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An examination of participants at special interest events in regional Australia

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AN EXAMINATION OF PARTICIPANTS AT SPECIAL INTEREST EVENTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
June 2009
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge, based on raw data collected by me except as fully acknowledged in the text. The work is original in content except where referenced, and I hereby declare that I have not previously submitted this material, in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Dr. Nerilee Hing
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List of publications included in this thesis

The following double-blind, peer reviewed publications are included in this thesis:


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Abstract

Events provide opportunities for communities to socialise, interact and to enjoy a sense of mutual celebration. However, special interest events offer other opportunities for recreation, and for the development of skills, identities and knowledge. Events such as car shows, Sci-fi conventions and Elvis festivals have large numbers of participants, as well as spectators, who have specialised needs and characteristics. This thesis uses a series of five published studies to examine the participants at special interest events and further to understand their characteristics and behaviours. The studies employ a mixed method approach to explore participants at a total of eleven events in Australia. In the first of these studies a spectrum of events is developed to explain the diversity of events in a region, as related to the special interest of participants. The study used a mixed method methodology to examine the differences between audiences at nine events in the Tweed Valley of NSW. The results were used to focus the study more on events that target serious participants.

The second study was published as a conceptual paper, providing a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of serious participants of leisure, recreation and events. The paper posits a model of serious participants (SerPa) for use and refinement in subsequent studies.

Papers 3 and 4 explore serious participants at two feature events in Australia, the Wintersun Festival in Coolangatta, and the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes. Drawing on the serious leisure framework proposed by Stebbins (2001), and other leisure and tourism research, the study explored the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at these events. Ethnographic methods were used to gain insight into behaviours, through participant observation at the events. The findings further develop the SerPa model, but also identify other themes that are relevant to leisure and event management and marketing.

Paper 5 explores the social connections of serious participants made on the Internet, and identifies their relationship to travel planning and events. The study utilised ethnographic methods adapted to the Internet, to identify and
discuss the social characteristics of serious participants as fans of Lord of the Rings, and the processes used to collaborate toward travel planning.

The study demonstrates the significance of serious participants as a segment of audiences at events, highlighting their contributions to the events themselves. As participants, they make the event happen, and are perhaps more important than consumers (Getz, 2007). They are defined by what they do in their leisure time, more than who they were born as, or by their profession. They have a leisure identity that defines them, and can find support and security in the fanatical system that they subscribe to. This system is usually found in special interest clubs, on-line networks and at events. These social systems help sustain their beliefs, and provide a leisure world where they feel a sense of ‘we’. From their serious devotion and social connectivity, serious participants receive social and personal rewards, which in turn provide more stimuli to develop their skills and/or knowledge. These psycho/social characteristics result in participants searching for new challenges and new destinations, which can facilitate their needs. These are found at events that are designed specifically with serious participants in mind.

The study demonstrates that identification of these market segments has important implications for the design and sustainability of events in Australia, and overseas. Additionally, it also has implications for planners and practitioners in leisure and tourism in understanding the extant links between recreation, travel and events.
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Chapter One – Introduction to the Study

*It’s what we do, and love it.*

Participant at Targa Tasmania
1.1 Introduction

Of course we will be going again. Jack found some more money to buy that car he had his eye on. They reckon he must have sold his wife to get it, but he really wants to win this year. I've been watching the DVD of last year's race, and I think I can beat my time.

'Brad,' Targa Tasmania participant (2007)

Every week in Australia, specialist events such as Targa Tasmania entice participants to compete in competitions, races and shows that will challenge their skills and reinforce their social persona. Known as participant events (Getz, 2007) or special interest events (Zeppel, 1992; Events Tasmania, 2006), they are planned experiences specifically designed to meet the needs of special interest groups and/or specialised recreationalists. The events range from small dog shows and swap meets, to large festivals, conventions and expositions (EXPOs) that attract visitors from across the country and overseas.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the characteristics and behaviours of participants at special interest events; to examine those who attend with the intention of partaking in the activities provided by the event. Participation may vary from performing on a stage, to competing in a car show. It is a contention of this thesis that participation in special interest events is not well understood, and further that psycho/socio analysis of participants can assist stakeholders in tourism and leisure industries to promote, plan and coordinate participant events.

The study is designed as a ‘thesis incorporating publications’ (described in Section 1.7), and thereby uses a series of five published studies to examine the participants at special interest events. The studies, presented in Chapters 2-6, employ a mixed-method approach to examine participants at a total of eleven events in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. This approach is based upon an inductive research paradigm (described in Section 1.5), which seeks to discover the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at events.

As described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, event participants may participate by driving cars or competing in dance contests, others attend to learn a new skill for their hobby, while others attend to spectate and socialise with their families.
While this study begins with an examination of the dimensions of event participation (Chapter Two), the main focus of the thesis is on the segments who are serious participants, to understand their characteristics and behaviours, and how attending events fits with other parts of their leisure careers and personal lives.

The results inform the development of a model of serious participation (SerPa) which is utilised to describe and interpret the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at special interest events (Chapter 7). As the results of this thesis will demonstrate, serious participants attend for patent personal and social reasons. They are, in fact primarily participants in recreation (dancers, rodders and bikers), or in fandom (Elvis fans, or Sci-fi fans) and secondly, participants at the event. These events provide essential benefits for the participants. Special interest events provide a crucial context for the development of skills, social networks and reinforcement of leisure careers and recreational goals.

The importance of this study is highlighted in federal, state and local government initiatives to encourage visitation to events (Tourism White Paper, 2004; NSW State Plan, 2006; Tweed Shire Council Festival Strategy, 2006). These documents, discussed in more detail below (Section 1.3.3), affirm the contribution of events to the economic prosperity of regional towns, as well as defining the branding of tourism destinations, and the encouragement of cultural and recreational participation and community wellbeing.

And yet, while events are promoted as desirable for the development of regional communities, there is little research into the needs and behaviours of the thousands of participants who travel extensively to attend them. As determined in the discussion following, event participants bring energy, excitement and specialist skills to an event to help create the event and engage spectators’ interest. As such, the study has implications for events professionals who identify the increased pressure to run events more successfully, and to cover the increased costs of insurance and facilities (Allen, O’Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2005). To achieve efficiencies, event managers can develop a market orientation that focuses upon the needs and wants of participants as distinct from other segments of the audience (Mehmetoglu & Ellingsen, 2005).
From an academic perspective, the sheer number and frequency of events held in Australia also provide an impetus to understand ‘what is going on’ from a social research perspective (Morse, 2003). Attempts to form an agenda for event research in Australia have also identified the need to discover more about the motives of those who participate in events (Harris, Jago, Allen & Huyskens, 2000). The in-depth exploration of event participants provided in this thesis adds to the pool of knowledge developed by academics of leisure and social studies that surround events in tourism, leisure, sport and fandom; and yet provides new insights into the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants.

As highlighted in Chapter 8, research in this area also provides valuable market information that can ultimately inform decisions in event management and marketing. The study suggests new strategies through which event markets can be segmented and targeted, based upon knowledge of participants’ behaviours, needs and expectations. Further, this information can be utilised by tourism managers and government agencies that plan, finance and support many of these events.

This first chapter provides background to the origin of the study (1.2) and discusses the interrelated fields of theory that have informed the design and operation of the research (1.3) and the initial framework of the thesis. The research objectives and scope for the study are identified (1.4 and 1.5) and the ensuing methodological philosophy and approach are explained (1.6). Considerations for the design as a thesis incorporating publications, and the structure of the thesis are provided in Section 1.7, and the significance of the study is provided in 1.8. Consequently, the first chapter provides the structure and platform for the development of the series of studies, and holistic analysis of serious participants at events.

1.2 Background to the Investigation of Event Participants

The impetus for exploring participation at special interest events has come about from a personal and professional interest in events and tourism, described further in Section 1.5.2. A curiosity about how and why people attend
events in Australia evolved into academic enquiries into the nature of participation at events. As Getz (2007) rightly stated, without participants there are no events. Initial investigations found that research into event participation was very limited, and featured mixed approaches to classifying participants, spectators, audiences, attendees and visitors. In this regard, there is no single model of event participation. This is in part due to the diversity of events, (described in 1.2.5) where the boundaries between participant, spectator, volunteer and performer are unclear. It is the intention of this thesis to contribute to the conceptualisation of audiences and the role of participants to the event, and to the wider community or destination.

While there is no single model of event participation, there is recognition that audiences may include a range of groups having event experiences, and can include paying customers, guests, participants, media audience, remote television viewers, performers, producers, VIP’s officials and regulators, sponsors, suppliers, volunteers, paid staff, media and the public (Getz, 2007). Accordingly, the term ‘audience’ in this thesis includes a range of people in this list who may or may not attend an event with the intention of participating.

The role of the audience has been examined in differing contexts, including performing arts, film, television, theatre and events, demonstrating various understandings of audience needs and behaviours. As discussed below, these roles and behaviours can vary to those observed at events.

Studies in performing arts, such as theatre, ballet and opera, recognise the basic role of audiences in supporting and watching performers, who are often on a stage (Bennet, 1997). The role of performers is to engage and excite the audience. Audiences leave the performance space (theatre or gallery) having consumed an experience. However, more recent initiatives into arts-based audiences promote an understanding that ongoing relationships can be formed with audiences to encourage regular visitation (Maitland, 2000).

Studies in television also describe the basic role of the audience as spectator, but have similarly widened the set of behaviours, to include participatory behaviours such as writing fanzines and even television episode scripts (Barker & Brooks, 1998). Film-based researchers also suggest audiences
Participants in Special Interest Events  Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

wish to be involved and participate in ways other than spectating (Murray, 2004; Williams, 2007a).

As highlighted in this thesis, audiences at events differ from film, television and performing arts audiences, as they are often given opportunities to go beyond watching or supporting performers. At many events, audiences are offered opportunities for interaction, and participation at varying levels. Audience members can engage in activities such as dancing in the streets, circus acts, contests, tournaments, workshops and street parades. The line between performer and spectator, so distinct in television and film, can often become blurred, as spectators are encouraged to join in to become performers too.

The studies within this thesis, build upon current conceptualisations of event audiences and more specifically of event participants, and while not providing a model of all participation, the proposal of the SerPa model, contributes to a wider understanding of how and why people attend events in Australia.

1.3 Theoretical Background

The identification and study of serious participants at events are related to a number of interconnected fields of academic endeavour. The background to these fields of study is provided in this section (1.3). As depicted in Figure 1, the fields of leisure, recreation, consumer behaviour, events, tourism, and fandom all contribute to a theoretical background for the study of audiences at special interest events. Consequently, the study has employed a multidisciplinary approach to the research of event participants. This approach puts aside questions of whether recreation is a component of tourism (Pigram, 1985), or that tourism is carried on within an essentially recreational framework (Murphy, 1985), and accepts the view that in many cases the two are mutually supporting (Mill, 1990; Hall, 1995; Swarbrooke and Horner, 2007). This broader approach was considered practical to explore the behaviours of event participants who may be seen as both recreationists and tourists.

The review of these theoretical fields subsequently highlights the dearth of research exploring participants at events, and the gap in our knowledge that this situation creates.
Figure 1: Spheres of literature

An understanding of the word ‘participant’ is critical in this thesis, as it is used extensively to refer to the individuals under study. The following sections provide a discussion of participation in these spheres of literature, beginning with a conceptual definition of participants, followed by discussion of the theories relevant to participation in leisure and recreation, tourism, events, fandom and consumer behaviour.

1.3.1 The classification of participation

Conceptually, participation has been described as passive or active by tourism, leisure and event researchers (Iso-Ahola 1982; Stebbins, 2001; Getz, 2007). Essentially, these researchers suggest that active participation is driven by or involves greater amounts of energy, enthusiasm, commitment of time and resources and increased knowledge and skills than passive participation. Passive participation relates to spectating, watching, observing, and often requires little skill or knowledge. The word participation is used frequently in the theoretical disciplines illustrated in Figure 1, albeit with variation of meaning. As discussed in the sections following, there is a shared understanding that participation can be either passive or active in leisure, recreation, tourism and event research.
Within this range of activity, this thesis examines active participants at events whose participation is in leisure, recreation (and fandom), events and tourism. The background to research and theory within these fields is discussed in the sections following.

### 1.3.2 Background to participation in leisure in Australia

The study of participation in leisure in Australia is made difficult by a lack of reliable data (Veal, 2005). However, some overall trends are identified which are useful to the background of this study. Firstly, predominantly passive home activity dominates leisure interests of Australians, and secondly, smaller segments actively pursue interests in arts and sports activities (Veal, 2005). It is these smaller segments that are the focus of this thesis, and as such, are discussed in detail in this section. These trends are expanded on below.

Much of the available data collected by governments in Australia is fragmented making it difficult to ascertain the extent of participation in certain types of leisure activities. As noted by Veal;

> The fragmentation has also left gaps in the picture, for example in visiting urban and national parks, social activities, such as visiting pubs, clubs and festivals, and home-based leisure (2005, p.54).

From the available data, researchers such as Veal (2005) have observed wide disparity in patterns of leisure participation. The majority of the participation in leisure activities in Australia is based around passive home activities, such as watching television, with 87% of Australians reporting this as their main leisure activity (ABS, 2006). In 2006, Australians watched television for an average of approximately 3 hours per day. ‘This means that in 2006, Australians aged 15 years and over spent a total of 42 million hours watching television each day’ (ABS, 2008, p.11). However, as shown in Table 1 smaller segments of the population actively participate in a wide variety of other recreational activities outside the home in both sporting and cultural pursuits. For example, the Time Use Survey (ABS, 2006) found that about 4% of the population visited entertainment and cultural venues, 25% participated in a sports or outdoor activity, 43% in reading, and 22% in audio/visual media. The
majority of participants in this study would fit into the games/hobbies/arts/crafts category, which lists a 17.7% participation rate.

Table 1: Average time spent on selected culture and leisure activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Average time spent per day</th>
<th>Average % of activity by all Australians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting entertainment and cultural venues</td>
<td>114 minutes</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at sport event</td>
<td>127 minutes</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious activities/ritual ceremonies</td>
<td>91 minutes</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and outdoor activity</td>
<td>88 minutes</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games/hobbies/arts/crafts</td>
<td>100 minutes</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>76 minutes</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV watching/listening</td>
<td>167 minutes</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/DVD watching</td>
<td>206 minutes</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to radio</td>
<td>123 minutes</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to records/tapes/CDs and other audio media</td>
<td>51 minutes</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at courses (excluding school and university)</td>
<td>110 minutes</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/visual media (does not include (a) &amp; (b))</td>
<td>83 minutes</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All or rounded to zero (including null cells).
- (a) Includes only those that have taken part in the activity.
- (b) Includes cultural activities that were undertaken as a secondary activity.
- (c) Computer and internet use, other than for games.

Source: ABS (2008, p.12)

Earlier data from the Australia Council (1999) suggested that 38% of Australians have direct participation in arts-based leisure in creative activities across a wide spectrum of interests – with creative writing being the most popular activity. There are, however, limited data to suggest how these interests are pursued, and to what extent. Is creative writing pursued at home, on the Internet, in clubs or at events such as the Byron Bay Writers Festival? Data from government agencies often provide researchers with broad trends of participation, while other theoretical approaches can assist in answering more specific questions about hobbies and recreational activities. The theoretical approach chosen for this study was the serious leisure framework, because it provided structure and insight into participants of a range of indoor and outdoor recreational and hobbyist pursuits. The framework also matched the methodological approach described in Section 1.5.
**Serious leisure**

In order to discover more about the ongoing career-like interests of participants at events, a leisure theory was adopted as a guiding framework. After consideration of other models, such as the Leisure Motivation model (Ragheb & Tate, 1993), and the Leisure Involvement theories of Havitz and Dimanche (1991, 1997, 1999), the serious leisure framework proposed by Stebbins, (1992, 2001) was adopted as it best aligned with the types of participants and types of environments which would be encountered during the studies in this thesis. The framework explores participants who pursue leisure interests with intensity, commitment and passion. Stebbin’s concept of serious leisure (1992, 2001) identified characteristics that could distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure as follows:

- A need to persevere at the activity – overcoming danger, fear, embarrassment and failure. According to Stebbins (2001, p.6), ‘it is clear that positive feelings about the activity come, to some extent, from sticking with it through thick and thin, from conquering adversity.’

- The availability of a leisure career – where the leisure activity has stages of development, turning points and temporal continuity. The term career also brings with it ideas of accumulating progress, rewards and prestige. Stebbins (2001) has also researched careers that show retrogression, where peaks in performance are reached early and are followed by reduced prestige and rewards.

- Significant personal effort based on skill, training and knowledge – where casual leisure may not require effort, serious leisure participants make a personal effort through reading, workshops, classes and contests.

- Realisation of various special benefits or outcomes. These are in the form of personal gain. Stebbins (2001) includes self-actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression and renewal of self.

- A unique ethos and social world – participants are part of a social world that has its own informal norms and ethos. As defined by Unruh (1979 p.115 cited in Stebbins, 2001), ‘a social world must be seen as an internally recognisable constellation of actors, organisations and events.
and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants.’

- An attractive personal and social identity – where participants identify strongly with their chosen pursuit to form a new or altered identity.

Adapted from Stebbins (2001, pp.6-10)

The work in this thesis builds upon the studies of serious leisure, and as such greatly acknowledges the seminal work of Robert Stebbins in pioneering this field of research. The term ‘serious participant’ is used to reflect the importance of the serious leisure concept to the development of this thesis.

There are, to the author’s knowledge, three studies in Australia which have used the serious leisure framework; Hamilton-Smith (1993) studied Australian bushwalker, Miles Dunphy, in relation to the development of his personal leisure career; Frew (2006) examined participants at a comedy festival; and Parker, Hamilton-Smith and Davidson (1993) explored the leisure interests of 30 Australians.

As highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4, serious leisurists have been studied within their clubs (Scott & Godbey, 1994) and at some events, and yet there is little research on the participants at recreational events. With the exception of studies by Frew (2006) and Shipway and Jones (2007), the influence and implications of serious leisure participants at events have been neglected in academic literature.

Recreation in leisure

A further distinction is necessary in the study and discussion of leisure, involving the place of recreation. According to Kraus (1978), recreation can be defined as follows:

Recreation consists of activities or experiences carried on within leisure, usually chosen voluntarily by the participant - either because of satisfaction, pleasure or creative enrichment derived, or because he perceives certain personal or social values to be gained from them. It may also be perceived as the process of participation, or as the emotional state derived from involvement.

(Kraus, 1978, p.37).
Alternatively, other researchers such as Leiper (2004) and Ap (1986) have also considered the literal meaning of re-creation as to ‘re-create[s] the individual so that he/she may be refreshed to enable him/her to resume daily obligations, whatever those may be’ (Ap, 1986, p.167).

Studies in recreation are as diverse as the range of activities within. Relevant to this thesis are those in recreation specialisation theory, which seek to understand the specialised interests of recreationists. In his seminal work, Bryan (1979) set out to ‘explore the idea that trout fishermen can be arranged along a specialization continuum which is linked to the diverse sportsmen preferences and behaviour’ (Bryan, 1979, p.30). The ensuing studies identified participants along a spectrum of interest and involvement with the ‘occasional fishermen’ at one end of the spectrum and ‘technique setting specialists’ at the other. The specialist recreational anglers studied by Bryan were ‘every bit as committed to their sport as my colleagues were committed to their jobs’ (2000, p.19).

It is these two ideas that much of this study is based upon; a) the concept of a spectrum of involvement and dedication towards leisure activities and, b) the concept of serious participation in leisure – and more specifically at leisure events. Within these studies, the importance of social contexts or social worlds is an integral component to understanding the motives and characteristics of participation. As noted, in the fourth of Stebbins characteristics, serious participants have a ‘unique ethos and social world’, explored in subsequent studies by Gillespie, Leffler and Lerner (2002), and Kane and Zink (2004). Bryan (1979) also refers to the social world of recreational anglers, while other specialisation researchers refer to the ‘leisure social world’ (McFarlane, 2004). As explored in later chapters, attending events that are tailored to the needs of participants enhances the importance of the leisure social world. However, attending events has an inherent element of travel, which has been examined under various guises, the first of which is recreational travel.

Recreational travel

The interrelatedness of recreation, leisure and tourism is highlighted in the concept of recreational travel posited by Iso-Ahola (1983) who suggested:
In sum, recreational travel is defined as activity performed in the process of travelling to, from and at a given destination during a period of time subjectively designated as unobligated, free, or leisure, the main goal of which is perceived and set to be recreation.


