents consumer behaviour as pursuing the more subjective, emotional and symbolic aspects of consumption (e.g. Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982), thus underlying the intrinsically personal relativity of consumption behaviour. Specifically, it could be argued that consumers are in search of experiences that are able

to satisfy different needs simultaneously, with most of them often being affective-based (e.g. Bigné et al., 2008b; Laing et al., 2014).

Emotions are important predictors of consumers' evaluations and behaviours and they mediate relationships between cognitions (e.g., the perceived performance of a product or service) and key outcomes, such as satisfaction, complaint behaviour, behavioural intentions and loyalty (Babin, Griffin and Boles, 2004; Lee et al., 2008; Oliver and Westbrook, 1993). The valence of emotions in influencing the consumption experience has been studied, distinguishing the main dimensions, namely: positive and negative (e.g. Lee et al., 2008).

Furthermore, when applied to tourism and hospitality settings, experiential approaches highlight the importance of authenticity (Sharpley, 1994) – “in shaping interpretation to, and satisfaction with, the tourism experience” (Ritchie, Tung and Ritchie, 2011, p. 434). Previous studies showed that the higher the level of emotional affect, the more consumers perceive their consumption experience as being fascinating and authentic (Del Chiappa et al., 2014), with the provision of a perceived authentic experience being able to increase tourist satisfaction with an event experience (Robinson and Clifford, 2012).

According to Grappi and Montanari (2011), the event experience is essentially social and shared with other visiting spectators; hence, “the degree of emotional gratification that attendees obtain from the environment affects their social identification” (Grappi and Montanari, 2011, p. 1138). In other words, the more positive emotions spectators feel participating in an event, the more strongly connected they feel with other visitors and the more they are willing to re-patronise the event (Grappi and Montanari, 2011).

The aforementioned considerations explain why several researchers have investigated the use of emotions as a segmentation variable (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Bigné et al., 2008a; Del Chiappa et al., 2014) by using a specific measurement instrument. Previous

literature used three principal approaches to measure emotions. The first approach suggests that emotional states exist in bipolar categories (Russell, 1980) and considers three dimensions of emotions, namely: pleasure–displeasure, arousal–non-arousal, and dominance–submissiveness (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). The second approach considers emotions as being originated from a relatively small number of basic emotions, namely: interest, joy, anger, contempt, disgust, shame, guilt, sadness, fear and surprise. Based on Izard’s (1977) study, the third approach – which is the one retained for this investigation – takes into consideration the idea that separate positive and negative affect dimensions are useful in understanding consumer reactions (e.g. Babin and Attaway, 2000).

When applying segmentation using emotions, previous studies used a discrete approach (Oliver and Westbrook, 1993; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). Bigné and Andreu (2004) measured emotions based on Russell’s bi-dimensional approach (Russell, 1980), which reflects the degree to which different individuals incorporate subjective experiences of pleasure and arousal into their emotional experiences (Barrett, 1998). Despite this, it can be argued that the variety and richness of the nature of emotions means that further empirical studies are needed to demonstrate their use as a segmentation variable for event spectators, and to further test their affinity with satisfaction (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997), social identification and perceived authenticity in the specific context of events. This study was therefore carried out with the specific aim of answering the following research questions:

RQ1. Is the level of overall satisfaction different based on the level of emotional feeling experienced at the event?

RQ2: Are spectators’ behavioural intentions different based on the level of emotional feeling experienced at the event?

RQ3. Does the perceived authenticity differ between groups of event spectators according to their higher or lower levels of emotional feeling?

RQ4: Do spectator express a different level of social identification according to their higher or lower levels of emotional feeling?

RQ5: Do customers with different demographics (i.e. gender, age, level of education, employment status, marital status, country of residence) and event-related characteristics (i.e. prior experience at the event) have a similar emotional attitude towards the event experience? Additionally, are these emotions dependent on objective variables (such as age, gender and level of education), or do they belong to an uppermost level of abstraction, where the objective traits of the consumer make no difference?

METHODOLOGY

In order to capture consumers' emotional outcomes in a tourism setting, the majority of existing studies usually ask respondents to rate their emotions on a set of affective items, thus applying the so-called self-report method (e.g. Mauss and Robinson, 2009). In accordance with this line of studies, we decided to use a questionnaire as a suitable method to gather consumption emotion information (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard, 1999). The survey instrument was developed based on existing literature and was divided into five sections.

The first section asked respondents to provide general socio-demographic information (gender, age, level of education, employment status, marital status, country of residence) and event-related characteristics (i.e. prior experience at the event). The second section asked spectators to assess the extent to which they were feeling eight different specific emotions during the event; four of them were positive (happy, pleased, energetic, excited) and four were negative (disappointed, bored, angry, annoyed). The emotions were sourced from Grappi and Montanari (2011) and were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1= *not at all*, 7=*very much*). The third section asked subjects to assess their level of agreement with a list of items used to measure their social identification; the items

were sourced from Grappi and Montanari (2011) and answers were captured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree*, 7 = *I strongly agree*). In the fourth part, spectators were provided a list of nine items used to measure their perceived authenticity of the event; the items were sourced from Brida, Disegna and Osti (2013) and Robinson and Clifford (2012) and were slightly adapted to suite the specific event-related setting of this study; answers were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree*, 7 = *I strongly agree*). Finally, in the fifth section, information was gathered to measure the overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Satisfaction was measured using three items sourced from Babin and Griffin (1998) and Lee et al. (2008), while behavioural intentions were measured using four items sourced from Lee et al. (2008) and Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996); in both cases, the answers were captured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *I strongly disagree*, 7 = *I strongly agree*).

Data were collected on-site during the days of the 2013 FIA WRC – Sardinia Rally (21–22 June 2013), with questionnaires administered face-to-face by four interviewers who were instructed to collect data at the place of the special stages from spectators aged more than 16 years. During the event, a total of 600 potential respondents were approached by the interviewees (convenience sample), of which 258 agreed to fill out the survey, thus originating a response rate of 43%. Sport tourist survey data were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and a series of descriptive analyses, cluster analyses, factor analyses, independent t-tests and chi-square tests were performed according to the purposes of the study.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of the sample. Respondents are mostly males (63.3%), under 35 years old (55.8%), with a secondary school education (50.0%), employees (29.7%) or self-employed (19.8%), married (31.6%) or singles (29.6%). The majority of respondents were regional residents (54.0%) or national tourists (26.6%) who have already attended the event at least once in the past (66.9%). As far as the type of accommodation is concerned, respondents were reported having stayed mainly in a hotel (36.7%) or B&B (24.8%) or were visiting friends and relatives (17.2%).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics

	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>(N= 49)</i>	<i>(N=209)</i>	<i>(N=258)</i>
Variables			
Gender			
Male	45.8%	67.3%	63.3%
Female	54.2%	32.7%	36.7%
Age			
16–25	29.8%	28.2%	28.5%
26–35	25.5%	27.7%	27.3%
36–45	27.7%	21.4%	22.5%
46–55	12.8%	15.0%	14.6%

55–65	4.3%	4.9%	4.7%
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>65	0.0%	2.9%	2.4%
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Education

None	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
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Primary school	2.1%	1.0%	1.2%
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High school	29.2%	24.2%	25.2%
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Secondary school	39.6%	52.5%	50.0%
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University degree	27.1%	21.7%	22.8%
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Master's degree/PhD	2.1%	0.5%	0.8%
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Occupation

Employee	15.6%	33.2%	29.7%
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Executive manager	11.1%	4.8%	6.0%
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Self-employed	17.8%	20.3%	19.8%
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Retired	2.2%	2.1%	2.2%
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Occasional worker	11.1%	13.9%	13.4%
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Unemployed	20.0%	12.8%	14.2%
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Student	22.2%	12.8%	14.7%
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Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
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Civil Status

Single	29.2%	29.7%	29.6%
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Engaged	27.1%	24.8%	25.2%
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De facto	6.3%	11.4%	10.4%
Married	35.4%	30.7%	31.6%
Divorced	2.1%	3.5%	3.2%
Widow	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Have you previously taken part in Rally Italia-Sardegna?