The study of recreational travel includes the diverse range of recreational activities, both active and passive for which participants travel. The basis of this theory was set in 1982 when Iso-Ahola proposed a theory of leisure motivation comprised of both seeking (intrinsic rewards) and escaping (routine environments) elements. The four dimensions he proposed include personal seeking, personal escape, interpersonal seeking, and interpersonal escape. These motives are considered latent and act as push factors as an individual pursues recreation activities. The theory has then been further advanced (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991) as the driving force for tourism behaviour. Significantly, they suggested that the benefits of recreational travel are drawn from the interplay of escaping and seeking of personal and interpersonal opportunities (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991). The validity of this theory was tested by Snepenger, King, Marshall and Uysal (2006), who found empirical support for the theory, but suggested additional research in different contexts was needed.

The process of travelling to and from a destination has also been explored in the many studies of tourism, an overview of which is given below.

1.3.3 Background to the study of participants in tourism

Participants in tourism are known as tourists, rather than participants. They typically participate in touristic activities, such as sightseeing, touring or travelling, as well as other recreational, business and sporting activities (Hall, 1995). This study focuses on the tourist experiences of special interest tourists at events. While much of the study focuses on the serious participants who have specialised itineraries and aspirations, the thesis also identifies the other participants (spectators and dabblers) who also comprise the audience at events. As such, it is useful to utilise a tourist market system to examine event participants as tourists within a market system. Similarly, it is also useful to examine the place and role of events as part of a tourism industry within a
market system. As highlighted in the discussion below, events are attractions that rely on the relationships and cooperation of other organisations to create a sustainable event experience. The tourism market system, proposed by Hall (1995), assists in conceptualising these relationships.

Research into tourism has focussed on the tourist, their motivations and decisions (Plog, 1974; Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Pizam and Mansfield, 1999); as well as the tourism resources, governments and industries (referred to in Hall’s model as the tourist product). In a representation of this tourism market system (Figure 2), Hall (1995, p.18) highlights the central part of the system as the tourist experience where the motivations, preferences and expectations of the tourist meet the provisions of the tourism industry\(^1\). The tourism industry refers to a supply-side perspective of tourism, which suggests the tourism industry may be defined as ‘the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure away from the home environment’ (Smith, 1988, p.183 cited in Hall 1995).

Importantly, the connection of the tourist to the tourist product is a two-way relationship. That is, the tourist impacts upon the industry, as the industry does on the tourist. Hall suggests that when this relationship is positive, it contributes to sustainability of both the destination and the tourist (in terms of repeat visitation and positive promotion).

\(^{1}\) Researchers note: In more recent years authors such as Leiper (2008) and Stear (2004) differ in their view of the validity of this definition, suggesting greater accuracy in the term tourism industries, which represent the variety of interests which businesses may have. As Leiper suggests, ‘The theory that all tourism falls within the ambit of one large industry is a false theory’ Leiper (2008, p. 249). This important point is acknowledged and accordingly, Hall’s use of the term industry is changed from this point to industries.
Figure 2: The tourism market system

Source: Hall (1995, p.18)
The tourist product (supply)

The many aspects to the ‘tourist product’ modeled by Hall (1995) should be noted, as they are commonly relevant and referred to in this study. The success of an event to attract and supply services, experiences and products to audiences, rests on the successful combination of the elements of the tourist product described by Hall (1995). Hall suggests the total product should not be seen as the immediate commercial package which the customer purchases, but as a combination of components being resources, government and the tourism industries.

In this regard, events rely heavily on the socio-cultural resources of a destination to hold a successful event. At the least they require a supportive local community to host the event, and often rely on volunteers from within the community to assist in operational functions (Allen et al., 2005). Events also utilise natural environments, and are under increasing scrutiny for their environmental practices.

Governments also play important roles in hosting an event. According to Allen et al. (2005), their roles include promoting, planning and sometimes managing events. In Australia, the three tiers of government all have functions in these roles. The Federal Government provides strategies, and direction for the event tourism industries in documents such as the 2004 Tourism White Paper, which highlighted the importance of event tourism for developing regional economies. State governments also have functions related to planning and promotion, but are also actively involved in bidding for major events, such as the Olympic Games, and Grand Prix motorsport events. Similar functions are performed at local government level, bidding for and promoting smaller events such as the Ulysses Motorcycle AGM in Coffs Harbour, as well as controlling development applications for the staging of events. There are many other tourism associations and networks such as regional tourism organisations (RTO), the Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN) and smaller local tourism associations which assist in planning and operating events in regional areas. While it is not within the scope of this thesis to analyse these government, private and public networks, the study does have important implications for these stakeholders.
As illustrated in Figure 2, the many organisations in the tourism industries identified by Hall (1995) supply the ‘tourism product’ which contributes to the tourist experience at events. As suggested by Hall, travel operators, accommodation, restaurants, visitor centers, casinos, convention centres and promoters are all involved in providing products and services to the tourist. In many cases, they cooperate to provide a themed product, often branded and packaged to offer the tourist. Special interest events rely on cooperative relationships such as partnerships and sponsorship, to hold an event. The cooperation within the tourism industries is therefore an important antecedent to holding a successful event.

The tourist (demand)

In many cases, recreationists (and fans) seek specialised products, destinations or experiences related to their recreational choices, and yet they are studied as tourists in order to distinguish their motives, characteristics and behaviours as related to the elements of the tourism market system. Hall (1995) suggests that tourist demand is affected by motivations, past experience and information, and by expectations and images, where ‘tourism provides an outlet for avoiding something and for simultaneously seeking something.’ (Iso-Ahola 1982, cited in Hall 1995, p.69). These are the factors explored within this study in Chapters, 2, 3, 4 and 5. However, further tourism research defines the demands of recreational tourists as special interest tourists (SIT), who seek specialised experiences. While these tourists’ experiences sit within the tourism market system, researchers of SIT suggest that they desire experiences that differ from those of mass tourists.

Special interest tourism

Where tourists seek out specialised experiences they are referred to as special interest tourists, where ‘the traveler’s motivation and decision-making are primarily determined by a particular special interest with a focus either on activity/ies and/or destinations and settings’ (Weiler & Hall, 1992, p.5). Reported growth in special interest tourism since the 1980s has occurred as a result of changes in leisure and societal attitudes and choices (Douglas, Douglas,
& Derrett, 2001; Trauer, 2006). While growing prosperity has provided many with more disposable income, and therefore more freedom to choose leisure activities, there have also been more activities to choose from. As suggested by Douglas et al. (2001, p.5) the increase in SIT ‘reflect(s) the continuously increasing diversity of leisure interests of the late-modern leisure society’.

Certainly the depth of research into SIT in recent years reflects its interest to researchers of both tourism and leisure (see review by Trauer, 2006), and a more valuable understanding of the participants of SIT. A principal understanding has been the breadth and depth of the SIT market. According to Trauer (2006), what was once thought of as a homogenous market has now been understood to contain a spectrum of visitors with varying levels of skills, interests and behaviours. According to Trauer (2006), practitioners are catering to tourists considered in the ‘hard or specialised’ end of the market, being ‘serious leisure participants’ (Stebbins, 1982; Weiler & Hall, 1992) as well as those in the soft or novice end of the spectrum. As explored in later studies (Ch. 2 and 4), Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) also contend that participants in SIT could be represented on a spectrum of interest and commitment with ‘dabblers’ at one end, followed by enthusiasts, experts and fanatics at the other.

The background to tourism theory described above assists in placing event participants in a broader tourism system, whereby their experience is influenced by their own specialised interest, motivations and expectations, as well by the resources, governments and industries that comprise the tourist product. This provides a useful context for examining the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at special interest events.

1.3.4 **Background to participation in Australian events**

This section provides background to events and event participation in Australia. Firstly, the broad purpose of events and the roles they now play in Australian communities are explored, different types of events are discussed, and the modern role of events as tourism (and economic) generators is reviewed. From this discussion, it is possible to conceptualise the types of events that attract greater numbers of participants, and the reasons for their development.
Participation in cultural and sporting events has a long history throughout the world with festivals and sporting events recorded from the earliest civilisations (Allen et al., 2004). From these cultural and sporting beginnings, the diversity of events has broadened in line with the diversity of interests in modern culture. Many events have provided milestones in personal lives, as well as for society (Allen et al., 2004). For example, the impact of the great music festivals of Woodstock in 1969 and the Isle of White in 1968 changed western society’s ideas of the power of counter culture and its acceptance into society (Hoffman, 1971).

In the 21st century, the design and staging of events has expanded to involve sports, business, culture, arts, politics and recreation in what event researcher Donald Getz describes as ‘unlimited scope for variety in form, function and event experiences’ (Getz, 2007, p. 22). Events of today have become remarkably diverse to celebrate aspects of present culture to include music, film, video games and motorcars. As this thesis will explore, participation in events provides a range of experiences in community and/or recreational settings.

The extent of participation in events in Australia is difficult to determine. There are no official statistics on participation, but an audit of all events in Australia by tourism company Explore Australia listed over 1,000 events per annum (www.exploreaustralia.com), attracting total audiences of approximately one million. Audiences consist of spectators and participants who together create meaningful social experiences and celebrate diverse interests such as music, arts, sport, cars, dogs, science fiction and nostalgia.

While a plethora of studies examine events from economic, touristic and community perspectives, very few examine the benefits and characteristics of the participants themselves. Implicit in this statement is the knowledge that some events rely more on active participation than others. This distinction, noted by Getz (2007), defines participant events as different to spectator and interactive events, where participant events are held for people to be involved, not just to spectate. As Getz suggests:
Participants are more than customers or guests, they are necessary for the event to exist. Meetings and conventions do not exist without delegates; there are no marathons without runners, dance festivals need dancers. (Getz, 2007, p.27).

Participant events are the focus of this thesis, where the events seek to attract participants as tourists to a town or region in Australia. The list of these types of events is possibly infinite, but can be broadly classified into groups based on a typology suggested by Getz (2007, p.22). Table 2 illustrates examples of participant events found in various regions of Australia. The shaded rows of the table are the types of events examined in this study.

Table 2 Examples of participant events in Australia 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Getz typology of planned events</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural celebrations</td>
<td>Albury Italian festival</td>
<td>Albury (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>Targa Tasmania</td>
<td>Multiple regions in Tasmania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and entertainment</td>
<td>Elvis Revival Festival</td>
<td>Central West (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and trade</td>
<td>PRIMEX Trade Expo</td>
<td>Northern Rivers (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; scientific</td>
<td>Australian Geothermal Energy Conference</td>
<td>Melbourne (VIC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport/competition</td>
<td>Cycling - Men’s NRS</td>
<td>Tour of the Murray River (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private events</td>
<td>Ulysses AGM</td>
<td>Coffs Coast (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political &amp; state</td>
<td>Labor political conference</td>
<td>Perth (WA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Getz (2007)

As Getz suggests, these events are desirable for tourism management agencies because they are able to attract visitors who often belong to established sub-cultural groups and networks. *Because these events provide ‘targeted benefits’ (i.e. they are customised experiences), they can be viewed as sub-cultural manifestations, and are highly sought-after by competitive tourist destinations who can either create them or bid on them.* (Getz 2007, p.27).
While there are no statistics to estimate the total economic impact of participant events to the national economy, studies of individual events in Australia highlight the significance of the impact. For example, annual events such as Targa Tasmania attract over 250 participants, 200,000 spectators and 3000 volunteers to various regions of Tasmania. The economic impact of that event alone is estimated to be up to $12 million per year (www.events.tas.gov.au). Smaller specialist events, such as the Australian Gospel Music Festival (AGMF), have estimated an impact of $2.3 million (Queensland Events Corporation, 2005).

For many towns in Australia that face ongoing rural decline, the injection of visitor funding into the community provides much needed economic relief. As suggested by Brennan-Horley, Connell and Gibson (2007), the yearly staging of special events, such as the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes, NSW, contributes over $1 million to the economy, but also contribute to the rejuvenation of small towns, create new identities and national publicity. As such, special interest events offer value to the communities that they are staged within, providing vitality and diversity to regional towns. Festival Manager, Barbara Moss, suggests that ‘economic impact is tied to the social fabric of the community. It’s directly linked to the social health of the town and confidence is always a big factor in economic growth’ (cited in Gibson & Connell, 2005, p. 223). Social interaction and bonding increase as towns and their venues are prepared for the arrival of thousands of participants and their cars, bikes or other equipment. Special interest events are often held in regional areas where communities often enthusiastically welcome the influx of people and activity which can add excitement and interest to an otherwise staid cultural landscape. Consequently, regional towns are known to bid for special interest events such as conventions, EXPOS and annual general meetings (AGM). As an example, Coffs Harbour City Council successfully bid for, and staged, the Ulysses Motorbike Club AGM in May 2007, where over 6,000 bikers and 500 exhibitors descended upon Coffs Harbour (population 60,000) for two days (www.coffscost.com). It was an event designed for active participation. In some instances, a participant event attracts more people than the total population of the town. In 2007, the annual Ute Muster in Deniliquin, NSW attracted 6,235 car owners and 20,000 visitors.
to the town of 7,400, to participate in the car parade for specialised ‘Utes’ ([www.utemuster.com.au](http://www.utemuster.com.au)).

To some authors, the proactive development of events represents a shift to promote events as a vehicle for economic growth or short-term economic stimulation (Kim, Scott & Thigpen, 1998; Carlsen, Getz & Soutar, 2000). Tourist towns are viewed as ‘managed destinations’ with branded events, which transform economies through visitor spending (Chalip & Costa, 2005). However, other authors note the potential negative social impacts that may result from such developments (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000, 2002), and promote a more balanced view.

In Australia, participant events are sought after and created as part of a larger tourism strategy. These are well established in all state, and many local, tourism agencies in Australia. For example, the Special Interest Event Grant Program is a Tasmanian Government initiative that seeks to encourage clubs, associations and special interest groups to consider Tasmania as the next location for their event, championship or gathering ([www.eventstasmania.com/Events_National.pdf](http://www.eventstasmania.com/Events_National.pdf)).

And yet, while these are popular strategies to encourage visitation, little research has been performed to understand the behaviours or characteristics of participants (or spectators). While many events conduct their own market research surveys to determine where participants are coming from and their overall satisfaction with the event, only a handful of academic studies provide insights into the motivations and expectations of participants (Raybould, 1998; Scott & Thigpen, 2003; Frew, 2006; Jim & Jamal, 2007). Clearly, there is great scope for researchers to explore the many aspects of participation at an event, as suggested by Getz (2007):

*To understand participants’ experiences requires knowledge of their motives, expectations, activities, emotions and cognitive processes in the specific context of the event ... participants are typically looking for mastery through meeting challenges, learning opportunities and sub-cultural identity or communitas.*

(Getz, 2007, p.193).
Similarly, research into event attendance from government agencies is also lacking. As noted in Section 1.3.2, collection of leisure based data in Australia, including festival attendance, is notably fragmented and sporadic. As an indicator, information collected from the Population Survey Monitor (ABS, 1995) suggests that about 2.9 million Australians (22% of the population aged 18 years and over) attended at least one art and cultural festival in the 12 months prior to September 1996. These people accounted for 4.1 million attendances at festivals, an average of 1.4 attendances per person. Over half of attendances were at multi-arts festivals (2.7 million attendances), such as the Sydney Festival and Carnivale and the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. The next most attended was popular music festivals (0.6 million attendances) and film/video festivals (0.3 million attendances).

According to the policies of local, state and Federal governments in Australia, participation in events is a desirable leisure activity, which achieves social, recreational and economic goals. It is then essential that a firmer understanding is gained of the behaviours, characteristics and needs of participants at events. The studies incorporated into this thesis contribute to the development of that knowledge in a variety of event contexts. The events chosen for examination fit into the first three categories of the typology of events in Table 2, those being recreational, cultural and arts/entertainment. Many opportunities exist, however, for future research at other types of events, to gain a more holistic understanding of participation in events in Australia and to assess the themes and findings of this thesis.

1.3.5 Background to the study of fandom

Fans of sports, television, film and music are well known for their participation in cultural and sporting events. Fans have been studied as supporters of football teams, music bands and racing cars and other aspects of popular culture such as television and film. As noted previously, the focus of this study is on participation in cultural and recreational events, much of which extends into fan behaviours. The studies of event participants in Chapter 5 (The Elvis Revival Festival) and Chapter 6 (Lord of the Rings) are directly related to fan
behaviours, and as such an overview of fandom theory assists in understanding the basis of these behaviours and their relationship to attending events.

Researchers into fandom suggest that participation in fan activities ranges from passively reading books or watching movies to actively screaming at concerts, writing television screenplays and engaging in discussions on the Internet (Lewis, 1992; Jenson, 1992). The reasons for wanting to be involved and participate as a fan are also well researched. The major reasons for active participation refer to a) connections to others, b) personal and social identity, and c) as a way to express devotion to their heroes.

The findings from the studies of fans by Lewis (1992), Jenson, (1992) and Darling Wolf (2004) reflect real-world research about fan groups and their collective sharing of feelings, joys and pain. Fans feel they can share real world issues and pain with others with whom they have a connection because of their shared fan experiences. Lewis (1992) also suggests that fans find a shared identity with other fans, more recently occurring through Internet discussion forums. These themes are often discussed as part of the subculture of fans, where members have shared conventions, values and rituals and can appear immersed or self-absorbed (Gelder, 2007). These concepts are often examined in parallel fields of research in cultural studies, examining ‘subculture’ or ‘scenes’ (Thornton, 1996; McRobbie, 1993; McKay, 1996). These authors explore the many manifestations of subculture membership in cultural studies such as clubs culture (Thornton, 1996) independent music and festivals (McKay, 1996) and youth, style and feminism (McRobbie, 1993). However in studies related to this thesis, such as those by Rodman (1996) and Doss (1999), subculture is viewed in the similar values and beliefs, which fans hold to popular cultural figures and/or icons such as Elvis Presley and the Hobbit.

Beyond sharing subcultural values and identity, fans also actively participate in fan activities to express their devotion, and dedication. Common ways to do this include the development of ‘fanzines’, staging conventions and other ‘gatherings’ and writing fan fiction (Scodari, & Felder, 2000; Wakefield, 2001; Williams, 2007a; Costello & Moore, 2007). Many fans are eager to participate in these types of activities and interact with other fans – which
inherently involves travel. Fans are well known for their tendencies to travel to destinations that are related to their passion (Macionis, 2004; Williams, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 6 (LOTR) fans have a high propensity to travel (as special interest tourists), to non-standard destinations for the purposes of ‘getting closer’ to their idols, or to gain more in-depth knowledge and experience about the film and its location (Tooke & Baker, 1996; Macionis, 2004). For example, movie fans are known to travel for three main reasons, these being; 1) to visit film locations (Tooke & Baker, 1996; Carl, Kindon & Smith, 2007), 2) to plan special trips to gather in fan meetings – either as small informal groups (Williams, 2007a), or in large conventions (Lawrence, 2003) and 3) to visit shrines to deceased (and living) music and movie stars (Jenson, 1992; Lewis, 1992). In so doing, they require specialised travel planning to reach their sometimes non-standard locations, and often travel with others in fan clubs or social networks (Williams, 2007a).

Related to the focus of this thesis is the potential for fans to attend events such as festivals and leisure conventions. While there is scarce research available, Obst, Zinkiewicz and Smith (2002) suggest that sci-fi fans felt a strong psychological sense of community, which is enhanced by attending sci-fi conventions. As explored in Chapter 6, this sense of community can also be found on the Internet in virtual fan communities (Lawrence, 2003; Darling Wolf, 2004). As noted by (Williams, 2007a):

*The community, originally purely a virtual phenomenon, has thus acquired a significant "real-world" dimension - one whose history is recorded, and its future furthered, on the Internet. The physical and the virtual existences of the Mohicans fandom are thus mutually reinforcing.*

(Williams, 2007a, p.533).