Yes	31.3%	75.5%	66.9%
No	68.8%	24.5%	33.1%

Country of residence

Sardinia	47.9%	55.4%	54.00%
Italy	31.3%	25.5%	26.6%
Abroad	20.8%	19.1%	19.4%

Type of Accommodation

Hotel	30.0%	38.3%	36.7%
B&B	20.0%	26.1%	24.8%
Rented apartment	6.7%	9.6%	9.0%
Hostel	0.0%	0.9%	0.7%
Friends or relatives	30.0%	13.9%	17.2%
Camper	3.3%	5.2%	4.8%
Tent/Camping	10.0%	6.1%	6.9%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

For the purposes of this study, eight emotions were considered in a dual process cluster analysis. According to Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2009), a hierarchical cluster (Ward method – Manhattan distances) was performed, and two groups emerged. The second step uses non-hierarchical techniques (e.g. k-means algorithm) to adjust the results from the hierarchical procedures. Using the initial seed points from the results in the hierarchical cluster, the k-means cluster defined two groups. The relevant information to be used to interpret and profile stages is provided in Table 2, which shows the final cluster centres and provides the mean value (centroid) of each of the eight emotional variables for each cluster.

Looking at the final cluster centres, Cluster 1 displays lower levels of positive emotions and higher levels of negative emotions in comparison to Cluster 2. To validate the cluster structure, a series of t-tests were run; the results show that significant differences exist among the clusters in terms of positive/negative emotional status. These findings suggest that segmenting consumers according to emotional experiences is feasible, thus confirming previous studies carried out in non-event related settings (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Bigné et al., 2008a; Del Chiappa et al., 2014).

Table 2. Cluster analysis

	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>	<i>T-test</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>(N= 49)</i>	<i>(N=209)</i>		
Excited	3.43	6.45	-21.159	0.000
Energetic	3.63	6.48	-17.876	0.000
Happy	4.08	6.52	-17.666	0.000

Pleased	3.00	5.99	-13.341	0.000
Disappointed	2.49	1.47	6.162	0.000
Angry	1.76	1.30	3.230	0.001
Bored	2.53	1.28	8.014	0.000
Annoyed	1.90	1.28	4.121	0.000

Cluster 1 (N= 49) includes a higher proportion of females (54.2%), aged under 35 years old (55.3%), married (35.4%) or single (29.2%), with a secondary school degree (39.6%), students (20%) or unemployed (22.2%). The majority of respondents belonging to this cluster (47.9%) are regional residents; 31.3% are national visitors and 20.8% are international visitors. Respondents not living in the event location mostly enjoyed their stay in a hotel (30.0%) or visiting relatives and friends (30.0%) and had not previously taken part in the rally (68.8%). Cluster 2 (N= 209 people) includes mostly males (67.3%), aged under 35 years old (55.9%), residing in Sardinia (55.4%) and single (29.7%) or married (30.7%), with a secondary school degree (52.5%). Respondents are mostly employees (33.2%) or self-employed (20.3%) with prior experiences attending the event (75.5%); when not residing in the event location, they enjoyed their stay in a hotel (38.3%) or B&B (26.1%).

With the purpose of answering the research questions, a factor analysis was performed on 20 items related to the consumption experience of spectators. A principal component factor analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation was undertaken. This procedure allowed us to identify four factors explaining 82.045% of the total variance (Table 3). The KMO-index (KMO = 0.892) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity (chi-square = 5979.869, p-value <0.0001) confirm that the factor analysis is appropriate to explain the data (Hair et al., 2009). Cronbach's alpha was then calculated to

test the reliability of the extracted factors; all values are 0.8 or higher, thus suggesting that the factors are reliable (Nunnally, 1978). The four factors have been labelled as follows: “F1 – Satisfaction and behavioural intentions”, “F2 – Food-based authenticity”, “F3 – Social identification” and “F4 – Culture-based authenticity”.

Factor 1 explains 46.518% of the total variance and is strongly related to items measuring the level of overall satisfaction and the intention to recommend the event to others and/or to return to attend it. Factor 2 explains 20.70% of the total variance and includes items measuring the level of perceived authenticity of local food and beverages that respondents could appreciate thanks to how the event was organised.

Table 3. Factor analysis

	Loadings	M.	S.D	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	% Cumulated	Alpha
Factor 1: Satisfaction & Behavioural Intentions				9.304	46.518	46.518	0.954
A1. I'm satisfied with my visit to this event	0.882	6.11	1.346				
A2. I feel very good about this event	0.901	6.07	1.298				
A3. I feel good about my decision to attend this event	0.875	6.17	1.210				
A4. I will recommend this event to friends/relatives	0.884	6.17	1.161				
A5. I will say positive things about this event to other	0.829	6.2	1.11				

people		1	6				
A6. I will attend this event next year	0.789	5.8	1.61				
		5	7				
A7. I will encourage friends/relatives to attend this event next time	0.844	6.0	1.26				
		8	6				
Factor 2: Perceived Food-based Authenticity		4.141	20.704	67.222	0.927		
A8. During the event, I had the chance to enjoy the authenticity of local food	0.893	5.3	1.85				
		7	1				
A9. During the event, I had the chance to enjoy the authenticity of local beverages	0.856	5.4	1.78				
		1	9				
A10. During the event, I had the chance to enjoy the local food in authentic restaurants that allowed me to be in touch with the Sardinian identity	0.891	5.3	1.99				
		1	0				
A11. During the event, I had the chance to enjoy typical food and wine with a good value for the cost	0.752	4.9	1.91				
		8	6				
Factor 3: Social Identification		1.704	8.518	75.740	0.984		
A12. My identity/personality is similar with that of the usual spectator of this event	0.851	4.8	2.08				
		2	3				
A13. I feel myself as being close to the usual spectator of this event	0.869	4.8	2.09				
		2	9				

A14. I feel a sense of belonging to the “tribe” of rally spectators	0.892	4.7 6	2.15 4
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A15. I feel a strong attachment to the group of other spectators	0.885	4.7 4	2.17 0
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Factor 4: Perceived Culture- based Authenticity		1.261	6.305	82.045	0.888
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A16. This event represents the local culture	0.824	4.5 2	2.15 2
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A17. This event represents a local historical tradition	0.864	4.4 2	2.13 3
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A18. This event is able to represent the image of Sardinia as a sport tourism destination	0.711	5.5 5	1.70 4
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A19. This event provides opportunities to be in touch with the local community	0.599	5.0 9	1.96 1
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A20. This event provides possibilities to learn about local costumes and traditions	0.665	4.5 8	2.15 3
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Factor 3 explains 8.52% of the total variance and is related to items that measure how people feel that they are connected with the event and with other people attending the event. Factor 4 explains 1.26% of the total variance and includes items measuring the extent to which respondents were able to appreciate the local culture and traditions thanks to how the event was organised.

To test the affinity of emotions with social identification, food-based and culture-based perceived authenticity, satisfaction and behavioural intentions, a series of statistical tests (t-test) was

performed both on factor scores and on each item included in each factor (Table 4); this was done using the group pattern that resulted when profiling respondents based on emotions elicited by the event (Table 2).

Table 4. T-test on factor scores and items

	<i>Mean Group 1 (N= 49)</i>	<i>Mean Group 2 (N=209)</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Factor 1: Satisfaction & Behavioural Intentions	-1.2167646	0.2906043	-10.999	0.000
A1.	4.38	6.51	-11.611	0.000
A2.	4.29	6.49	-12.978	0.000
A3.	4.63	6.55	-11.966	0.000
A4.	4.73	6.51	-11.294	0.000
A5.	5.02	6.49	-9.125	0.000
A6.	3.92	6.36	-11.569	0.000
A7.	4.52	6.47	-11.52	0.000

Factor 2: Perceived Food-based Authenticity	- 0.333357	0.1077589	-2.671	0.008
A8.	4.42	5.66	-4.297	0.000
A9.	4.42	5.76	-4.957	0.000
A10.	4.73	5.54	-2.593	0.010
A11.	4.21	5.22	-3.309	0.001
Factor 3: Social Identification	- 0.4979426	0.2033706	-4.582	0.000
A12.	2.74	5.49	-9.638	0.000
A13.	2.77	5.51	-9.642	0.000
A14.	2.98	5.39	-7.873	0.000
A15.	3.00	5.38	-7.706	0.000
Factor 4: Perceived Culture-based Authenticity	- 0.1193739	- 0.0378461	-0.490	0.625
A16.	3.75	4.67	-2.656	0.008
A17.	3.35	4.63	-3.749	0.000
A18.	4.94	5.63	-2.469	0.01