The propensities for fans to travel to events, and develop virtual communities on the Internet, are key elements of participants’ behaviour explored in this study. The high propensity for fans to consume objects related to their idols is also a key behaviour explored in this thesis, and one discussed in more detail below.
1.3.6 Background to the study of consumer behaviour at events

As will be demonstrated throughout the thesis (Ch. 3-6), event participants are noted for their propensity to consume, and in quite distinct patterns of consumption. As such, theories in consumer behaviour are relevant to this thesis as a behavioural outcome of participants. That is, the consumer behaviour of participants is influenced by their own needs, wants and desires, as well as by others in their social world, and what is on offer at the event. As such, theories in consumer behaviour have been reviewed in the context of tourism and events, and as noted previously, in fandom too. These areas are described below, preceded by an overview of the principles of consumer behaviour.

The study of consumer behaviour is a broad and complex topic, defined as, ‘the study of why people buy the product they do and how they make that decision’ (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999, p.6). Alternative definitions include reference to buyers and buyer groups, as well as to the process by which consumers make decisions; thus ‘Consumer behaviour is the process involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and wants’ (Solomon, 1998, p.5).

Several conceptual models were originally proposed to demonstrate the basic process of consumer buying behaviour, such as the EKB model (Engel, Kollat & Blackwell, 1993), and others (Andreason, 1965 and Nicosia, 1966, cited in Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999). Since that time, models have been refined and the Consumer Decision Process (CDP) model (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel, 2001) has become one of the established models of buyer behaviour, to include Internet buying behaviours. These models, however, are not without their detractors (see O’Keefe & McEachern, 1998), and it is not within the scope of this thesis to determine if participants’ behaviour may, or may not, fit within the models. It is more likely, as suggested by Swarbrooke and Horner (2007, p.78), that participants are affected by specific motivators that are ‘so powerful that they totally dominate the purchase decision, to the exclusion of all other factors’. Alternatively, the study assists in defining and informing theoretical concepts of consumer behaviour in relation to participating in events. Specifically, the thesis confirms, expands and develops concepts related to the consumption process;
exploring motivators and behaviours leading to the purchase of an event experience, and the products and services within the event itself.

Researchers such as Engel and Blackwell (1982) suggest that the context of purchases is highly influential on consumer behaviour. This is of particular relevance to the respondents in this study, where participants are undertaking a touristic experience in an event setting, whilst also pursuing a recreational goal - thus creating multiple contexts for consumption. These contexts have their own dynamics, as discussed below.

As described by Swarbrooke and Horner (2007), ‘the characteristics of tourism make the study of consumer behaviour in tourism a particularly complex subject’ (2007, p.4). Notably, they suggest, travel decisions are important in consumer’s lives: ‘The decision to purchase by a consumer is of emotional significance’, and can be an expensive investment. The process they undertake to find information is influenced by many internal and external motivators and determinants. Many travel decisions take more time and involve more careful consideration than other purchases (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). The complexity of consumer behaviour in tourism has resulted in an extensive history of research approaches to determine tourist motivations and buyer behaviour (see review by Hall, 1995).

While it is reasonable to suggest that people who buy tickets to a festival are consumers of that product and/or experience, there is a mixed approach to research in the area. There is, for example a plethora of studies, which consider visitor motivations in attending an event (Uysal, Gahan & Martin, 1993; Kerstetter & Mowrer, 1998; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001; Van Zyl, & Botha, 2004) and yet these studies predominantly discover why people buy the product (e.g. social reasons, entertainment and atmosphere), rather than how they make that decision. Perhaps this approach lies in the trend to treat event audiences as visitors, as distinct from consumers; an approach taken in only a few studies to date (Gursoy, Spangenberg & Rutherford, 2006; Boo, Ghiselli & Almanza, 2006; Grant & Paliwoda, 2001).

As this research will demonstrate, audiences at festivals consume a variety of products in preparation for and during the event, which include, but are not limited to, performance tickets, contest registrations, merchandise, clothing and
transport tickets. During the event, other more hedonic consumer experiences can be expected, defined as those aspects of consumer behaviour that are associated with the multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive elements of product usage experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). As Gursoy et al. (2006) suggest, the nature of festivals suggests they are likely to offer hedonic consumer experiences, derived from the sensations of attending the event.

As discussed in the previous section (1.3.5), and highlighted in the studies in Chapters 5 and 6, fans are also noted for their avid consumption of products related to the subject of their fandom. These products can be part of the ever-expanding merchandise market, or can be rare and unique authentic pieces (Lewis, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Doss, 1999). Fans collect these pieces as a way of symbolising and expressing their devotion, and to ensure they keep the memory alive (Doss, 1999). Researchers of media fans, such as Kozinets (2001), suggest that fans can become caught in a consumer culture that surrounds some modern media, such as Star Trek. They are, he suggests, ‘more likely to invest more of themselves in their consumption and therefore expect more from it’ (Kozinets, 2001, p.85).

In summary, theory in consumer behaviour suggests that participants at special interest events are likely to be consumers of event, travel and fandom products and experiences; and that these may include tangible products such as merchandise and clothing, or intangible experiences such as escape, fantasy and emotion. The studies within this thesis explore these concepts in detail throughout the individual studies in Chapters 2 to 6.

**Summary of background**

In establishing the background for this study, the preceding overview of the literature highlighted various analogies for participants who are highly active in their field. The term ‘serious participant’ is used analogously with those highlighted in Table 3.
### Table 3 analogies for serious participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Analogy for serious participant</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>Serious leisurists</td>
<td>Stebbins (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enthusiast</td>
<td>Dannefer (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism (SIT)</td>
<td>Fanatic, enthusiast</td>
<td>Brotherton &amp; Himmetoglu (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hard or specialised</td>
<td>Weiler and Hall (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom</td>
<td>Devoted fans, fanatical fans</td>
<td>Doss (1999), Jenson (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Serious participant</td>
<td>Jamal and Kim (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analogous links between these fields of study have been made by several authors noting the distinct similarities in participation. Specifically, Trauer (2006) notes the links between serious leisure and SIT, while Green and Jones (2005, p.175) suggest that ‘serious leisure finds an outlet in sport tourism, whilst sport tourism encourages serious leisure’. Accordingly, the terms are often used interchangeably throughout this thesis to explore serious participants who may be fans, specialised tourists or serious leisurists at any one event.

### 1.3.7 A framework for the study of serious participants

The synthesis of the relevant fields of theory allows the development of a conceptual framework, which demonstrates the links and relationships between the theoretical concepts. As described by Henderson (1991, p.38), a framework is used in the interpretive paradigm to generate theory from the data, to ‘give order and insight to what is, or can be observed’. The framework allows a diagrammatic focus that helps frame ideas in the study as well as providing some theoretical grounding for future data collection (Henderson, 1991). As depicted in Figure 3, a basic conceptual model is presented to focus the study on the areas to be explored, in particular highlighting the personal and social characteristics of event participants which result in distinct consumer, travel and leisure behaviours.
The inductive drive of the study (Section 1.5) required the development of a framework that allowed the theory and the data to inform one another, rather than be a definitive model for testing. The development of the five studies was part of that interactive process of theory development. It was important to view the framework as a flexible form that was allowed to change as new data emerged.

As demonstrated in the discussion of the results in Chapter 7, the initial conceptual framework provided a basis to explore various characteristics of serious participation at events and to refine a Model of Serious Participation at Events (Figure 27 in Section 7.6.1). The model (referred to as the SerPa model) summarises the key characteristics that may be used to frame the discussion of results as well as the implications for practitioners and further research (Section 8.4).

The synthesis of the background to this study, and the mapping of an initial conceptual framework described in the preceding sections of 1.3, allowed the development of the research objectives, discussed in the following section.

### 1.4 Research Objectives

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at special interest events. To address this aim, the following four research objectives (RO) have been developed:
RO1. To explain and model the diversity of events in a regional destination, according to the specialised interest of participants.

While the focus of this study is on exploring participants at events, it was considered instructive to first conceptualise the types of events that participants attend. This was done within the geographic focus of regional Australia. Thus, the first objective aims to explain the differences between special interest events and general interest events. The lack of existing research in this area suggests that addressing this objective is a prerequisite to examining serious/specialised participants at any specific events.

RO2. To explore and model the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants at special interest events.

The second objective aims to explore and model psycho/social characteristics through the examination, review and synthesis of relevant literature. This allows the initial psycho/social model of serious participation to be explored and developed in the context of specific special interest events, and then refined.

RO3. To explore and model the behaviours of serious participants as consumers, recreationalists and travellers.

The exploration and modelling of psycho/social characteristics of the serious participants in RO2 lays the foundations for understanding more about the behaviours of serious participants. While a wide of array of behaviours could have been examined, those most relevant to this study were chosen to be consumer, recreational and traveller behaviour.

RO4. To explain the social networks utilised by participants of special interest events.

Events are, by nature, a social occurrence, which attract social groups and networks. Examination of these networks, and the social behaviours of participants, assists in determining how participants make decisions about
attending events. The aim of this objective is to discover how participants use networks to gather information and develop their leisure interests and organise travel.

1.5 Scope

The scope of the study is primarily defined by its geographical, cultural and temporal settings. The study is undertaken at events in Australia and, with the exception of some Internet participants, most participants are Australian. Also, the scope of the study is narrowed to regional events, in the state of NSW. This assists in focussing the scope of the study to a more manageable geographical area, but also assists in comparing the results within a similar geographical, and cultural context. Regional events have some other defining qualities which make them different to larger events, or mega events (Allen et al., 2002). Regional events are held in towns and small cities and in rural and coastal locations. They feature a planned program of activities, entertainment and festivities, which are designed to celebrate the local community and attract visitors to the town. They differ in size and scale to city based events, such as the Sydney Festival or the Melbourne Comedy Festival in Australia. They also differ vastly from thousands of the cultural and sacred festivals held throughout the world. As described by Hunter (2002), diverse and different experiences are undertaken by millions of participants under different social, cultural and geographical contexts at events such as the Maha Kumbh Mela in India, and the Phuang daw u, Inle Lae, Burma.

In summary, the scope of this study resides within popular cultural and leisure pursuits in regional events in NSW, Australia. It does not extend to the study of religious, sacred, sports, business or other events.

The scope of the study is also limited to the timeframe in which it was undertaken. The thesis presents a snapshot in time of the events under study. Events can be vastly different from one year to the next, by growing in size, or disbanding altogether. While there is some evidence that the events in this study have endured and developed over a period of approximately ten years, the research from this study does not track the changes of events or participants over time.
1.6 Research Approach and Strategy

Given the exploratory nature of the objectives, the study of audiences at special interest events departs from the traditional approach to research in tourism with an influence of positivism and the scientific method and the ‘largely unspoken epistemology’ discussed by Botterill (2001). Instead, the study provides data, analysis, images and discussion that build insight into the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at events. The following sections describe the approach taken in devising the inductive research design. To begin, a rationale of the research is provided (1.6.1), followed by the professional and personal influences on the study (1.6.2). The overarching research philosophy is discussed (1.6.3), followed by the specifics of the mixed-method design (1.6.4) and description of triangulation (1.6.5). The use of images is also described in 1.6.6.

In describing the research approach, the study primarily follows the methodological logic proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982) who suggests a departure from reliance on factual data, such as incomes and ages, as a predictor of travel. Alternately he suggests:

Recreational travel is a social psychological experience, which resides in an individual’s mind. Such sociological variables as income, occupation and socio-economic status are of little use in scientific efforts to understand the basis of recreational travel behaviour. Even if we know that people with high incomes visit national parks more frequently than people with low incomes (Bultena and Field, 1978), this says nothing about how individuals make decisions about going to national parks and the role of personal income in it. Obviously, income does not make decisions about anything, the individual does. Consequently, researchers should analyze decision-making processes and individual feelings and cognitions about recreational travel.

(Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 49).

Accordingly, as this thesis attempts to examine the recreational tourist experience at events (as described in Section 1.3.3), it is these aspects of decision-making, feelings and cognitions that are important to the analysis.
Research into audiences at events has typically followed the same traditions as those of tourism, following a deductive paradigm which relies on quantitative methods (Getz, 2007). This in part has been due to the trend toward economic studies, guided by the need to determine the value of events to the economy. However, studies on the motivations and satisfaction of event audiences have also relied on traditional measures of socio/demographic variables to create profiles of audience segments (Formica & Uysal, 1998; Hede, Jago & Deery, 2004). Despite recognition of the need for more innovative approaches, research methods have mostly relied on quantitative approaches to evaluate events. In contrast, Getz (2007, p.138) promotes the use of qualitative research as ‘such measures may provide further insights into the characteristics of event goers and another means of segmentation’.

Event research has also been confined to examining the socio-demographic variables of audiences, leading to suggestions that researchers should:

*Extend the range of profile attributes beyond the socio-demographic variables ... to include psychographic measures of event-goers in order to examine the impact of personality and lifestyle on event attendance.*

(Nicholson and Pearce, 2000, p.252).

As discussed in the sections following, the strategy and design of this study is based on *mixed-method designs* proposed by Morse (2003) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), employing core ethnographic studies of event participants, supported by supplementary studies in other contexts. As such, the theoretical driver of this study is inductive, attempting to answer questions such as those suggested by Morse (2003, p.196): ‘What is going on? What is happening? What are the characteristics of____? What is the meaning of _____?’ The following sections describe the background and rationale to developing this approach and the influences which I, the researcher, have had upon this study.

**1.6.1 Rationale**

Understanding the complex social, psychological and environmental structures that influence behaviours of participants at events requires an approach which
Participants in Special Interest Events

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

Joanne Mackellar

is sensitive to the social structure (Botterill, 2001), as well as to the psychological and environmental influences. Subsequently, the approach in this thesis has been to explore event participants from multiple perspectives and across disciplines such as leisure, tourism and event studies.

Studies in tourism are often approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, cognisant of the many aspects to the phenomena. While this thesis does not try to account for all these perspectives it does provide a multidisciplinary approach, from within leisure, fandom, consumer behaviour, events and tourism, as described in the sections preceding. The study was also designed to provide a wide perspective across the main three fields of tourism studies, as suggested by tourism researchers Botterill (2001) and Wearing and Wearing (2001):

- Self – the study explores the identities, motivations and psycho/social influences which affect participants’ behaviours.
- Supply of product – the study explores the aspects of the event which assist in facilitating the needs of serious participants.
- Demand for product – the study explores consumer behaviour of special interest tourists and travel patterns.

The use of a multi-disciplinary approach, cognisant of the fields of tourism studies, and the psychological, social and environmental influences upon the participants, has subsequently informed the research philosophy and mixed method strategy as described below.

1.6.2 Professional and personal influences on the study

As acknowledged by Botterill (2001), it would be difficult to argue that a certain ‘utility of output’ has not influenced this study, mainly as a result of the connections with policy makers and event organisers made by the author before and during the research. As such, it is noted that a number of professional and personal influences have been present during this study. The author has been employed in the field of tourism for over 20 years in both government and corporate organisations in Australia. The author also has worked for events, conducted research at events, spoken to hundreds of event visitors over the past ten years, and has a confessed passion for the positive social outcomes that can
occur from regional events. Furthermore, the author has also completed honours and masters research theses in the area of event management.

There is no doubt that this experience affects what I perceive as serious participation in leisure and events. Participation in any of the fields in Figure 1 relies on an accepted view of participation that comes from the author's ontological perceptions (Henderson, 1991). In this case, these perceptions are significantly influenced by a highly westernised view of participants at events, where participants have many freedoms to express their passions and persuasions in public spaces. The participants in this study have access to the time, money and resources needed to participate. Social norms in Australia allow permission to partake in leisure activities, and government regulations allow freedom to participate in public events. The author's own ontology of the western world and its ensuing epistemology has thus been gained from personal and professional experiences in tourism and event organisations, academic journals, texts and conference interactions. As noted by Hall (1995), while we try to understand the world from other perspectives 'we can never transcend our own view of the world' (Hall, 1995, p. 12).

1.6.3 Research philosophy and mixed-method strategy

Perhaps as a result of the aforementioned professional and personal influences, the overarching research philosophy for the study has been one of pragmatism, where multiple methods have been used to explore the different dimensions of event participation within a tourism and leisure context. This has eventuated for two main reasons. Firstly, the aforementioned background to the study suggests more innovative approaches to research be undertaken to discover more about the people who are participants at events. Secondly, the philosophy has derived from the desire to ensure triangulation in the study. The origins and development of the philosophy are discussed below.

A pragmatic research philosophy stems from the work of classical pragmatists Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey proposing that 'research approaches should be mixed in ways that offer the best opportunities for answering important research questions' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16). Pragmatism assists researchers in cutting through
the philosophical debates between qualitative and quantitative purists and in finding a research solution that will mix the two methods successfully. As described by Powell (2001),

*Pragmatism, on the other hand, rejects positivism, on grounds that no theory can satisfy its demands (objectivity, falsify-ability, the crucial experiment, etc.); and rejects anti-positivism, because virtually any theory would satisfy them. As such, the pragmatist proposes to reorient the assessment of theories around a third criterion: the theory’s capacity to solve human problems.*

(Powell, 2001, p.873)

Pragmatism has therefore been used as the philosophical basis for designing mixed-method research strategies by researchers in various areas of social science including, but not limited to, tourism (Pansiri, 2004), education (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, in press), consumer behaviour (Hausman, 2000) and health (Morgan, 1998). The approach is further clarified by Creswell who states:

*A mixed-method study may also be seen as one in which the researcher tends to base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds and employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand the research problem.*

(Creswell, 2003, p.18).

Relevant to the studies within this thesis are the multi-method research strategies used in fields of tourism, leisure and events as discussed below.

**Mixed method studies in tourism and leisure**

In a review of mixed-method tourism studies, Pansiri (2004) suggests that mixed method studies have been increasing in popularity in management, social sciences and tourism. A major benefit of using the mixed-method approach has been in gaining insights into understanding leisure and travel behaviour. For example, the method has assisted researchers in these fields to understand more about why people travel. Specifically studies have sought to understand why people travel on their own (Mehmetoglu, Dann & Larsen, 2001), why people travel to volunteer (Brown & Lehto, 2005), and changing leisure patterns (Stodolska, 2000). The mixed methods of these studies have allowed
researchers to gain multiple perspectives on complex decision making processes. For example, Mehmetoglu et al. (2001) used in-depth semi-structured interviews as a primary method and participant observation and diaries as secondary techniques, suggesting that this provided the necessary checks and balances for obtaining more reliable information.

Further, Davies (2003) also suggests the multi-method approach has been useful in a variety of industrial studies of tourism by Archer (1980), Uysal and Crompton (1985), Stabler (1993) and Stabler and Goodall (1996). As described by Davies (2003):

_Symbiosis of the scientific tools of positivism and the subjectivity of "moments of qualitative research" would enable both the verification of facts and the investigation of complex reality undertaken in sympathetic ways._

(Davies, 2003, p.105)

In terms of leisure research, mixed-method designs have also assisted researchers to find out more about recreational aspects of human behaviour. For example, researchers such as Bryan (1977) and Scott and Godbey (1994) have used mixed methods in the development of the recreation specialisation framework. The originator of the theory, Hobson Bryan (1979), used participant observation in conjunction with longer interviews and other surveys to discover more about the behaviours of trout fishermen. In other areas of leisure research, Cleave and Doherty (2005) used mixed-methods to discover more about constraints to volunteering.

As noted previously, event research often relies more on quantitative research designs, such as on-site surveys to examine the profiles of event attendees; however, there are some notable exceptions which have guided the design of the studies in this thesis. Brennan-Horley, Connell and Gibson (2007) combined surveys and interviews to establish a demographic profile of the audience. Seaton (1997) used survey data and unobtrusive observation to evaluate an arts festival, and Anwar and Sohail (2004) combined focus groups and surveys to examine perceptions of event visitors.
1.6.4 Mixed method design

The construction of this mixed-method study has been guided by three design principles described by Morse (2003). Adherence to the principles enhances the likelihood of maximum validity and internal consistency. Considerations of the principles are described below.

1. **Identify the theoretical drive of the research project**

The thesis has been constructed using an inductive theoretical drive, described by Morse (2003) as ‘working in discovery mode’ to explore the psycho/social characteristics and behaviours of the event participant. It is important to note that the overall inductive mode does not change, even if other supplemental parts are more deductive or confirmatory. Greater understanding of this idea is made clearer in responding to the second principle.
2. **Develop an overt awareness of the dominance of each project**

The project is best described as a core project emanating from the theoretical drive of the study, supported by supplemental projects, which assist in providing new perspectives and insights. This design is illustrated in Figure 4, showing the types of research designs and methods used in both the core and supplemental projects. Use of this figure provides the overt awareness of the dominance of the core project as described by Morse (2003).

3. **Respect methodological integrity**

In preparing the overall design, care has been taken to respect the methodological integrity of each core and supplementary project. According to Morse (2003):

> It is important not to violate the assumptions, sampling (appropriateness and adequacy of data), and so forth. Keeping in mind it is the results of each study that are triangulated to inform the research question.

(Morse, 2003, p.199)

Consequently, as explained by Morse it has been important to establish the specific mixed-method designs, and their resultant requirements for this study, as per Table 4. In doing so, a simultaneous design was decided upon, more highly driven by one method, with other methods supplementing the results that the first method cannot achieve (Morse, 2003). Of the nine basic possibilities for mixing methods between qualitative and quantitative (e.g. sequential qual + quant, simultaneous qual → qual), the design chosen for this study is simultaneous qualitative methods with a **qualitative inductive core and qualitative/quantitative supplementary projects**.

The table below describes the methodological strategy used for each of the series of papers described in Section 1.6. While the detail of these methods can
be found in each chapter, an overall picture of the methods used assists in understanding the multi-method approach and the contribution of each study to the triangulation of results.

**Table 4: Mixed methods used in studies 1-5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis Chapter</th>
<th>Study #</th>
<th>Method used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mixed design of interviews and surveys at nine events in one region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Literature review, conceptual model development and synthesis of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Qualitative design of participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Qualitative design of participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Qualitative design of ethnography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1.6.5 Mixed-method studies and triangulation**

Mixed-method research also assists in the process of triangulation, defined as ‘the use of multiple methods to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Triangulation aims to improve the validity of the research by obtaining corroborating evidence using a variety of methods. As Pansiri (2005) suggests, any research method chosen has inherent flaws and the choice of that method obviously limits the conclusions that can be drawn. The use of mixed-methods assists in obtaining a variety of evidence to corroborate. Of the four types of triangulation that are possible (data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation), this thesis aims to achieve methodological triangulation by combining dissimilar methods to measure the same phenomenon. According to Pansiri (2005) the rational for this strategy is that;

*The flaws of each individual method will be compensated for by the counter-balancing strengths of another and, by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies.*

(Pansiri, 2005, p.199)
Thus, as described previously, the mixed method design of the study uses quantitative survey data and interviews as a basis for understanding the scope of participation in a region, before using qualitative methods to examine the phenomena in more detail. For example, the first study in Chapter 2, quantifies the ratios of participants travelling to events in special interest groups. Further ethnographic studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explain the nature and identity of the recreational clubs, and how the social networks stimulate travel behaviours. The reader will also note that the ethnographic studies of the Wintersun and Elvis festivals utilise quantitative demographic data as supporting evidence to frame and corroborate the findings of the study. This approach counter-balances the quantitative evidence of group travel, with in-depth qualitative insights of the dynamics of the group to form valid conclusions about serious participant characteristics and behaviours.

1.6.6 Images and analysis

Used in conjunction with field notes and the formal process of participant observation (Spradley, 1980), the analysis of images also played a role in this study. The rationale for this is based partly on the known challenges of event research, as highlighted by Smith (2004, p1), where ‘there is only one opportunity to get things right’. Events operate in fast paced and crowded environments such as festivals, parades, train journeys and concerts. Capturing images in the form of photographs and video assisted in addressing these issues in three main ways:

1. To capture and document what was going on,
2. To analyse and understand the entire cultural scene of an event,
3. To examine behaviours, fashions, expressions and identity, and communicate the richness of the behavioural expressions.

While there are many issues to be taken into account, such as context and framing (Crawford & Turton, 1991), images can be useful additions to words in describing phenomena such as event participation. Prosser and Schwartz (1998) suggest images are a highly underused tool in ethnography, as more traditional researchers rely on narrative based methods to describe human activity.
However, as demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, images can add insight and depth to ethnographic studies which seek to describe and explore human characteristics.

**Summary of research approach**

In summary, the research approach adopts the principles of inductive research design to explore this new area of research. The lack of existing research into participants at events requires an innovative approach to explore the characteristics and behaviours of participants and discover more about their consumer, travel and leisure behaviours. A mixed-method design allows the researcher to gather a variety of data, images and observations that will tell us more about the feelings, experiences and aspects of decision-making that are important to the analysis of event participants. The design also provides important checks and balances to the validity of the research, ensuring qualitative data is counter-balanced by quantitative findings.

### 1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured using a ‘thesis incorporating publications’ approach, which entails the planned design of a series of research studies which together answer a central research question (see Appendix 1 ‘Guidelines for Incorporating Publications into Doctoral Theses’). This approach has been taken to demonstrate that the research has been peer reviewed and is deemed worthy of publication. It also maintains currency of the research as it is completed, and allows wider review and discussion from industry professionals and academics. As noted in Chapter 3, review by event industry, and government, professionals has helped validate and develop the findings of this thesis.

In this case, the structure follows the research cycle adapted from Spradley (1980) as a cyclical process, where the results from one stage of the research process inform the methods and questions of the next stage. As highlighted in Figure 5, the preceding sections of this chapter have included the development of broad questions of enquiry, to specific research objectives, and the selection of appropriate research methods. The second stage in Chapters 2 to 6 involves
the development of five studies, to explore the behaviours and characteristics of participants at events. Each study follows from the knowledge and findings of the previous, to form a body of knowledge addressing the research objectives (1.4).

**Figure 5: The thesis research cycle**

![Thesis Research Cycle Diagram](image)

The structure of the five published studies is described below.

The first study makes initial discoveries addressing RO1, into the diversity of events in a regional destination according to the specialised interest of participants. As this was an area of little research, this initial investigation was needed to determine ‘what was going on’ with participants at events. True to the inductive design of the research (1.6.4) the first study proposed some questions for deeper exploration. In particular, the concept of a ‘spectrum of interest’ became a founding concept of the study, as did a focus on serious participants, who were noted for their fanatical behaviour at some types of events. The paper was presented to a gathering of international event researchers at the Global Events Congress 2006, where further ideas were gathered to inform the development of the study.

The second study was informed by the results of Study 1, and proposed a theoretical framework, focussing more on the serious and fanatical segments of event audiences. The paper synthesised the academic literature in the fields of
study described in Section 1.3 (tourism, leisure, events, fandom and consumer behaviour), and determined the types of likely behaviours at special interest events. The study addressed the theoretical requirements of RO2, RO3 and RO4, and provided a framework for the ensuing ethnographic studies. In particular, the serious leisure framework and the SIT spectrum emerged as prominent theoretical bases to advance the initial observations made thus far.

The third study is a core ethnographic study at the Wintersun Festival in Coolangatta. The study utilised participant observation to explore the behaviours and characteristics of serious participants, proposing nine domains, or themes to describe these. In so doing, the study addressed the research objectives RO2, RO3 and RO4.

The fourth study provides another core ethnographic study, at the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes NSW. The study also utilised participant observation to explore the behaviours and characteristics of serious participants, and also used this methodology as a basis to segment the audience. The results assisted in demonstrating the application of the SerPa framework to the development of event marketing strategies. The study contributes to research objectives RO2, RO3 and RO4.

The final study provided ethnography of event participants in a different environment. The study sought out serious participants (fans) in an online community to examine the structure and relations of virtual fan communities and their decision-making processes to attend events. In terms of consumer behaviour, this study sought to discover how and why serious participants attended special interest events.

A total of five publications were submitted to tourism, leisure and event management journals as shown in Table 5. Four of the papers five papers have been accepted for publication, with the final paper currently unpublished. The article is preceded by an introduction stating the aims of the paper, and each contains its own literature review and methodology explaining the method required for that particular study. The papers are presented in their entirety as prepared for publication, so as to preserve the formatting and referencing styles required by different journals. The papers are concluded with reflections on the
study, its implications for the next study, and its contribution to the development of this thesis.

**Table 5: Publications incorporated in this thesis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Article title</th>
<th>Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Special interest events in a regional destination – exploring differences between specialist and generalist events</td>
<td>Global Events Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fanatics, fans or just good fun? Travel behaviours and motivations of the fanatic</td>
<td>Journal of Vacation Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>An examination of participants at the Wintersun Festival</td>
<td>Leisure Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dabblers, fans and fanatics; exploring segments at the Elvis Revival Festival</td>
<td>Journal of Vacation Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Anyone going to RingCon? The structure and relations of virtual fan communities – Lord of the Rings</td>
<td>Unpublished paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third stage of the thesis, as represented in Figure 5, encompasses the concluding phases of the research, which seek to summarise the results and highlight their contribution to knowledge. Chapters 7 and 8 provide a discussion of results to compare and synthesise the results from the individual studies and discuss the implications for leisure, tourism and event managers and marketers, as well as the contribution to both empirical and methodological knowledge. As highlighted in the research cycle (Spradley, 1980), suggestions for subsequent research are formed from the preceding analysis and synthesis of data.
1.8 Significance of the Study

The study can be viewed as significant in two main ways. Firstly, in its own right, it is a piece of academic research that seeks to explain psycho/social behaviour of event participants within a specific cultural context. Secondly, in a practical sense, it is significant to the industries and governments involved in leisure, tourism and events.

In the first instance, the study is significant to the three interrelated fields of study in tourism, leisure and events. As demonstrated in the final chapter (Section (8.6), the results contribute to the development of theory in postulating a model for serious participation at events, which acknowledges the multi-faceted dimensions of participant characteristics and behaviours. As discussed throughout the thesis, this has significance for the mutually supporting fields of tourism and leisure, as well as the events themselves. As noted by Iso-Ahola:

*In a broad sense, social psychological analyses of recreational travel aim at understanding the bases of this behaviour. Such knowledge is of value for both its own sake as well as for practitioners in their decision-making and planning. To this end, research is needed to determine how social psychological factors influence individual decisions and choices about recreational travel. ...Clearly, more research is needed to show the sources of social influence and how they are taken into account in individual travel choices and decisions. Research is also needed to provide information about the formation and composition of various travelling groups, as well as interpersonal influences during travel and their impact on the perceived success of a trip. Such knowledge is important because it will demonstrate the relative weight of various factors in the enhancement of the quality of recreational travel, both during and after.*

*(Iso-Ahola 1983, p.49)*

The direction for research into tourism and events in Australia has been greatly influenced by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), whose research program aim is ‘the development of a strategic approach to understanding tourism special events, and the production of leading edge tourism special events research’ (Harris, Jago, Allen & Huyskens,
2000, p.24). This thesis, supported by the STCRC intends to contribute to those aims, in developing greater understanding of 1) the spectrum of community and tourist events, 2) the travel behaviours of event audiences and 3) the characteristics and behaviours of participants at events.

However, the study also has direct significance to tourism and leisure planners, and event managers described in earlier sections, and summarised in Table 6. The study’s primary significance to these stakeholders is the provision of empirical research, which can inform policy planning, promotion, branding and research decisions. The significance to these stakeholders is described in detail in the concluding chapter (Section 8.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder level</th>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism</td>
<td>Can inform policy planning and legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Australia</td>
<td>Informs marketing decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Events Australia</td>
<td>Informs segmenting and marketing strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Research Australia</td>
<td>Can inform design of research programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government*</td>
<td>Dept of State and Regional Development</td>
<td>Can inform policy planning and legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism New South Wales</td>
<td>Informs funding distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assists marketing decisions for events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Organisations</td>
<td>Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO)</td>
<td>Can inform branding and promotional decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>Tweed Shire Council</td>
<td>Can inform funding distribution amongst events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can assist marketing decisions for promoting events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Managers</td>
<td>Regional event organisers</td>
<td>Assists marketing decisions for events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assists resource allocation for events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
State and local government structures are given as examples; other states may have differing departmental structures.

Event organisers can directly benefit from understanding the characteristics, needs and behaviours of audiences. The study is thereby significant to both those who study events, tourism and social behaviours, as much as to those who manage them.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study, including background to the study of leisure, tourism, fandom, consumer behaviour and events. In so doing, the chapter firstly identifies the gaps in event-based research in Australia, and points to the need to analyse participants at events from a multidisciplinary perspective. Secondly, as highlighted in the research philosophy and approach, the chapter has laid the platform for the development of an innovative research design that will address those research needs.

The focus of the study has been defined as the examination of serious participants at events, achieved through the development of a series of published studies. The following chapters present these studies, beginning with the examination of nine events in a regional destination in NSW.
Chapter Two – Paper One

_Bananas, Beethoven and Brabham;
Exploring differences between specialist and generalist events_
2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the first in the series of the published papers. The paper is preceded by the author’s objectives in designing the paper and the relationship to the thesis research cycle. The paper is then included in its entirety as presented at the Global Events Congress, Brisbane, September 2006, where over 100 international researchers shared new trends and challenges in event research. The chapter concludes by articulating the outcomes of the study for tourism and event managers, as well as for the development of this thesis.

2.2 Paper One Objectives

The primary objective of this paper was to fulfil the first of the research objectives of this thesis (Section 1.4):

RO1 To explain and model the diversity of events in a regional destination, according to the specialised interest of participants.

To date, events in Australia have been studied at macro and micro levels. Federal government studies have produced an incomplete picture of events in Australia from fragmented census data (Section 1.3.2) and state governments have produced audits of the numbers and types of events, without an analysis of who was attending and why. A number of individual studies of events in Australia have been conducted by academics to explore attendee profiles (1.3.4), but there is no existing data to examine the diversity of events in any one regional destination. This study achieves this at nine different events in the Tweed Valley Shire of northern NSW, Australia.

2.3 Contribution to the Research Cycle

The synthesis of background theory in Stage 1 of the research cycle (Section 1.3.1), identified concepts from tourism and leisure theory that could be used to examine event diversity. In particular, concepts from special interest tourism suggested audiences could be placed on a spectrum of interest, which could
explain the differences in their behaviours and characteristics. As illustrated in Figure 6, the development of this study has thus been informed by the development of theoretical background, research questions and methodology in Stage 1 of the research cycle.

**Figure 6: Current stage of the research cycle**

The aim of this first study was to identify the differences in event audiences, based on levels of interest in leisure pursuits. From this point, the identified traits of the audience could be explored further in the academic literature and in the ensuing studies of Stage 2.

A mixed method approach was used for this study, relying on quantitative data to identify the differences across the nine events, supported by qualitative data from the event organisers. This approach was considered appropriate in this study, as it represented a practical way of comparing characteristics of audiences across different events.
2.4

SPECIAL INTEREST EVENTS IN A REGIONAL DESTINATION – EXPLORING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPECIALIST AND GENERALIST EVENTS

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Australia

ABSTRACT
This paper demonstrates the development and application of a special interest event spectrum designed to contribute to a deeper understanding of special interest and general interest event audiences. A multi-method study collected data from nine events in one region of Australia, using audience surveys, participant observation and short interviews. The results explored differences in event audiences in terms of visitor to local ratios, other events attended, group composition and use of social networks. A spectrum of events is proposed to demonstrate the diversity of events in one regional destination, and the corresponding variety of audiences, from community social seekers to leisure fanatics.

INTRODUCTION
This paper seeks to demonstrate the development and application of a special interest event spectrum in one regional destination in Australia. For the purposes of event planning and management at both micro and macro levels, the study has classified events in one regional destination on a spectrum of general interest (GI) to special interest (SI) based upon interviews with festival organisers and other regional stakeholders and the results of audience surveys.

The study has used the SI tourism literature to form a basis for the development of a SI event spectrum, adapting the concept of a SI tourism spectrum first proposed by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997). The context for exploring this concept is the event sector of tourism in a regional shire in NSW Australia. The events involved in the study range from GI events like the community banana festival to highly specialised events such as the classical car race. The aim of the study is to explore the differences between audiences at specialist and generalist events. This aim has been guided by the following research questions;

1. How does place of residence differ for specialist and generalist event audiences?
2. What types of other events do SI and GI event audiences attend?
3. What is the profile of groups travelling to SI and GI events?
4. How important is word of mouth to SI and GI event audiences?

The research process has led to researchers and tourism managers gaining a greater understanding of the portfolio of events in one regional destination. Subsequently it has also led to an increased understanding of event market segments in one regional destination, and the subsequent development of marketing strategies to target those segments. The process of these developments is also described in this paper.
Special interest and general interest events
Events are often contextualised using a typology derived from Getz (1997) in which events are classified into eight major categories as shown in Figure 1. As noted by Getz (1997), events can fall into more than one category and are subject to a multitude of variations dependent upon the purpose and circumstances of the event.

Figure 1 Typology of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS</th>
<th>SPORT COMPETITIONS</th>
<th>PRIVATE EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Festivals</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Personal Celebrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnivals</td>
<td>Amateur</td>
<td>Anniversaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious events</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parades</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rites de passage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage commemorations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parties galas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerts</td>
<td>Educational and Scientific</td>
<td>reunions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other performances</td>
<td>Seminars, workshops, clinics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibits</td>
<td>Congresses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award ceremonies</td>
<td>Interpretive events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUSINESS/TRADE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairs, markets, Sales</td>
<td>RECREATIONAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer and trade shows</td>
<td>Games and sports for fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expositions</td>
<td>Amusement events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and Conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund-raiser events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Source: Getz (1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other methods by which events have been classified include by form or content such as festivals, sports events or business events (Allen et al 2004), or by sub fields; civic events, hallmark events, retail events (Goldblatt 2002). Shone and Parry (2004) suggested a further distinction between types of special events as being either leisure, cultural, organisational or personal events.

This paper offers a deviation from these event typologies by suggesting a spectrum of events, based on the event’s appeal to general interest (GI) or special interest (SI) audiences. This type of classification allows event managers and regional planners to better understand the motivations and behaviours of audiences. Further it allows segmentation of audiences based upon their understanding of specialised recreational needs.

The spectrum is inclusive of public events in all of the categories suggested by the above authors. The study begins by examining the difference between SI and GI events as shown in the literature, as well as the characteristics of audiences at these events. From these studies, a spectrum of events is explored based upon a review of existing tourism spectra.

Special Interest Events
There are scant studies available in the field of special interest (SI) events, and even fewer definitions. For the purpose of this paper, SI events are defined as events that cater for the needs of SI groups and individuals. They include a vast array of recreational and cultural events such as show’n’shine in motor-sport, bird-watching festivals, rock’n’roll competitions and dog shows to name but a few. They can be large events such as the annual Hummer/bird Celebration in Rockport/Fulton USA, which attract audiences of over 4500 to one event (Kim, Scott, Thigpen &
Participants in Special Interest Events

Kim (1998) or small events such as local dog shows, which attract audiences of only a hundred. Some SI events are in the form of festivals or conventions, such as the annual Star Trek Convention, while others are expos such as the Madison Fishing Expo.

The concept of a SI tourism event was first identified by Zeppel (1992) who suggested that festivals are a form of the larger phenomena of special interest tourism examined by authors such as Hall and Weiler (1992), Douglas, Douglas and Derrett (2001) and Trauer (2006). SI events follow the same basic needs as SI tourism in catering to individual needs and recreational pursuits. Prentice and Andersen (2003) provided evidence of this when they proposed the purpose of SI events as satisfying certain needs for pursuing a hobby/recreation. However they also added further important dimensions to the purpose of SI events as developing a social leisure world and adding to a central life interest. Similarly, in a study of a remote fishing event Raybould (1998) found that development of the social leisure world and opportunities to extend social benefits were important aspects to the SI event, beyond the competition itself.

General Interest Events

SI events are distinct from general interest (GI) events, where there is little or no specialised program, activities or theme to the event. GI events are commonly referred to as community events, which have different objectives related to community development, local pride and identity, heritage and urban renewal (Derrett 2004). Attracting visitors is often a secondary concern. Examples of these include community festivals such as the Parkes Picnic Races, the ubiquitous art and craft fair and celebrations of seasonal change such as Snowfest and Springfest. In Australia virtually every country town holds an annual agricultural show, where the focus is on tradition and competing in events such as rodeo and wood-chopping amongst others.

Other general interest events have a more distinct purpose to target tourists, such as those that showcase the region, and promote local business development (Ritchie 1984). Such is the case with “The Taste of Niagara” held annually in the USA, described as,

“an event designed to showcase Western New York and the Niagara region along with its culinary offerings, hippest entertainment and favorite beverages, it also serves a humanitarian purpose for the local community by raising money for Western New York charities”. (www.tasteofniagara.net)

This event’s description is typical of thousands of events around the world attempting to draw visitors to their town or region. Several studies have found that audiences at community based events are often more interested in the social opportunities with family and friends and escape than any specific item in the program (Uysal, Gahan and Martin 1993, Formica and Uysal 1996, Van Zyl and Botha 2004). As such they can be seen as general interest audiences, with a general/community interest rather than specific interest in the event.