A19.	4.00	5.24	-3.935	0.00 0
A20.	3.94	4.69	-2.182	0.03 0

The findings revealed that significant differences exist among clusters for Factor 1, “Satisfaction & Behavioural Intentions” ($t = -10.999$; $p < 0.01$), thus suggesting that spectators with lower levels of positive emotions and higher levels of negative emotions (Cluster 1) are less satisfied and less willing to return to the event and/or to recommend it when compared to their counterparts (Cluster 2). For example, respondents belonging to Cluster 2 were more satisfied with the event ($M = 6.51$) when compared to people in Cluster 1 ($M = 4.38$) ($t = -11.611$; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, spectators in Cluster 2 ($M = 6.36$) were reported to be more willing to return to the event when compared to spectators in Cluster 1 ($M = 3.92$). Results confirm prior studies reporting that positive emotions are able to influence satisfaction and loyalty (e.g. Grappi and Montanari, 2011; Lee et al., 2008).

Significant differences among the clusters were also found for Factor 2, “Perceived Food-based Authenticity” ($t = -2.671$; $p < 0.01$); people with a higher level of positive emotions were reported to have an increased possibility of appreciating authentic food and drinks at the event compared to their counterparts (e.g. “During the event, I had the chance to enjoy the authenticity of local food”: Cluster 1 ($M = 4.42$), Cluster 2 ($M = 5.66$), ($t = -4.297$; $p < 0.01$).

The findings also revealed significant differences for Factor 3, “Social Identification”, showing that individuals who elicited higher levels of positive emotions during the event identified themselves more strongly as fitting in with the other spectators compared to their counterparts ($t = -4.582$; $p < 0.01$). For example, individuals in

Cluster 1 felt a lower sense of belonging to the tribe of event spectators ($M=2.98$) when compared to those in Cluster 2 ($M=5.39$) ($t = -7.873$; $p < 0.01$); similarly, they felt a lower level of attachment to the group of other spectators ($M = 3$) than did people of Cluster 2 ($M = 5.38$) ($t = -7.706$; $p < 0.01$). The results seem to confirm previous academic research, highlighting that a positive relationship exists between positive emotions and social identification (Grappi and Montanari, 2011).

Finally, no significant differences were found among clusters for Factor 4, “Perceived Culture-based Authenticity” ($t = -0.49$; $p = 0.625$); despite this, some significant differences were found among clusters when items belonging to this factor were individually considered (e.g. “The event represents a local historical tradition”: Cluster 1 ($M = 3.35$), Cluster 2 ($M = 4.63$), ($t = -3.749$; $p < 0.01$), or “This event provides possibilities to be in touch with the local community”: Cluster 1 ($M = 4.00$), Cluster 2 ($M = 5.24$), ($t = -3.935$; $p < 0.01$).

Finally, a series of chi-squared tests were run to ascertain whether consumers with different demographic (i.e. gender, age, level of education, employment status, marital status, country of residence) and trip-related characteristics (i.e. prior experience at the event) had a similar emotional attitude towards the event experience. Findings showed that significant differences existed between the two clusters based on gender ($X^2 = 7.740$, $p < 0.01$) and prior participation in the event ($X^2 = 32.247$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Chi-square test

Variables	Chi-square	sig.
Gender	7.740	0.005
Age	2.308	0.805
Level of education	3.703	0.448
Employment status	9.984	0.125
Marital status	1.576	0.813
Prior experience with the event	34.247	0.000
Country of residence	0.946	0.623
Type of accommodation	14.162	0.117

No differences were found based on age ($X_2 = 2.308$, $p = 0.805$), level of education ($X_2 = 3.703$, $p = 0.448$), employment status ($X_2 = 9.984$, $p = 0.125$), marital status ($X_2 = 1.576$, $p = 0.813$), country of residence ($X_2 = 0.946$, $p = 0.623$), or type of accommodation ($X_2 = 14.162$, $p = 0.117$) (Table 5).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to analyse the usefulness of emotions as segmentation variables with regard to sports events and the relationship between emotions, satisfaction, loyalty, social identification and authenticity. Furthermore, this study explored the

influence of socio-demographic- and trip-related variables on emotional status.

In the specific context of a sports event – where, to the best of our knowledge, an emotion-based segmentation approach has not previously been applied in the literature – our findings confirm that emotions are adequate for consumer segmentation. Specifically, two different segments were identified based on the level of emotions that spectators experienced during the event.