Larger scale general interest events are also referred to as destination-based events which serve to highlight the town/city as a destination for visitors. ‘Some destinations are precisely in the public psyche because they host spectacular public festivals and events’ (Derrett 2004). The attraction of these events for audiences is much more broad-based, combining factors such as program/activity, image of the destination and social attraction. Destination-based events can also act as an umbrella for many diverse activities, in arts, cuisine, heritage, environment and other disparate activities. Brisbane’s Riverfest offers an example of this, described by its organisers as follows:

“Riverfestival is Brisbane’s major annual community and environmental festival celebrating our waterways and culture by focusing on the city’s...”
signature natural landmark, the Brisbane River. With its broad cultural focus incorporating art, environmental science and sport underpinned by a strong sustainability message it is unique in the Australian festivals’ landscape. By focusing the general public on the distinctiveness of Brisbane’s landscape and culture, it fosters local community ownership and pride and assists in developing social cohesion and a sense of shared responsibility in the sustainability of this city, its environs and particularly its precious water resources. (www.riverfestival.com.au)

A recent count of Riverfests found over 100 events in 5 countries making use of this generic name as an umbrella for diverse activities such as these (www.google.com).

A spectrum of events
While differences between SI and GI events are identifiable, placing events into categories of GI or SI is not practical, as some events offer activities and programs to suit a mix of SI audiences and the local community. It is therefore more logical that a spectrum exists which places events at either end or in the middle of the spectrum, dependent on their level of specialised programming, theme and on the types of audiences attracted (see Mackellar 2006). As such this paper seeks to develop a simple illustration of a spectrum by which event organisers and other stakeholders can reflect on their own event and its attraction to SI travellers. The development of the spectrum draws from the literature on SI tourism spectra as described further below.

The use of spectra in SI tourism studies has been adapted by several authors and falls into three main areas: 1. studies related to recreation specialisation (Bryan 1979), 2. studies related to leisure theory developed by Stebbins (1992), 3. studies related to tourism spectrum theory (Brotherton and Himmetoglu 1997). Whilst some studies make use of all three theoretical perspectives, most fall within one of these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recreation Specialization</th>
<th>Serious Leisure Theory</th>
<th>Tourism Continuum Brotheron &amp; Himmetoglu (1997)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birding (Burr and Scott 2004)</td>
<td>Food and wine (Hall and Mitchell 2001)</td>
<td>SI framework (Trauer 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage (Kerstetter, Confer &amp; Graefe 2001)</td>
<td>Cultural tourism (Mckercher 2002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adventure Tourism (Kane and Zink 2004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these approaches follows a similar logic, that participants can be placed on a spectrum that indicates increasing levels of commitment, involvement and activity. The methods used in each research area are somewhat different as described below.

Recreation specialisation studies directly related to tourism are adapted from the early work of Bryan (1977, 1979). They have used predominantly quantitative methods to rigorously assess participants’ levels of behaviour, commitment, skill and knowledge. For example, Kerstetter, Confer and Graefe (2001) adopted the approach in their examination of heritage tourists conferring that these recreationalists can be organised sequentially along a continuum. The study demonstrated how high specialists differed from medium or low specialists in terms of their travel behaviour and motivation.
Studies using the leisure theory developed by Stebbins (1992, 1996, 2005) are more qualitative, based on Stebbins own ethnographic methods of group immersion. The studies have described differences between amateur and serious leisure whereby leisure participants can be characterised by their levels of activity, involvement and interest in a leisure pursuit. Often this behaviour includes travel and travel decisions, such as those identified by Hall and Mitchell (2001) whose interest in food and wine is a form of ‘serious leisure’.

Studies using the approach suggested by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to classify tourists into groupings along a spectrum. For example, Ritchie, Mosedale, and King’s (2000) work with rugby match attendees identified cluster groups as either ‘avid’ spectator/fan, ‘frequent’ spectator/fan or ‘casual’ spectator/fan with each group shown to have differing travel and touring behaviours and expenditure levels.

In all three of the research areas, the main uses of the spectra are to assist in understanding the needs and wants of the participants and defining market segments. The main theoretical base for this study follows Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997), who described a tourism continuum from general interest tourism (GIT) through mixed interest (MIT) to special interest tourism (SIT) to explain variations within the overall tourism market. Their focus remained on the SIT end of the spectrum, devising categories of tourist as dabbler, enthusiast, expert and fanatic. The differentiation is thus made between tourists who are making the transition from destination-based tourism (GIT) to SIT (dabblers), and those who are committed SIT fanatics.

The concept was extended further in the area of event management suggesting that different types of events attract different proportions of SI audiences (Mackellar 2006). For example, SI events such as classic car races attract large segments of the audience that are “fanatical” in the sense described by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) and smaller segments of local community members. Other more GI events such as a food and wine festival attract a range of interests from those with a special interest in food and wine, “foodies”, as well as dabblers, enthusiasts and experts. Consequently, each event has its own audience spectrum, from those with largely fanatical SIT travellers, to those with a broad range of audience interests. Every event has its own unique mix of SIT/GIT segments which consequently designate it as a GIT or SIT event.

The spectrum, shown in Figure 2, has been modified to include the community/social event as a further dimension to the continuum inclusive of GI, community based events. The events with higher levels of special interest activity are at the top end of the spectrum, while those with less special interest activity and wider appeal to a range of audiences are toward the bottom of the spectrum. It should be noted, that any position on the spectrum does not reflect the success of an event, merely the type of event that is offered and the likely audience that is attracted.

Figure 2 Special Interest Event Spectrum
**Participants in Special Interest Events**

Chapter 2 Paper 1

Joanne Mackellar

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**Differences in SI and GI Event Audiences**

The characterisation of audiences at special interest events has been scant, and yet given the size and popularity of these events, is worthy of further research. Several researchers agree that special interest events attract special interest groups with a specific recreational or career interest in that pursuit. For example Zeppel (1992) suggested that visitors primarily participate in these SI festivals because of a 'special interest in the product, event, heritage or tradition being celebrated' (1992). In a case study of the Festival of Pacific Arts, she identified SI groups in the audience as being indigenous groups, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and artists. Similarly, in a later study of arts based festivals, Prentice and Andersen (2003) identified SI individuals and groups as 'serious tourists... those for whom cultural pursuits are a form of identity creation, an extension of general leisure, and a systematic (career-like) pursuit' (2003 p8). However not all authors agree that SI events attract purely specialist SI audiences. The results of Scott and Thigpen (2003) showed that audiences at a bird watching event in Texas were a mix of both highly and less specialised recreationalists. 34.6% of the audience were characterised as being casual birders, 42.3% were interested birders and 13.5% were active birders. 9% were skilled birders able to identify over 325 birds by sight and 50 by sound. Similar results were found more recently, when Bowen and Daniels (2005) asked 'Does the music matter?' finding that the music mattered greatly to some parts of the audience described as "hard-core music fans" and not to the "just being social" segments.

The findings of Nicholson and Pearce (2001) also showed variations in audience levels of interest according to the event type, concluding that motivations for attending events are event specific and not homogenous. The study showed that the "event specific" motivations of audiences were higher for special interest events such as the Golden Guitar Awards and Warbirds over Wanaka than for more general interest events.

Other specific studies suggest that SI events attract targeted market segments with determinable characteristics. For example Thrane (2002) demonstrated that people who were more interested in jazz music spent more money at a jazz festival than those who were less interested. Similarly, Mules and Ayling (2005) found that visitors' engagement with a special interest event and their
direct expenditure are related to their place of residence, and further that ‘visitors who travel further tend to engage more with the event, stay longer in the host destination and spend more than those who only have to travel short distances to the event’ (Mules & Aying 2005 p78).

Conversely, studies in GI events often demonstrate a shift of focus in motivation for attendance, which include greater emphasis on family togetherness, celebration of place, community and social opportunity (Derrett 2004). These factors are seen repeatedly in a number of specific community based event studies including the First Night festival (Kerstetter and Mowrer 1998) and the County Corn Festival (Uysal, Gahan and Martin 1993). While it is recognised that GI events are not homogenous, they represent events that have a more open appeal to wider audiences, in part due to their function as an opportunity for social interactions described above.

The literature provides a narrow range of studies that attempt to identify and understand the characteristics of specific SI and GI audiences. The majority of these studies examine GI events. There are still many more aspects to the social and psychological aspects of SI events and their audiences to be explored that will assist event organisers and other government and community stakeholders to plan and manage events. The project presented below attempts to contribute to this research void by examining the differences between SI and GI audiences across one regional destination and in so doing, provide a new perspective by which to view the distinctions between special interest and general interest events.

**METHODOLOGY**

The method used for the study combines ethnographic research collected from festival organisers and other government stakeholders, with survey data collected at local events in one regional destination. The research was conducted by the author as part of the Tweed Shire City of the Arts 2003-2005 Audience Development Program. The research, conducted on behalf of the Centre for Regional Tourism Research, was designed to address the needs of the Management Task Force represented by Tweed Shire Council, Tweed and Coolangatta Tourism Inc, Department of State and Regional Development and Northern Rivers Area Consultative Committee, Department State and Regional Development, Northern Rivers Area Consultative Committee and major festival organisers. The research was conducted over four stages those being,

1. an initial workshop with event organisers to establish research goals and discuss event objectives,
2. collection and analysis of survey data and distribution of results to event organisers and stakeholders,
3. workshop with festival organisers to discuss and compare results,
4. further analysis of special interest data.

Further description of these stages is provided below.

*Stage One – Initial workshop with event organisers*

The initial workshop with event organisers was held to establish research goals and record relevant event data. Data were collected from event organisers on the purpose and objectives of each event, and the types of programs and themes each event represented. The methods used for data collection follows those of participant observation described by Spradley (1980) where the stakeholder group meetings provided the social situation to collect ethnographic data.

*Stage Two – Collection and Analysis of Surveys at Nine Events*

The primary purpose of the research for the event organisers was to collect and examine demographic and psychographic data that would assist event planners to better understand their market segments and develop their audiences. However the data collected also assisted in
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Chapter 2 Paper 1

Joanne Mackellar

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answering the research question for this paper, to understand the differences between generalist and specialist audiences and events.

Intercept surveys were conducted at each event with over 1200 useable surveys collected at nine different festivals in the Tweed Shire as shown in Table 2. The study offered a rare opportunity to gather data across nine very different festivals and compare results. A team of researchers conducted face-to-face interviews using a generic survey form, intercepting audience members as they moved through the event site. Truly representative sampling was made impossible by the unrestricted nature of the festival sites. Most events were unticketed, and many had multiple entry and exit points. Every attempt was made to collect as many surveys as possible from multiple locations at the event. Two researchers were also assigned participant observational research tasks (Marshall and Rossman 1999). Using generic observation sheets, they recorded data relating to crowd size and flow, interest in particular activities and participation levels in activities such as dancing. The 1200 useable surveys provided data in a number of research areas including demographic characteristics, travelling behaviour, psychographic characteristics and event related behaviour and perceptions.

Stage Three – Summary workshop with event organisers
Following examination of all events in Stage Two, a workshop was held with event organisers and shire council representatives to discuss and compare results. Representatives from the CRTR presented the findings of a cross-event comparison and gathered data on their interpretation of results. Ethnographic methods described by Spradley (1980) were used to record and analyse the discussions of the workshop relating to the structure of events, their programming, funding, theming, and thoughts on audience development. These conversations were later analysed using coding methods described by Spradley (1980) to determine their contribution to the research question. The content of the discussions assisted in informing the analysis of data in Stage Four, described below.

Stage Four – Analysis of Special Interest Data
The aim of stage four of the study was to use the data collected to explore the differences in specialist and generalist event audiences. This began with research question 1, exploring the differences in place of residence for specialist and generalist event audiences. To achieve this, data were recoded into regions that were comparable in terms of distance travelled using a style similar to Madden, Groenerwold and Thapa (2002), “The rings were placed in order to achieve a reasonable sample in each region but more importantly to put people in geographical regions that represent the perceived distance”. The geographical positioning of the event sites made analysis of visitor generating regions more complex. The state border between NSW and QLD was within 30 kilometres of the event venues, so that within one annular region, there could be two or more State regions, such as the “Gold Coast” and “Northern Rivers”. The use of annular regions assisted in depicting the analysis to within a range of distances.

The other demographic and psychographic data used in this stage of analysis were transferred from the results of Stage One and were analysed in SPSS.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
The results are presented for the four stages of research described above.

Stage One – Initial workshop with event organisers
The results of the workshop provided an overview of the events under study. As illustrated by the data in Table 2, each event varies greatly in terms of event duration and history as well as audience size and targeted markets. For example, the Wintersun festival is a dynamic event targeted to those who enjoy the nostalgia of 50’s and 60’s rock’n’roll. The event has been developed over 13 years, and has drawn large crowds of around 50,000 people, many travelling...
across the country in classic cars specifically for the event. In contrast, the Tweed River Festival is a smaller community event, which attracts around 5,000 local people, focusing on celebrating the local heritage, environment, recreation and industry that exist along the Tweed River.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival Name</th>
<th>Audience Size</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Short Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wollumbin Festival</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>The event seeks to promote respect for indigenous culture, reconciliation, healing, sustainable lifestyles and environmental responsibility The program includes workshops, music, dance, art and market stalls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyalgum Diggers Rodeo &amp; Sports Day</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>95 years</td>
<td>A family day featuring horse riding competitions, rodeo, displays and stalls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyalgum Classical Music Festival</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>A niche event for classical music enthusiasts held in an historic wooden town hall in small village of Tyalgum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweed River Fest</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Celebrating the Tweed River and promoting care for the river catchments by the whole community. Activities include water based events, music, dance, environmental educational and lantern parade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed on the Tweed</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Annual historic and classic car speed trials on a 1.4km street circuit in Murwillumbah. Special events held in the town in the evenings featuring classic cars and classical music performances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweed River Agricultural Show</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>104 years</td>
<td>In its 104th year, the event celebrates local agriculture in the Tweed shire with contests, shows and exhibitions. Located in the Murwillumbah showground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingscliff Art Food &amp; all that Jazz</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>2.5 days</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Located on the beachfront at Kingscliff, the event offers a weekend of local art displays, live jazz performances, children’s activities and food from local restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweed Valley Banana Festival &amp; Harvest Week</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>48 years</td>
<td>The event celebrates the local community and its rural farming traditions. The celebration consists of many contests, fundraising events, art and craft displays and a colourful street parade in which the floats featuring bananas and other local produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wintersun</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>A festival of 50’s &amp; 60’s rock ‘n’ roll nostalgia, featuring cars, music, dancing, memorabilia and fashions of the era. Concerts, performances and other events are held in the streets and venues in Coolangatta and Tweed Heads.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The discussion from the first workshop began a process of comparison of events in the shire and the gradual recognition of a spectrum of events that provided the shire with a unique portfolio of events. Some event organisers identified their events as having a tourism focus while others were distinctly community events. Others identified both tourist and community objectives in their planning and management. The level of special interest activity was often determined by the objectives of the event, as well as by marketing and operational strategies. For example, events such as the Tweed Valley Agricultural Show, which has been operating for 104 years, has a strong community tradition to uphold, with little room for changing the program to specialise in any one area (such as show jumping). The program is designed to appeal to the broad community, inclusive of all ages and interests. Upholding the traditions of the local agricultural area is an important objective of the event.

Conversely, newer events such as Speed on Tweed have a very narrow specialisation in classic car racing, designed to attract car-racing specialists from all over Australia. The program is designed to feature street racing events and opportunities for car-enthusiasts to socialise and celebrate their passions together. The local community is encouraged to embrace the event, although car racing is not part of their local history.

Examination of data from the workshop provided the idea for the development of a spectrum shown in Figure 3 below, designed to depict the variation from GI to SI interest events for the shire. While it was clear that each event would attract different audiences, it was the degree of special interest that appeared to best distinguish one event from another, as opposed to demographic or other variables.

Figure 3 Spectrum of Special Interest Events for Tweed Shire

Stage Two: Collection and Analysis of Surveys at Nine Events
The collection and analysis of data from each event allowed event organisers to examine their audiences in terms of their demographic and psychographic characteristics. Subsequently, the research assisted organisers to define their primary and secondary market segments. The results demonstrated that each event had an audience with distinct market profiles as shown in Table 3. While each audience profile is unique, in psychographic and demographic characteristics, some are more similar than others. Audiences to the community/social events are more similar than those from the SI events. As shown in the table, the age, occupation and group composition are similar for the local community events, with three events sharing the
Participants in Special Interest Events

“local families” as their primary market segment. This was to be expected as they draw audiences from the same local region. The results also highlighted that the SI audiences were more diverse in terms of their demographic and psychographic variables, where each SI event showed a different primary audience segment.

The surveys allowed organisers to determine the major segments of their audiences. The full details of these segments are described in Mackellar (2004), and for reasons of brevity are summarised in the Table 3.

Table 3 Market segment profiles (summaries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival Name</th>
<th>Primary Segment</th>
<th>Secondary Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speed on the Tweed</td>
<td>Car enthusiasts, older age groups</td>
<td>Local families, mixed ages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wintersun</td>
<td>Car and dance enthusiasts, visiting baby boomers</td>
<td>Local baby boomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollumbin Festival</td>
<td>Students, 18-26yrs local and neighbouring regions</td>
<td>Alternative lifestylisters, older, environmentally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyalgum Classical Music</td>
<td>Classical music enthusiasts, older age groups</td>
<td>Local cultural community, older age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingscliff Art Food &amp; all</td>
<td>Local residents, mixed ages and interests</td>
<td>Jazz music fanatics, older professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that Jazz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana Festival &amp; Harvest</td>
<td>Local families, mixed age groups</td>
<td>Local residents without children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyalgum Diggers Rodeo &amp;</td>
<td>Local families, mixed age groups</td>
<td>Participants from neighbouring regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweed River Agricultural</td>
<td>Local families, mixed age groups</td>
<td>Participants from neighbouring regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweed River Fest</td>
<td>Local families, mixed younger age groups</td>
<td>Local mature couples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage Three – Summary workshop with event organisers

Following examination of each event, a workshop was held with event organisers and shire council representatives to discuss and compare results. While the results proved useful for defining their own market profiles, the spectrum of events that became evident was also useful for the regional destination planners in gaining a more holistic perspective of event activity in the area. The following ideas emerged from the workshop participants:

- the events provided a diversity of contributions (social and economic) to the one regional shire,
- events lower in the spectrum contributed to community development and wellbeing, whereas those higher up raised the profile of the region and attracted visitors from other regions,
- some event lifecycles have shifted their focus over time from GI to SI and others do not.

This is particularly the case for Wintersun which had started as a community event, and had developed into a SI event over its 13 year history.

- government funding processes require event organisers to demonstrate a contribution to tourism, therefore pressuring events to become a tourist event in order to access funding,
- many community events shared the same local audiences,
- recognition of the spectrum of events in the shire has implications for their contribution to the image of the region,
- event organisers should share resources for marketing and brand development to reduce costs and improve efficiencies.

Additional to the contemplation of the event spectrum, the workshop reinforced the value of an event organisers’ network in sharing information related to all aspects of event management.
including funding, sponsorship, risk management, signage and government funding and approval processes.

**Stage Four - Analysis of Special Interest Data**
Further analysis of the data defined a number of specific differences in audiences at specialist and generalist events. Each research question is answered in a section below.

**Differences in Visitor to Local Ratios**
Audiences at GI and SI events can be firstly analysed by exploring the differences in place of residence, exploring how far visitors have come specifically for the event (RQ1).

Using the annular method described above, audiences to each event were coded into annular regions as shown in Figure 4, with six regions defined. "Locals" were defined as residing within 30 kms of the event venue. The regions beyond that were defined by approximations of existing regional parameters as defined by state tourism organisations; for example the Coffs Coast region is approximately 200kms from the venue sites.

![Figure 4 – Annular regions defined for the study](image)

From this analysis, it was then possible to determine the visitor to local ratio for each event. The results summarised in Table 4 below, indicate that the events targeted to SI audiences attracted a greater percentage of visitors from outside the local region, having the lesser ratio of locals to visitors. Wintersun, for example, shows the lowest percentage of locals at 19%, whereas, community based events such as the Banana Festival & Harvest Week and the Tyalgum Diggers Rodeo & Sports Day attract over 80% of their audience from the local area.
A further factor is also important in this analysis. Visitors (and locals) sometimes come across a festival in their daily movements. In other words, some visitors did not come specifically for the festival, but were in the area for other reasons such as shopping or sightseeing. While these respondents are sometimes extracted from analysis (McKercher and Chan 2005), in this case they are left in, as often, they were observed to spectate, purchase food or participate in festival activities – they are an incidental, but still extant part of the audience. The festival is part of the mix of daily or weekly activities. As a point of analysis, the percentage of “incidental visitors” is shown in the far right column of the table.

The results showed that Wintersun attracted the highest ratio of visitors from other regions (87.6%), followed by Speed on Tweed (71.8%) and Tyalgum Classical Music Festival (67.4%). Community based events such as the Banana Festival & Harvest Week are successful in attracting the local community, but have little to offer SI travellers. The event does not pull visitors to the destination.

The results provided in Table 4 demonstrate the variance in visitor to local ratios, and therefore suggest the greater attraction of some events to inter-regional visitors. While it is proposed in this paper that the major reason for this is the attractiveness of the SI theme, and ensuing marketing activities, other factors are also likely to affect the attractiveness of an event to visitors. In some cases the destination itself can add to the attractiveness of an event (Getz 1997), however in this case, all events were in the same shire within approximately 30 kms.
proximity to each other, thus this factor is somewhat negated. Other suggestions include the
history and establishment of the event. Events with a longer history have had time to build their
audiences from near and afar, with greater opportunities for social networks to extend further.
The experiences of one festival organiser (Wintersun) suggest that previous success and
satisfaction with the event will also play an important role in attracting visitors to future repeat
events. SI travellers such as classic car enthusiasts make use of extensive networking via
websites, newsletters and club associations where they will share their stories and enthusiasm
or dissatisfaction throughout the SI community.

SI and GI audience Attendance at Other Events
To further illuminate the differences between GI and SI event audiences as postulated in
research question 2, respondents were examined by the types of other events they had
attended. The results from this question assisted in providing insight into the strength of their
interest and commitment to their chosen recreational pursuit. The results were surprising, in
demonstrating how far, and how frequently some audiences will travel to other similar events.
For example, as shown in Figure 5, over 60% of the audience at Speed on Tweed reported
attending other car events such as the Leyburn Sprints in SE Queensland and the Indy Grand
Prix on the Gold Coast, with a small percentage also reporting attending car events in
Melbourne and Canberra (over 1000 kilometres from home). A similar results was found for the
Wollumbin Festival where over 60% had attended other indigenous/environment based events.

The results also demonstrated that SI events at the top of the SI events spectrum (see Figure 2)
attracted audiences who had been to many other events of the same, or similar theme. Audiences of those events at the bottom of the spectrum had attended a much more mixed
selection of events, some music, some sports and some community.

![Figure 5 Attendance at Other Similar Events](chart)

**Special Interest Groups**
Examination of the group sizes across the nine events provided a further distinction between SI
and GI audiences as proposed by research question 3. Table 5 demonstrates larger groups
attended SI events than GI events. Speed on Tweed had the largest average group size of 4.1,
followed closely by Wintersun with 3.95. Interestingly, the most common group size (mode) for
all events was 2. However the standard deviation is higher for SI events, indicating a greater
range in group sizes. Wollumbin showed groups as large as 30, as did Wintersun, both higher on the SI event spectrum in Figure 2.

Table 5 Mean adult group size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Festival Name</th>
<th>Mean Adult Group Size</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Speed on the Tweed</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wintersun Festival</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Banana Festival &amp; Harvest Week</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tyalgum Diggers Rodeo &amp; Sports Day</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tyalgum Classical Music Festival</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wollumbin Festival</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tweed River Festival</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tweed River Agricultural Show</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Kingscliff Art Food &amp; all that Jazz</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the data do not tell us whether these are SI groups, the supporting data from the organisers suggest that this is the case. Interviews with the organisers of those events which attracted more SI visitors helped to explain the profile of groups travelling to SI and GI events. SI event organisers used more targeted means of marketing to SI groups such as SI magazines, personal communications with clubs and associations and contact via the internet with SI websites. Organisers of GI events tended to use more local advertising, through local schools, local media and more localised social networks. Promotion in neighbouring regions was sporadic, using newspaper advertising and editorial. The higher result from the Banana Festival & Harvest Week can be predominantly explained by the festival organiser’s strategies to attract school, and other community, groups.

Use of social networks
A further difference between GI and SI audiences was found in the use of ‘word of mouth’ promotion (RQ4). The existence of extended social networks for SI and recreational clubs has been well documented (Stokowski and Lee 1991), as has the common use of ‘word of mouth’ at events (Shanka and Taylor 2004). Consequently, SI events should also have a higher rate of social network usage via ‘word of mouth’ communication. This can be seen in the response for “word of mouth” promotion summarised in Table 6. The results of this study show that where respondents were asked “how did they hear about the event?”, the highest frequency response for “word of mouth” came from audiences at SI events such as the Wollumbin Festival and Tyalgum Classical Music Festival.

Table 6 Rank of Festivals – Word of mouth frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Festival Name</th>
<th>Word of mouth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wollumbin Festival (n = 74)</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tyalgum Classical Music Festival (n = 56)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wintersun Festival (n = 234)</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Banana Festival &amp; Harvest Week (n = 102)</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Speed on the Tweed (n = 161)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kingscliff Art Food &amp; all that Jazz (n = 143)</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Tyalgum Diggers Rodeo &amp; Sports Day (n = 96)</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tweed River Agricultural Show (n = 121)</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tweed River Festival (n = 117)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data suggests that word of mouth advertising is more important for SI event audiences than for GI audiences. Interviews with event organisers confirmed a higher use of personal selling to
clubs and social networks by SI events than GI. Wintersun organiser suggests he spends much of his time maintaining personal contact with car clubs, car magazine editors and dance clubs to ensure their support of the event. He places much greater value on these methods than advertising or connections with tourism businesses.

SUMMARY
In summary, the examination of SI and GI audiences in this regional destination has demonstrated that they are characterised by more than one attribute. Not only did SI event audiences travel further to attend SI events, they also tended to have similar behaviours which included having attended other events based on the same theme, travelled with more people in SI groups and relied on social networks to hear about events related to their pursuit.

Acknowledging that a simple classification of general or special interest is too narrow, a spectrum of events has been proposed to demonstrate the variety of events in one regional destination, and the corresponding variety of audiences, from community social seekers to leisure fanatics. The results of studies by Scott and Thigpen (2003) and Bowen and Daniels (2005) suggest that some special interest events attract a mix of both highly and less specialised recreationalists. Similarly, the results from this study demonstrate that specialised events such as the Speed on Tweed have a range of audience segments, from those who are dedicated to car racing, to those who are locals looking for an exciting family day out, and many in between. The results also indicate that SI events attract more visitors from outside the region who have an interest in attending similar events elsewhere.

The results of this study were somewhat limited by the survey design, in complying with the needs of the Tweed Shire Audience Development project and not being able to design more specific questions about levels of involvement, commitment and behaviour. However, as an exploratory study, the results demonstrate the efficacy of defining event audiences by their SI or GI characteristics, the implications of which are described further below.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH
The results of the research illustrated the purpose of considering differences in SI and GI audiences in terms of their behavioural characteristics, and subsequently comparing the value of events in attracting differing audiences.

The value of events to community well-being has been frequently reinforced (Derrett 2004, Getz 1997) as has the value of events to SI tourists (Scott and Thigpen 2003). It can be considered important then to explore a spectrum of events within a destination which satisfies both community and visitor interests. This study has attempted to show the potential in this process and in involving the event organisers themselves in exploring their own events from a shire wide perspective. The continuation of the network of event organisers for purposes of sharing resources and lobbying funding bodies has also demonstrated the value of reflecting upon the spectrum of events in a destination and in understanding the value of each type of event.

The results also show the importance of comparing events across a regional destination, with respect to the image and identity of the region. This then becomes useful for planning and developing destination brand via the growth of SI events which reinforce the image of the destination (see Chalip and Costa 2005).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF AN EVENT SPECTRUM
The results provide insights into the events in the region beyond an understanding of whether an event is a SI event or not. These implications included a greater understanding from event organisers that some audiences are shared amongst events, both regionally and inter-regionally. From this knowledge, some event organisers have started promoting at other similar SI events, while others at local GI events are considering acknowledging and sharing the pool of volunteers which are also part of the shared audience.
The results have also provided insight into SI event audiences, which shows them to be a tightly knit group who share experiences of events through word of mouth, the Internet and other social networks, and who attend other similar SI events regularly. This too has been useful for event organisers who have made better use of these networks for their marketing strategies.

The improved insight into event lifecycles assists those who wish to grow their event from GI to SI, and for others to reinforce their position in the community as solid community-based events.

**CONCLUSION**

The results of this study suggest that events can be placed on a spectrum of events from GI to SI events, based on the objectives and strategies of the event organisers. Events at either end of the spectrum attract types of audiences that have differences in characteristics and behaviour, and those in the middle of the spectrum also have identifiable characteristics. In previous events based research, the differences in audiences has been explained by single attributes such as motive, or by reason to attend, or by socio-demographic profiles. However this study suggests that multiple attributes related to special interest behaviour may provide insight into the classification of audiences at events. These multiple attributes include distance travelled, attendance at other events, special interest group type and reliance on social network structures.

While this study was somewhat limited by the use of secondary data, future studies could develop more advanced designs of a SI index, not only in the context of events, but across all SI tourism. The paper has contributed to the knowledge of event audiences and presented a new approach to examining their characteristics, in terms of their special or general interest in an event. The implications of this approach are multi-fold in understanding the different needs of event audiences and in providing for the needs and desires of different special, and general, interest audiences.

**REFERENCES**


Madden, Groenewold and Thapa (2002), Estimating demand for a special event and the event's contribution to a regional economy. *CRC for Sustainable Tourism Pty Ltd. Gold Coast.*


2.5 Reflections

The first study has provided a useful starting point in defining the differences between specialist and general audiences, highlighting the statistical differences between audiences attending these types of events. However, there were many other observations and images collected from the events which also provided a wealth of data and ideas for the researcher. In particular, some participants at specialist events displayed levels of intensity and passion for their pursuit which was clearly beyond what others would consider normal or acceptable.

As shown in Figure 7, the commitment and dedication of serious participants formed the basis of the attraction for spectators. At an event such as Speed on Tweed, a core group of amateur competitors poured time, money and effort into the pursuit of classic car races. The cars themselves cost thousands of dollars to obtain and maintain. Some participants gained sponsors to help finance their trips, but most relied on their own resources. In their normal lives they were doctors, business owners and other professionals with high levels of disposable income.

Figure 7: Participants are marshalled prior to race at ‘Speed on Tweed’

Source: author
Their lives were structured around the circuit of events in Australia and sometimes overseas. They spent time between events planning for the next one. The word ‘fanatical’ recurred in conversations with event staff and researchers, spectators and the participants themselves in reference to the enthusiasm and almost religious zeal shown for some recreational pursuits.

As shown in Figure 8, this commitment and dedication was also evident at the Wintersun Festival where rock’n’roll dance contests attracted serious dance participants. The intensity and passion at this event was evident in the precision and timing that reflected thousands of hours in practice and tuition. As shown in the photograph, their passion for the pursuit was also displayed through handcrafted matching clothing, reflecting their chosen lifestyle and shared passion for dancing.

Figure 8: Participants perform a display dance in Tweed Shopping Centre

Source: P. Derrett (with permission)
As part of the inductive design of the thesis, it was important to gather comments and ideas from the other delegates at the Global Events Congress which would also confirm and inform the direction of the study, and its conceptual foundations. Based on these discussions, and on the reflections from the study given above, four main issues arose to be explored in the next phases of research:

- The participants at these events were not well researched or understood, and yet the events themselves existed because of their intensity and committed participation.
- The participants at these events were phenomena in themselves whose participation extended to other activities in their lives.
- Participants would be found across many (if not all) forms of recreation and leisure, from bird watching to book reading.
- Participation is likely to occur at fan-based events, as well as recreational events, including Star Trek conventions, Elvis festivals and Sci-Fi expos.

As such, the study provided the impetus for learning more about fanaticism generally, and specifically as related to leisure. It also provided the impetus to use qualitative methods to discover more about these types of events, where methods such as observation, conversation and interviewing would enable greater insight into the human behaviour of participants.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the first analysis of a spectrum of interest at events. As noted in the paper’s conclusion, the study demonstrates how tourism and event planners can use this research method to identify the characteristics of different audiences and plan toward the future development of community based and/or special interest events. The findings also suggest that special interest events attract more tourists and larger groups, which provide different benefits and outcomes than general interest events.

This paper also provided the first attempt to analyse a set of events in one regional destination in Australia, and to model the diversity of audiences at those events. As a result, the research provided a mechanism for local
government to assess the value of events in attracting different audiences, for different purposes.

In terms of the development of this thesis, the study has provided the first stepping-stones to understanding participation at events. Reasons for participation are diverse; from supporting a community event such as the Banana Festival, to indulging an interest in Beethoven or Jack Brabham. The study highlighted a range of participation, from the casual spectator to the avid competitor, finding that special interest groups will attend events that are related to their recreational choices.

Importantly, the study provided a platform to direct research on the upper end of the special interest spectrum, focusing on the specialised, serious and fanatical parts of the audience.
Chapter Three - Paper Two

Fanatics, fans or just good fun?
3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the second in the series of the published papers entitled ‘Fanatics, fans or just good fun? Travel behaviours and motivations of the leisure fanatic’. It is a conceptual paper, which continues the development of a model of serious participation. The paper is preceded by the author’s objectives in designing the paper and its relationship to the research cycle. The paper is then presented in its entirety as published in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* in August 2006, a journal chosen for its readership of travel and event researchers. The chapter concludes with remarks by the author reflecting upon the process of theory analysis and development, and the further development of the model of serious participation.

3.2 Paper Two Objectives

The primary objective of this paper was to provide a review of the literature necessary to support the thesis, following from the initial conceptual framework in 1.3.8. Accordingly, the objectives for this paper are related to three research objectives outlined in Section 1.4:

*RO1 To explore and model the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants at special interest events,*

*RO2 To explore and model the behaviours of serious participants as consumers, recreationalists and travellers,*

*RO4 To understand the social networks utilised by participants of special interest events.*

3.3 Contribution to the Research Cycle

The paper in this chapter contributes to the second stage in the research cycle. In essence, the paper was to provide a thorough literature review and to
synthesize and define the psycho/social characteristics of event participants. As previously outlined in the theoretical background to the study (1.3), the study of event participants incorporates numerous interrelated spheres of literature in different streams of tourism, leisure, fanaticism and consumer studies. The result of this synthesis is a conceptual framework that demonstrates the links and relationships between the theoretical concepts. As described by Henderson (1991, p.38), the framework was used in the interpretive paradigm, to ‘give order and insight to what is, or can be observed’. The inductive drive of the study, discussed in Section 1.6, required the development of a framework that allowed the theory and the data to continually develop, rather than be a definitive model for testing (Henderson, 1991). Successive papers would need to be part of the process of theory development, as much as this paper was. It was important to view the framework created in this paper as a flexible form that was allowed to change as new data emerged.

**Figure 9: Current stage of the research cycle**

This paper frames and directs further primary research, which would be conducted to explore participants of special events. At this early stage of the study, participants were conceptualised as leisure fanatics. However, as
demonstrated later in the study, this concept later appeared too narrow to conceptualise the behaviours of both fans and fanatics as a broader segment of serious participants (see Section 3.5 following).
3.4 Academic Paper

Academic Papers

Fanatics, fans or just good fun? Travel behaviours and motivations of the fanatic

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3.5 Reflections from the study

The paper submitted to the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* continued the development process toward a theoretical model for this thesis. The theoretical constructs gave some order to the study of fans, fanatics and other special interest audiences. It provided the platform to begin in-depth research into special interest events, and other social contexts such as the Internet, to discover more about participants’ psycho/social characteristics and resultant behaviours. It was important to conceive this model as a fluid structure, rather than a definitive model for testing. It was expected that the lists in the ‘boxes’ would be expanded as new insights were discovered, and that some attributes in the model would not be considered as relevant as the literature had suggested. The use of a diagrammatic model allowed categorisation of concepts and proposed relationships between the categories to form.

This process was progressed when, following publication of the article, the author was invited to present the model to a workshop at the Events Exchange conference in Hobart, Tasmania in July 2006. This opportunity provided valuable feedback from event managers, and local and state government managers on their own experiences with leisure fanatics at special interest events. In particular, they provided snapshots of the travel behaviours of fanatics at events such as the Wooden Boat Festival and Targa Tasmania, two successful participant events which attract tourists to Tasmania. The workshop provided an ideal opportunity to share stories and conversations, which contributed to the ethnography of the thesis. Our discussions focussed on the dynamics of audience participation and the propensity for audiences to display their heightened enthusiasm. This then provided useful examples which informed the design of the next stages of the research. In essence, this one-day workshop became part of the inductive research process, confirming and informing the development of the conceptual framework and the research design.

**Fans, fanatics or serious participants?**

As a critical part of that interaction, discussions also led to a refinement of the model. Many of the psycho/social characteristics described in the leisure fanatic
model were also true of enthusiasts, serious leisurists and others who were not quite fanatical, but perhaps on their way to it. In essence, the model described a wider section of the audience than those who were self confessedly fanatical (a term which was proving to be a subjective description). In terms of the spectrum suggested by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997), the participants in this research represented enthusiasts, experts and fanatics. As a result of these important industry-led discussions, and of detailed review of the literature, the model was revised as the SerPa model to include those who were self-confessed fanatics as well as devoted fans, enthusiasts, hard-core participants, and very serious leisurists. The word serious participant was used to encapsulate these terms and the SerPa model (1) was devised as shown in Figure 10. The word ‘serious’ had been used extensively in leisure theory by Stebbins (1992, 1996, 2001), in a way which aligned well with this study, encapsulating many of the meanings above. The word ‘participant’ was used to reflect their role at events. The term ‘serious participant’ has since been used in a study at a Renaissance Festival in Texas, USA (Kim & Jamal, 2007).

Figure 10: The SerPa Model (1)

Source: Author
However, as noted in Section 1.3.2, leisure theorists also refer to participants as those who more generally participate in leisure activities. This focus on serious participation provides direction for the thesis as a whole, as well as for the first of the ethnographic studies, as described in the following chapter.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a review of the literature relevant to this thesis in the form of a conceptual paper, published in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. The literature review highlighted the multidisciplinary approach that is needed in the study of participants at events, and the influence of leisure or recreation choices on the types of events participants will travel to. The review also introduced the concept of fanaticism as a way in which to describe those with a very serious level of participation in leisure activities. Specifically, the chapter has assisted in informing the research objectives (RO2 and 3) which seek to understand more about the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants, and their behaviours. The chapter has identified these characteristics and incorporated them into the continued development of the SerPa framework, which continues to inform the direction and focus of this thesis. Moreover, the reflections of the chapter document the process of model development, as being inclusive of academic peer review, as well as event industry review. This process has led to important developments to the SerPa model, and to the inductive research process of this thesis.

The synthesis of the literature, and ensuing model development, has provided the platform to conduct more specific studies at special interest events, as shown in the following chapters.
Chapter Four – Paper Three

*A good dance is worth the time it takes to get there.*

Serious Participant at the Wintersun Festival
4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the third in the series of the published papers following from the initial research in Chapter 2, and the development of the SerPa framework in Chapter 3. The paper explores serious participation at a special interest event, the Wintersun Festival, in Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia, where car and dance enthusiasts celebrate rock’n’roll and the lifestyle of the 1950s.

The study uses ethnographic methods of participant observation to inductively explore the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at the event. The researcher, and her associates, had spent four years attending the event, exploring the cultural scene (Spradley, 1980) and collecting various images and data for analysis. Participants were observed and conversed with, without interfering with the flow of the event. As a result, nine domains (themes) were derived from the exploration, which assist in the development of theory for this thesis.

The paper is preceded by the author’s objectives in designing the paper and its relationship to the research cycle. The paper is then presented in its entirety as submitted to the Leisure Studies journal – a journal selected for its emphasis on the social sciences, and its contributions to the theories of leisure behaviour and, specifically, serious leisure. The paper has recently been accepted for publication in 2009, and is in the process of being typeset.