Specifically, the cluster with the higher level of positive feelings and emotions (Cluster 2) was found to be more satisfied with the event, and more willing to return and to recommend it to others, perceiving a higher level of food/culture-based authenticity and expressing a higher level of social identification with the event and its spectators. In line with prior studies devoted to festivals and cultural events, our findings confirm that emotions can also be a determinant of satisfaction in the specific context of sports events. Furthermore, the fact that clusters differed just based on gender, but not based all other demographics, seems to partially confirm prior studies (e.g. Del Chiappa et al., 2014), suggesting that emotions more than “objectivism,” accounts for shaping satisfaction, with emotions belonging to an uppermost level of abstraction, whereby the objective traits of the consumer make little difference. The fact that significant differences were found among clusters based on gender, with Cluster 2 (the one with higher levels of positive emotions) made up mostly of males, could be explained by arguing that the rally events are more likely to elicit positive emotions in men; in other words, the rally could be considered as mainly being a “man-based event”.

Furthermore, the fact that individuals in Cluster 2, who are also more likely to have prior experience with the event, expressed higher levels of positive emotions when compare to those in Cluster 1 (with no prior experience with the event) could be explained by arguing that spectators in Cluster 2 are a type of fan of the event.

Overall, our results seem to suggest, in line with the existing literature, that variables traditionally considered for segmentation are no longer useful for identifying differentiated groups of customers (Story and Hess, 2006). Furthermore, they add to a body of knowledge suggesting that cognitive and emotional aspects should be considered simultaneously when developing models to measure spectator satisfaction and behavioural intentions (e.g. Grappi and Montanari, 2011). Finally, individuals with higher levels of positive emotions expressed higher levels of social identification, as well as food-based and culture-based authenticity, thus somehow confirming, also in the context of sports events, that emotional status is also able to influence consumer consumption outcomes.

Aside from the contribution to the body of knowledge that arose from the aforementioned conclusions, the findings of this study have a number of practical implications for policy makers, destination marketers and event organisers. First, they suggest that managers need to re-emphasise how customers feel about their experience of service delivery by giving greater attention to what could be done to elicit their positive emotions during the event. Despite the obvious relevance of the emotions spectators feel during the event experience, usually event organisers (as it happens for other service providers: Barsky and Nash, 2002) do not generally ask them for feedback on their emotions and feelings. Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of how consumers experience emotions during the event experience, as well as the different ways in which these influence and contribute to social identification, satisfaction, behavioural intentions and perceived authenticity, would give rise to relevant information that could be used to better design and deliver the event experience itself. For example, given that prior studies found that food quality is able to influence positive emotions and patron satisfaction, event managers and food vendors should be monitored for quality and variety in an effort to enhance the overall event experience (e.g. Lee et al., 2008). Broadly, the findings

suggest that event managers should pay attention to improving the overall eventscape rather than just relying on “hard” variables of the event (such as facilities); all event details have the potential to provide pleasure and positive feelings to visitors (e.g. food, entertainment, music and sound, etc.). Attention to these details is needed to heighten participants’ emotional experience (Mason and Paggiaro, 2012).

Finally, the findings suggest that segmenting spectators on the basis of emotional feelings and tracking their emotions over time in the post-consumption phase would constitute a relevant measure to assess visitors’ experiences and satisfaction.

Despite the theoretical and managerial implications, this study has a number of limitations. First, we have introduced a study of a concrete case and a specific type of event (i.e. rally) based on a convenience sample. The application of the study to other events would allow for wider generalisations of the obtained findings. Second, the study did not investigate the direction and the intensity of the relationships between emotions and the other constructs (i.e. satisfaction, behavioural intentions, perceived authenticity and social identification); future research could replicate the study in other types of sports events with the aim of collecting a representative and stratified sample to be used for more sophisticated statistical analyses (e.g. structural equation modelling). Finally, this study applied the self-report method to capture consumers’ emotional feeling and thus it may have involved cognitive bias and/or have elicited the tendency to provide socially acceptable answers (Wiles and Cornwell, 1991). Hence, future research could consider the possibility of using psychophysiological measures (e.g. heartbeat, facial expressions and muscle movements) (Wang and Minor, 2008) or electro-dermal analyses (e.g. skin response, galvanic skin response) (e.g. Jacobs, Fehres and Campbell, 2012).

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