The chapter concludes with reflections on the study, in terms of its contribution to the development of the conceptual framework and to the development of knowledge for event and tourism managers.

4.2 Paper Objectives

The third paper was designed to further inform two of the research objectives guiding the development of this thesis (Section 1.4):

RO2 To explore and model the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants at special interest events,
To explore and model the behaviours of serious participants as consumers, recreationalists and travellers.

4.3 Contribution to the Research Cycle

The study explored parts of the SerPa model developed from the literature in Chapter 3. Whilst using the theory as a basic guide to what might be discovered, this study aimed to inductively determine more about the participants. As part of Stage 2 of the research cycle, the study aimed to see if formal theories were applicable to the data, or ‘if substantive theory related to the context of the situation must be developed’ (Henderson, 1991, p.39).

Figure 11: Current stage of the research cycle

Source: author (2008)
4.4 Academic Paper

An examination of serious participants at the Australian Wintersun Festival
Joanne Mackellar*

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4.5 Reflections from the Study

A number of psycho/social behaviours were identified in the study that informed further development of the SerPa model proposed in Chapter 3. Consequently, the findings were utilised in the ongoing research cycle typical of qualitative research designs (Spradley, 1980; Henderson, 1991).

The nine domains identified in the study informed and explained psycho/social characteristics and consumer, leisure and travel behaviours of the SerPa model (1), as shown in the Table 7.

Table 7: Relationship of the study domains to SerPa model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics and behaviours of serious participants (SerPa)</th>
<th>Domains from the Wintersun Festival study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological characteristics</td>
<td>Identity reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fanaticism – value attitude and intensity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social characteristics</td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer behaviour</td>
<td>Fixated consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure behaviour</td>
<td>Leisure lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel behaviour</td>
<td>Specialised travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the characteristics proposed in the SerPa model (1) (3.5) were quite prominent (text is underlined in Figure 12), while others were less observable. In particular, the psychological characteristics of pride, identity and intensity were very strong in this study. The passion and commitment of the very serious, or fanatical, participants were at times overwhelming. The commitment to the dance club, and the lifestyle that it represented, was unfaltering. The club’s activities, including attending numerous events, were central to these participants’ lifestyles and their decision making. The social characteristics proposed in the SerPa model (2) (Figure 12) were also highlighted under the domain of social interaction. The event had provided a
context that could facilitate participants’ interests. Social groups worked together to progress and achieve common goals, and in so doing achieved the social rewards of group accomplishment highlighted by Stebbins (1992).

In terms of consumer behaviour, the study identified the sometimes intense fixation with consuming fashion and accessories which reflected participants’ chosen leisure lifestyles. The study highlighted the propensity for serious participants to go to extreme lengths to search and find authentic examples of clothing, music and memorabilia.

Perhaps most significantly, the study contributed to a greater understanding of leisure behaviours at special interest events, such as the Wintersun Festival. The study found many behaviours related to Stebbin’s theory of serious leisure (1992, 2001), especially as related to lifestyle, competition and skill development. Importantly, the event provided a context for participants to advance their leisure careers through skill progression and seeking new challenges in dance contests and car shows.
Touristic behaviours of serious participants were also identified as one of the main themes of the study. Specialised travel was required to meet the specific needs of participants in terms of looking after their equipment, and meeting the rules of dance competitions. Travel to the Wintersun event was an important ritual for serious participants which they repeat every year. They demonstrated they will travel anywhere for a good dance, to non-standard locations, and to repeat locations. The study of the travel patterns also identified the important role of events to serious leisure participants.

4.5.1 The role of events in serious leisure

Identifying the role of the event in the development of serious participant behaviours was also a significant outcome for the study that had not been previously explored in the literature. The results suggested that the event played a crucial role in developing the behaviours of serious participants and what had previously been described in Chapter 3 as leisure fanatics. The study found that the event director facilitated highly specialised requests, mediated between interests and provided the necessary contests, workshops, social activities and facilities that met the sometimes dogmatic needs of participants. While it is not unusual for event managers to respond to the needs of their audiences, in this case, the tasks could be seen as particularly specialised, and particularly crucial for the event. For example, contests and workshops provided opportunities to develop specific skills and knowledge desired by the participants. However, dance contests must be performed on a specific flooring surface, provided by the event organiser.

The role of providing specialised services and activities for serious participants is part of a cyclic process. The event provides specialist services, which are used by the participants, who in turn request more specialised services, which again are met by the event. This ensures the sustainability of the event as participants appreciate the efforts of the organisers, rewarding them with return visitation and positive word of mouth promotion.

The study provided an innovative approach to examining participants at an event. Ethnographic studies of events are not common, and yet they can provide a new way of looking at the event from within. The approach is
particularly suited to examining participants, as it combines observation of behaviours with conversations *in situ*.

### 4.6 Conclusion

It was important to note that the results of this qualitative study are not generalisable, and consequently, the outcomes were not seen as emphatic findings. The results provided pieces of evidence that assisted in compiling the bigger picture. Specifically, they contributed to RO2 to include psycho/social characteristics related to identity reinforcement, fanaticism and pride, as well as social behaviours identified as networking, competition and skill development.

In relation to RO3, the study developed an inductive understanding of the importance of specialised travel for participants and the process of consumer behaviour undertaken at special interest events. Similarly, the centrality of recreational pursuits like dancing and rodding to participants’ lifestyles was highlighted.

The results also suggested that theory related to the context of leisure behaviours could be developed, requiring more examination at different social environments, including events, club meetings and the Internet. The results of this study begged the question; were the characteristics of these serious participants likely to be the same at other SI events where fanatics pursued other hobbies like fandom, sports or fishing? Additional research was needed at other special interest events to examine the psycho/social characteristics identified in this study, as well as the travel and consumer behaviours.
Chapter Five – Paper Four

When Elvis died it was like the world had come to an end.

Participant Elvis Revival Festival 2007
5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the fourth paper in the series of published papers. It explores serious participants at a special interest event, in the context of fandom. The paper is preceded by the author’s objectives in designing the paper, its relationship to the research cycle, and the outcomes and discussion resulting from the paper. The paper is presented in its entirety as accepted for a forthcoming publication in the Journal of Vacation Marketing.

Festivals and other special interest events such as the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes, NSW provide an environment where serious participants can be observed and conversed with, without interfering with the flow of the event. In this case, the event was preceded by a six-hour train journey (The Elvis Express), which was tailored specifically to take fans to the event. During the journey and at the event, ethnographic methods of participant observation allowed the researcher to record and analyse the behaviours of Elvis fans and fanatics at the event. These observations created the basis of behavioural segmentation, highlighting differences in audience groups at the event.

Video footage taken on the train, and at the event is provided as an appendix to this study (Appendix 2). The footage was used for data analysis, to review and analyse the many aspects of participation by fans. The visual data were particularly useful for studying the details of participants’ behaviours, fashions, and other aspects of social identity. The footage was edited by the author, and presented at an internal University Research Forum, and may be useful here to provide a visual context for the study.

5.2 Paper Objectives

The objectives for this paper relate to three of the research objectives for the thesis identified in Section 1.4:

RO2. To explore and model the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants at special interest events,

RO3. To explore and model the behaviours of serious participants as consumers, recreationalists and travellers,
RO4. To explain the social networks utilised by participants of special interest events.

5.3 Contribution to the Research Cycle

The paper presented in this chapter builds upon the knowledge gained from the previous studies in Stage 2 of the research cycle shown in Figure 13 below. Specifically, it builds upon the knowledge gathered thus far that:

- Special interest events attract serious participants
- Serious participants attend other events of the same theme
- Serious participants have a willingness to travel for the pursuit of recreational goals and ambitions
- Serious participants seek identity reinforcement and have pride in their identity and skills
- Serious participants seek social interaction and opportunities to consume products which align with their recreational identity and goals.

The paper also aimed to explore the literature identified in the theoretical background to fandom (1.3.5), which suggests that attending events may be a behavioural manifestation of devoted fans.
5.4 Academic Paper
Academic Papers

Dabblers, fans and fanatics: Exploring behavioural segmentation at a special-interest event

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5.5 Reflections from the Study

This paper has contributed substantially to widening the context of serious participation. As such, it expanded the context from recreation that is based on cars and dancing to include popular music fandom. The results contributed to defining the psycho/social characteristics of serious participants, demonstrating the importance of passion, lifelong devotion and formal and informal social networks.

Many of the concepts posited in the SerPa model (3) in Figure 14 below, were clearly observed throughout the study, and were identified as characteristics in the fan and fanatic segments in the paper. Some characteristics appeared more prominent than others (text is underlined in Figure 14). Personal characteristics such as passion, enthusiasm, devotion and narcissistic thrill were particularly prominent. Commitment to the memory of Elvis was also identified, reflective of the fandom literature on devoted fans (Rodman, 1996; Doss, 1999), where Elvis was King – an absolute truth in their minds.

Figure 14: SerPa model (3) showing additions from Paper 4

Source: author
However, new characteristics were identified to add to the model which had proven consistent with the previous study at Wintersun (shown in italics in Figure 14). Personal leisure identity was an emerging theme from both studies. Participants’ personal leisure identity as an Elvis fan provided them with many personal and social rewards, reflective of the rewards of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001). Serious participants had clearly made choices about their leisure identity, which often stayed with them in other parts of their lives. More casual dabblers returned their Elvis suit at the end of the event, and returned to their ‘normal’ persona.

Social characteristics proposed in the SerPa model (2) were also observed, and documented throughout the paper. Serious participants, (fans and fanatics) were noted to join groups such as fan clubs that sustained their beliefs, and to attend events that reinforced ideals. They relied on each other for support and social interaction, allowing the clubs and events to facilitate their passions and interests (contextual facilitation). While these characteristics had previously been identified in the SerPa model (1), other characteristics were now proposed, emerging from this study and from the previous study at Wintersun. Group identity was particularly strong, in the worldwide Elvis family, to which fans felt they belonged. As identified previously by Doss (1999), the Elvis ‘family’ provided an alternative community, or social network where they could interact, and build relationships. Within this family, there was a feeling of ‘we’, where participants felt secure and reassured by those around them, who felt just as passionately for Elvis Presley. As illustrated in Figure 15, being a fan provided an established social identity which participants were proud of, and developing this identity allowed opportunities for public appreciation and reward in contests and parades.
The study also demonstrated that the psycho/social characteristics resulted in consumer, leisure and touristic behaviours, illustrated in the SerPa model.

Elvis fans showed a propensity to consume fashion and souvenir items in order to visually demonstrate their devotion. Consistent with research by Rodman (1996), Verden (2006) and Doss (1997), they had a deep and passionate interest in Elvis ‘stuff’. The design of their fashions, and display of Elvis memorabilia appeared to outsiders as excessive – but also very entertaining. Adorned with costume dress and jewellery, fans and fanatics shared their involvement with other fans and publicly expressed their devotion to Elvis.

In terms of leisure, fans and fanatics showed many of the behaviours thus far identified in the SerPa model. In particular, participants were highly involved in their leisure activity, seeking new challenges and ways to express their fandom. They receive ‘just right reinforcement’ from those they know, and don’t know, at the event. According to Bryan (2000), involvement in an activity is ‘fuelled by a just right reinforcement schedule of success and recognition of that success by peers having similar values’ (2000, p.19). Fans conduct their
leisure activity within a leisure social world, where members can share similar attitudes and beliefs, and to create a sense of group identity (Bryan, 1977).

The psycho/social characteristics of Elvis fans and fanatics described throughout the study and above, lead to focussed and specialised leisure interests that are reflective of the concept of central life interest described by Kim, Scott and Crompton (1997, p.324), where centrality refers to ‘the extent to which a participant’s lifestyle and social networks are connected to his or her pursuit of a given leisure activity. Moreover centrality implies a rejection of alternative leisure activities’.

The identification of the travel behaviours of serious participants was further assisted by this study. The study confirmed without doubt that fans and fanatics travelled to pursue their activity, to both events and other destinations such as Graceland. All were independent travellers who had made their own transport and accommodation arrangements, often relying on their past knowledge and expertise. Elvis fans demonstrated that they were willing to travel to non-standard destinations, such as Parkes, to indulge their leisure interests. Additionally, they also were observed to enjoy elements of escape from their normal working lives.

Notably, fans and fanatics did not pose marketing difficulties; their social networks provided easy distribution channels for marketing and promotion. Many were keen to return to the event and had booked a year in advance to secure train tickets and comfortable accommodation. The travel, leisure and consumer behaviours proposed in the SerPa model (3), were observed and identified in the study of Elvis Festival participants, suggesting the model may be adapted to special interest events with fan–based audiences. Other fan-based events in Australia include film festivals, Sci-fi festivals and gamer festivals such as Reloaded 2008.

Other characteristics and behaviours also emerged from the study, not identified in the SerPa model. The study revealed fantasy to be an interesting and prominent observation of the study relevant to fans and fanatics. Participants were observed acting out fantasy and allowing their imagination to be unrestricted by reality. To the uninitiated (or non-fan), this was sometimes a confronting and inexplicable behaviour. The extension of this idea is
conceivably relevant to other recreation, event and leisure theory and holds potential for additional research.

5.6 Conclusion

The study contributed to the research objectives, RO2, RO3 and RO4. Specifically, the study has highlighted the psycho/social characteristics of the participants as belonging to four segments; social, dabbler, fan and fanatic. Each segment showed different psycho/social characteristics, whereby fans and fanatics, showed an intense passion and involvement with Elvis Presley. The segments also showed membership to different social networks, with fans and fanatics belonging to fan clubs or Internet networks. Social networks, in the form of fan clubs, existed before and after the event. In relation to RO3, consumer, travel and leisure behaviours were also identified as being different for the four segments, thus posing challenges for event organisers to provide differing products and activities.

This study makes a methodological contribution to event-based research by demonstrating the use of behavioural segmentation as a means to segment an audience into discrete segments. As such, it addresses the recent idea of Getz (2007) that ‘such measures may provide further insights into the characteristics of event goers and another means of segmentation’.

In relation to RO4, the identification of fan and fanatical segments, and their social network characteristics led to more questions about network activities. If organisers knew more about how fans connected through networks, and how they operated, organisers could do more to attract more participants and discover more about them. These questions led to the development of the fifth study presented in the following chapter.
Chapter Six - Paper Five

This community we all love.

Participant - Lord of the Rings Fanatics Plaza
6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the fifth paper in the series of the journal papers, exploring the social dynamics of an on-line forum – the Lord of the Rings Fanatics plaza (LOTR plaza). The paper is preceded by the author’s objectives in designing the paper (6.2) and its relationship to the research cycle (6.3). The paper is then presented in its entirety (6.4) as it will be presented to a tourism or leisure journal. The chapter is concluded with outcomes of the study (6.5) in terms of its contribution to the development of the conceptual framework and to the development of knowledge.

6.2 Paper Objectives

The objectives for this paper related primarily to the last of the research objectives:

*RO4 To understand the social networks utilised by participants of special interest events.*

The objectives of the final study allowed deeper investigation into the social world of leisure fanatics. Investigations into social contexts of leisure fanatics had so far focussed on special events. Extending that research into other contexts, such as virtual communities on the Internet, would explain more about their ongoing relationships, and in particular, the emerging importance of the Internet as a tool for social facilitation and travel planning.

6.3 Contribution to the Research Cycle

Throughout the collection of data in previous studies, references were made to using the Internet to find out about events, and discuss upcoming events. Previous studies in Chapters 2–5 identified existing websites where leisure fanatics had established their presence, and provided the basis for this study.
Figure 16: Current stage of the research cycle

Selection of a fanatical leisure-based virtual community involved a process of elimination, where various sites were matched against criteria developed from the previous studies in this thesis. As shown in Table 8, the member activities of six forum-based websites were examined for characteristics previously identified of serious participants. For example, the opportunity to develop skills through the site was sought after, as was some reward system for participation. As travel behaviours were part of the study, this activity was also sought.
### Table 8: Member activities of fanatic based websites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for fanatics</th>
<th>Discussion forums</th>
<th>Skill development</th>
<th>Reward for commitment</th>
<th>Participatory fandom – art /fiction</th>
<th>Fixated shopping</th>
<th>Event/travel section</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Star trek</td>
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<td><a href="http://boards.startrek.com/community/">http://boards.startrek.com/community/</a></td>
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<td>Lord of the rings</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.lotrplaza.com">www.lotrplaza.com</a></td>
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<td>Elvis Presley</td>
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<td>Fly fishers</td>
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<td>Deer hunters</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.whitetailfanatics.com">www.whitetailfanatics.com</a></td>
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Of all the sites reviewed, the LOTR plaza site offered opportunities across all dimensions, as well as additional functionality for fanatics to socialise. The site also proudly displayed its fanaticism in its site name and objectives.
6.4 Academic Paper

Anyone going to RingCon? – The structure and relations of a virtual fan community

Abstract

An examination of the social relations in a virtual community demonstrates how a fan based network has created an environment where members can connect and share a passion for LOTR. Using network analysis in combination with thematic analysis, the study shows the factors that have led to collaborated effort toward travel planning. A moderated network with clear rules, inclusiveness and identity development, have led to continued connectivity, trust and reciprocity. The outcome of these strong social relations has been collaboration for the purposes of planning travel to LOTR related destinations and conventions. Accordingly, the study suggests that Internet forums replicate some traditional event activity, but may also foster new interest in attending special interest events. This paper considers these processes in relation to fan-based tourism and event marketing.

Introduction

Since its inception, the Internet has been utilised to create virtual spaces which link like-minded individuals into communities of interest (Rheingold, 1993, 2000). Community participants are drawn to a virtual space by a need to interact in meaningful discussions about common interests. This paper aims to examine the social relations of participants inside a virtual community and considers them in relation their travel behaviours to destinations and events.

The subject of the study is the Lord of the Rings Fanatics’ Plaza (http://www.lotrplaza.com); a specialised group of fans, whose connections reach deep into the fan community throughout the world. With over 80,000 members, this fan-based web-site is a portal for fans to meet, discuss, fantasize and connect.
The focus of the study is to discover how travel plans are generated through this fan based website. Film and music fans are well known for their tendencies to travel to destinations that are either film locations (Williams, 2007), sacred sites such as Graceland (Jenson, 1992) or conventions (Lawrence, 2003). Similarly, fans are also noted for their use of the Internet to form virtual fan communities (Lawrence, 2003; Darling Wolf, 2004). What remains to be explored is how and why fans use their virtual communities to plan their travel. Specifically, the research objectives guiding this study were 1) to examine the social relations of participants of a virtual fan community, 2) to examine how these relations influence travel decisions and behaviours.

These issues can be addressed using interpretive research methods, seeking to generate meaning, explain and describe this social activity from within the virtual community. Previous studies have been reviewed to identify trends and gaps in current research of virtual communities, as well as to synthesise concepts in fan-based tourism and event studies.

**Fan tourism**

Research into fans as tourists characterises them as specialised (or special interest) travellers who are willing to travel to non-standard destinations for the purposes of ‘getting closer’ to their idols, or to gain more in-depth knowledge and experience about the film and its location (Tooke & Baker, 1996; Macionis, 2004). A review of the literature suggests that movie fans are known to travel for three main reasons; those being:

1) to visit film locations (Tooke & Baker, 1996; Carl, Kindon & Smith, 2007),
2) to plan special trips to gather in fan meetings – either as small informal groups (Williams, 2007a), or in large conventions (Lawrence, 2003), and
3) to visit shrines to deceased (and living) movie stars (Jenson, 1992; Lewis, 1992).

In so doing, they require specialised travel planning to reach their somewhat non-standard locations, and often travel with others in fan clubs or social networks (Williams, 2007a).

Fans attendance at special interest events such as science fiction (sci-fi) and fantasy conventions is also noted as a prominent characteristic by Bacon-Smith (2000) and Obst, Zinkiewicz and Smith (2002). While there are numerous Sci-fi conventions worldwide, which claim to attract audiences in their thousands (www.scificonventions.com), little empirical research is available to tell us
why audiences attend or what they are doing there. One significant study by Obst et al. (2002) suggested that sci-fi fans felt a strong psychological sense of community, which is enhanced by attending sci-fi conventions. The dimensions that underlie the sense of community included belonging, cooperative behaviour, friendship and support, leadership and conscious identification.

Other research suggests that Sci-fi audiences belong to virtual communities such as fan clubs (Lawrence, 2003) and other special interest networks, but the relationships between memberships of communities and attendance at special events is not well understood. The use of internet forums to promote and coordinate events is also lightly researched (Gibson, 1999). Further knowledge in this area can assist tourism and event marketers in identifying the needs and ambitions of audiences and thus assist in better attracting and satisfying these markets.

To date, studies of tourism on the Internet have focussed on dedicated travel websites for organisations including backpackers (Adkins & Grant, 2007), on-line travel sites (Chen, 2006), travel guides (Stockdale & Borovicka, 2006), travel agencies and travel blogs. This trend assumes tourism planning and itinerary development occurs within dedicated travel sites. The purpose of this paper, however, is to demonstrate how special interest travellers often discuss and plan travel outside these purpose built contexts, in their own virtual communities, and to examine how this may occur. As a precursor, it is important to establish what a virtual community is, and how it may foster (or inhibit) travel behaviour.

**Virtual Communities**

Whilst some scholars readily accept the transfer of traditional community structures to virtual communities, others find it more troublesome to assume that communities have the same qualities in cyberspace as they do in the physical world (Walmsley, 2000).

In understanding Internet communities, Parks and Floyd (1996, p80) suggest ‘that only the illusion of community can be created in cyberspace’. Similarly, Fernback (1998, p.205) notes that much of what appears to be community on the Internet needs further investigation, stemming from the opinion that communities themselves are often difficult to define. Fernback suggests the work of Williams (1983) is useful in defining the essence of community as commonality of either interests or physical location. Hence, communities can exist beyond geographical boundaries, and into
cyberspace through commonality in interests.

Subsequent research suggests communities do exist in a multitude of forms and purposes and that the rules and norms of ‘cyber community are generated by the participants’ appropriation of accepted structures of communication as well as the rules of interaction within those structures’ (Baym, 1995 p.211). While it is prudent to consider possible differences in community between virtual and real worlds (Walmsley, 2000), research has pushed forward to examine many types of virtual communities. For example, the relationships of local communities to virtual communities have been comprehensively researched (Hampton & Wellman, 2001; Harrison & Stephen, 1999), as have educational online communities (Rosen, Woelfel, Krikorian & Barnett, 2003). Baym (1995) cites the thousands of Usenet groups which stimulate computer mediated communication (CMC) within their own on-line communities.

**Fan-based virtual communities**

Fan-based virtual communities can be initiated both by organisations and by individual fans themselves. This is evident in studies on Japanese movie stars (Darling-Wolf, 2004), Star Wars and Lord of the Rings (Murray, 2004), the Last of the Mohicans (Williams, 2007), TV fans (Costello & Moore, 2007) and cyber-punk (Paccagnella, 1998). As highlighted by Murray (2004) fans are unpredictable and may visit many different web-sites based on the same theme. They may however, only contribute to one. It is important to note then, that a virtual community may traverse across many web-sites, although to what extent one web-site is considered home is a further interesting question. Williams (2007) provides important evidence to suggest that real world and virtual fan communities are mutually reinforcing.

‘The community, originally purely a virtual phenomenon, has thus acquired a significant "real-world" dimension-one whose history is recorded, and its future furthered, on the Internet. The physical and the virtual existences of the Mohicans fandom are thus mutually reinforcing.’ (Williams, 2007 p533).

As summarised in Table 1 fan based web-sites can be created for and by the fans. These tend to be less commercial in their outlook than those controlled by media organisations, the latter known as official web-sites. The greater resources of official web-sites allows them to provide breaking news, and high-end content such
as fantasy games, video feeds, game-day audio and copy-righted materials such as trailers. While member initiated sites do not provide these expensive materials, they can provide a greater sense of community interaction and social support as seen in the example by Darling-Wolf (2004).

There is evidence to show that very different outcomes can be expected between these two types of virtual fan communities (Murray, 2004). The relevance of fans is not lost on the media industry that see them not as geeks, but as savvy targeted segments who can contribute to the promotion of the product (Murray, 2004; Costello & Moore, 2007). As described by Murray (2004), the developers of LOTR films (New Line Productions Inc.) created a ‘strategy of collaboration with what they termed Rabid Tolkein Fanatics (RTF) to embrace their willingness to share information and assist in publicising new films and merchandise. ‘New Line’s conception of Tolkein fans clearly envisaged their commercial utility not only as market influencing early adapters but, more specifically, as a self-constituting and precisely targetable niche market’ (Murray, 2004, p20). It is suggested in this paper that improved understanding of fan-based networks could also make these strategies applicable to tourism and event marketers.

Research to date suggests that the Internet provides varying environments for fans to exchange computer mediated communication. As Li (2004) summarises virtual communities can be classified as asynchronous (Listserv, bulletin boards, newsgroups) or synchronous (MUD, chat rooms) based upon on time delays. On-line forums have both synchronous and asynchronous functions in terms of accessing people and information and as such, are well suited to fan communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type by purpose</th>
<th>Fan community</th>
<th>Member initiated</th>
<th>Organisation initiated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takuya</td>
<td><a href="http://asianfanatics.net/forum/">http://asianfanatics.net/forum/</a></td>
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Studies of the structure and relations of a virtual-community suggest that the open-source community may be better thought of as an online social network of people interacting with each other continually (Rheingold, 2000; Wellman, 1997) with varying degree of social interaction and feelings of belongingness. This perspective creates an opportunity to utilise the well-respected methods of social network analysis to provide further insight and explanation of the structures and relations of on-line social networks. This perspective is described further below.

A community of fans and fanatics

The findings from the study by Darling Wolf (2004) reflect real-world research about fan groups and their collective sharing of feelings, joys and pain often considered part of fan sub-culture (Lewis, 1992). The Internet has allowed even further extension of these collective fan communities beyond countries and continents. The sprinkling of fan-based Internet studies highlights the utility of the Internet in developing fan behaviours and allowing fans to express themselves in creative ways. In separate studies, Scodari and Felder (2000) and Wakefield (2001) examined fans of the X-Files finding that the websites provided, ‘a safe haven, opposed to the dreariness of life’ (Wakefield, 2001 p2). Similarly, Costello & Moore (2007, p.134) found that TV fans use on-line newsgroups and fan sites both as a place where they can find ‘kindred souls with whom to share information and enthusiasm’, as well as a practical substitute for fan magazines, information and gossip. Fans themselves should not be seen as homogenous, and are often looking for different experiences from the Internet. As reported by Costello and Moore (2007) some fans were content to use the Internet as a tool for acquiring information while others enjoyed socialisation and interpersonal communication. Within the mix of active and passive fans found by Costello and Moore (2007) researchers discovered fans who use these sites obsessively, showing a fanatical interest in their fandom. For devoted fans, those who consider themselves fanatics, collective sharing of feelings is perhaps just one reason for their use of fan forums. Research in the real world suggests that leisure fanatics use social settings such as events and conventions to share a passion for a hobby or interest and reinforce each others identity, ideas and fanatical behaviours (Mackellar, 2006).

Method

Selecting an appropriate method to study virtual communities is not a
straightforward process. Just as in the real world, there are multiple viewpoints on what is ethically and methodologically sound in on-line social studies (Hine, 2000; Seymour, 2001; Sharf, 1999). However as Hine (2000) argues, research can be guided by traditional methods, which are well suited to the Internet, requiring the established processes of developing research questions and developing methods that are appropriate to answer those questions.

For research in the interpretive paradigm, the Internet offers unprecedented opportunities to access participants and to observe social relations, however, researchers need to be equally aware of individuals’ rights to privacy and informed consent (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Subsequently, the methods chosen were designed to be unobtrusive to the flow of member discussions and to the identity of members themselves.

**Thematic Analysis**

Previous studies of on-line leisure groups have chosen ethnographic approaches (Rutter & Smith, 2000) requiring extended communications and high levels of researcher involvement in the group. However, in this case, the researcher’s presence in a fanatic’s forum would have been obtrusive to the general flow of fanatical LOTR discussion and would not be ‘acceptable’ by the rules and norms of the forum. Therefore a more appropriate interpretive approach was chosen following from Darling-Wolf’s study of a virtual fan community where ‘the author did not participate in the virtual community in any other form than as an informed observer, in order not to influence the flow of discussion’ (2004, p.510).

The website itself had provided useful data on the objectives of the website in developing a community, but what was also sought were the manifestations of these objectives in the web-site itself. How do people interact to form this virtual community? What are the functions of the website that assist in community feeling and development. Analysis of the website also followed the process of thematic analysis described above where pages of forum text were coded and interpreted for relevant themes. However in this stage, the three stage process in developing and using an inductively derived code were followed as described by Boyatzis (1998) included 1) selecting a sample and sub-samples, 2) discovering and developing themes that differentiate sub-samples and 3) applying the code to the full sample.

Criterion references were used to develop the coding of the text as described...
by Boyatzis (1998). In order to study the factors affecting the social relations in the website, the researcher identified sources of sub-samples from the unit of analysis (www.lotr.com) and extracted identifiable differences between the samples. These sub-samples (or criterion references) were sourced from the website using the existing systems created by the website administrators as follows. Each member acquires fanatic points over time – depending on their active participation in the community. These points are then shown adjacent to their community identity as per Figure 1. More active members can therefore be distinguished from less active members by both their fanatic points and number of posts to the discussions. From discussion with the council, high users were defined with fanatic scores of over 5000 (n=80), average users were below that number (n=91). In order to score over 5000, members needed to earn points through forum discussions and challenges which would typically take more than 2 years to achieve. Thus high users were also committed and devoted users, as discussed further in the results section.

An entry into the forum was considered a ‘unit of coding’. In all over 800 units of coding were analysed using a codebook which included labels, definitions, descriptions of inclusions and exclusions and examples as described in detail by Boyatzis (1998). The process of developing a codebook ensured reliability through consistency in coding, observation and labelling. Interpretation of the data has been predominantly descriptive, typical of a study of one organisation, and of an approach appropriate to the interpretive approach of the researcher (Boyatzis, 1998).

The process provided a situation as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1984) of the cyclical process inherent in qualitative research, where questions have led to data collection; which led back to the

**Figure 1 member identity panel**

![Figure 1 member identity panel]

user name fanatic points

kingdom symbol and rank
development of more questions. The results of the process are presented below.

**Results**

**Network structure**

The structure and activities of the network are managed by a bureaucratic style government called Valinor. The structure is modelled on the governing structure in J. R Tolkein’s books where the activities and policies are decided by a core of council, administrators and kingdom rulers (represented by the shaded area in Figure 2). The decisions are grounded in a democratic process that allows forum members high levels of input and eventual progression to positions within Valinor. According to the website, ‘Being part of Valinor is not only a great privilege, but also a lot of responsibility, and only the most dedicated members get to enter Valinor.’

The network is formally organised with a strategic plan, site vision and policies. Its structure reflects a ‘brokered network’ with a hub and spoke network structure as described by Heracleous (2003) and Heracleous and Murray (2001).

A particularly relevant feature of the brokered network is the importance of the strategic centre (represented in Figure 2 by the shaded core) to act as a coordinator of the network - without which this network would most probably fall over completely.
In this network the core is very active in designing policies and activities that will keep the network functioning efficiently. In particular, the administrators are highly active, with rights to edit, delete and move posts and topics in all forums and houses.

There are several ways that the creators have purposefully designed a network structure to create a sense of community, as well as community-like interactions. These can be analysed firstly by the structural sections of the site, and secondly by the rules and norms of network behaviour which allow like-minded fans to connect, develop and celebrate collective interests.

**Structural sections of the website**

Of first and foremost importance is the requirement for new members to select a kingdom to belong to. There are nine kingdoms to choose from, with two rulers of each kingdom. Each member can choose to live in these themed communities and play an active role in that community. As they progress, they can own a house, get married and become rulers of the kingdom. They display membership and rank in their community identity (see figure 1) used when contributing to other general discussion forums. The forum structure helped to connect like-minded fans into areas of interest. At the time of this study, the LOTR plaza contained 34 forums based on LOTR themes, (such as Middle Earth Locations and Middle Earth Languages) and real world categories (such as movies, art and fan fiction). It is common for members to contribute to more than one forum, both within their kingdom and in more general discussion forums.

These structural elements of the network are an important basis for interaction, however the network is also governed by quite extensive rules and norms of behaviour as described below.

**Rules and norms of network behaviour**

The structural sections of the website allow members to inhabit a space, which is purposefully designed to look and feel like a community, aptly named the plaza. However, there are other rules and norms of the network which contributed to the development of a virtual community. Many rules were written in the forum themselves, and forum moderators ensured that these were maintained. Rules regarding spam and plagiarism were frequently posted by administrators, as were rules about making inflammatory comments toward others. A comprehensive list of forum rules and frequently asked questions ensured that expectations of the administrators were easily understood.
The second important norm is that of inclusion, to all those with a passion for Tolkein and LOTR. Inclusion was found and fostered in the separate kingdoms, as well as in general discussion forums. For example, opportunities were frequently made available to members to take on a role in running a contest, contributing to newsletters or assisting in other administration duties, participating in art and fan fiction, or becoming a review buddy. Promotion to higher ranks in the community is given to those who participate more often and are seen as good community citizens. Examples of inclusion were also found as higher ranked users welcomed new comers and assisted them with getting to know the forum. As members take on roles such as mentor, contest coordinator or reviewer, they take on a responsibility to return to the site frequently to carry out their duties. The norms of inclusion allowed members to feel a sense of belonging and an urge to return to a place where they are needed. This then assists the network to maintain an active and exciting environment that members will return to. However, it also provides confessed fanatics with formal ways of demonstrating their commitment and devotion to the Plaza and to LOTR /Tolkein.

**Thematic analysis**

A number of distinct themes have resulted from the process of theme development described above (Boyatzis, 1998), which assist in interpreting the social relations of the LOTR plaza. Four central themes have been developed to generate meaning in this area; identity, connectivity, collaboration and centrality. These themes are described below.

**Identity**

The identity of members is a complex theme discussed here on two levels, personal and social identity. The personal identity of a member was chosen when registering, whereby members designed a pseudoname and signature (a short phrase or prose). Devoted members (high users) researched their names in Tolkein texts or Elvish, books and translation websites to ensure their name had meaning, as well as to display their scholarship in Tolkein.

The member also has an option of developing a profile, where real world information of age, name, occupation and location can be disclosed. Contact details via email and MSN can also be listed here. The identity created by the member was used throughout the forums in the plaza and masks the real identity of the user. It is therefore possible to be known only by
your member name, or be known as your member name and your real name. While anonymity contributes to the fantasy theme of the site, some discussions indicated that the personal identities created by high users in the plaza flowed out into the real world highlighting the importance of this identity (and this community) as an alternative to the real world. The results are consistent with the study of MUD by Bromberg (1996), suggesting identity play, allowed exploration of alternate or preferred identities. The identity as a LOTR fanatic plaza member could also be enhanced by achieving special rank and status— an option that was taken by high users. The personal and community identity of the member was clearly displayed in all forum discussions as shown in Figure 1. Decisions made about personal identity are also linked to the social identity of the member described below.

Social identity – this world we all love

The design of the website allowed members to develop a social identity through participation in forum activities. The first of these was to choose a kingdom to ‘belong’ to. Some guidance is given by the website designers, for example; *if you feel that a mortal life is for you but that you can’t cope with the rigid standards of the Numeroneans, the plains are waiting. If you have a great heart and a mighty call for horse-ridden battle be welcome to Edoras and enjoy the bliss of Theoden’s Halls.*

This process essentially aligns member’s personal identity with others who have similar interests, and similar self-identification. The social identities were often referred to in general forum discussions such as *you hobbits are always popping up.*

The member’s chosen identity was used for role play games, and activities in the Kingdoms, known as IC (in character). There are, however, several forums that are OOC (out of character) when details are revealed about real world personal issues and challenges. In an interesting twist, it appears the trust that is built up in playing IC games and activities is transferred to OOC discussions and support. In many cases, the high user members have been communicating for up to four years on different levels and relate to both IC and OOC identities.

Connectivity - Sending you warm vibes from across the great pond

The Plaza offers a virtual space for sharing experiences that would not be possible in the real world. A great deal of time was spent connecting with other fans,
making strong ties that were considered friendships, whilst also contributing to debates about the LOTR texts, movies or other activities detailed earlier. The words “my friend” appear often in the dialogues between members, or as shown in the following examples, where members connect on an opinion or direction of thought. For example;

Ahh Sally ... someone knows what i am referring to ...

Somehow we have same interests, because I love spending time in nature and comparing the beautiful locations with places in Middle Earth!

Other references are made to feelings of family or kinship, as seen in this expression from one member. ‘No worries Bundy, what are family for? (Even if they can’t figure out just how they are related!).

The discussions often incorporate a collective friendship – as if members have a predetermined connection just by being in this space. The reciprocity of feelings and reinforcement of ideas assisted in developing trust between members. Consistent with the findings of Ridings, Gefen, Arinze (2002), the data analysis identified situations where trust was increased through ongoing relationships in the virtual community and by the belief that others confide personal information. Collective phrases such as the ones quoted below are also common;

So, let us all go together and give Brenda a big group hug to let her know how much we care about her, and that we all hope for a swift return

In the example above, the member is referring to a sick colleague, showing that the connections went beyond the activities and identities of the plaza. Accordingly, the connections made in LOTR discussions often extended to issues in the real world (known as RL = real life). The plaza offers one specific forum for members to send out a cry for help or support, and it is met with empathy and kind words. The anonymity provided by the plaza is useful for members to find connectivity with others who will provide some advice and support for personal problems. The words friend appear more frequently here than in other areas of discussion. The example provided here demonstrates this point;

None of you actually know me in person so I'm going to be open about things...

Reply 1…know that we're always here for you...

Reply 2…*hugs* And just know you're not alone- a lot of else have felt like that before.
As per the suggestions of other virtual communities (Parks & Floyd, 1996), the connections made are important enough that high users feel it is a real community with genuine personal relationships. Comments made directly attested to this - *This is a wonderful online community.*

The development of an IC and OOC identity allowed members opportunities to connect in varying levels of anonymity. The ability to connect OOC in an environment that is strictly for like-minded fans has led to a greater feeling of trust and reciprocity. As recognised in studies of real world social networks, one of the important outcomes of trust in a social network, is collaboration (Powell, 1998).

**Collaboration**

The theme of collaboration describes numerous activities observed in various plaza forums primarily in the fora of fan art, poetry, books, movies and Elven languages. The prominence of collaboration in these areas should not be understated and provides unique outcomes of its own (Mackellar, forthcoming). However, the focus of this study is on collaboration related to travel, both to destinations of LOTR, as well as to conventions and other events, as discussed below.

**Travel to conventions**

During the time of the study, one of the main destinations for members of the plaza was sci-fi conventions. While there were some obvious personal motivations (discussed below), the prominent reason to attend, as discussed by members, was to publicise the plaza, and increase membership. As part of the public relations (PR) forums of the site, both high users and average users collaborated to discover where sci-fi conventions are held and how they can best represent the plaza. As noted in this post, it was a matter that they took seriously:

*I'm very anxious that we actually have a continuing PR presence from now on out, not just a 'tap' that turns on and off from time to time, and one way will be to make ourselves known on the Convention/Meeting circuit, which is a job that will demand many hands.*

A typical post showing the collaborative effort needed stated, 'Indianapolis Convention- go spread the word. Ask Betty and Moira how best to optimise attendance at conventions- they're the experts’:

Throughout the time of data collection, global membership allowed them to target conventions in USA, Australia, Sth Africa, Europe, Canada and
the UK. Over 30 sci-fi conventions were listed as targets for travel.

Attending events for personal enjoyment was also found to involve a certain level of collaboration, and was used as an opportunity to meet members face to face. For example, a festival was promoted in one thread as follows,

The [place] Renaissance Festival is in full swing, and this weekend (Aug 25-26) is the Highland Fling. It looks to be lots of fun, so if any of you are in the area come on over and say hello

The thread received 45 responses, with some arranging to meet other members there for the first face-to-face connection. Collaboration to travel and meet at small festivals occurred several times during the study, but rarely involved extended travel planning. More intensive travel planning occurred for travel to RingCon, the official LOTR event, held annually in Europe. The thread began with a call to find out if anybody else will be going to Ring*Con UK?. Thirty responses were received the following day, with varied advice from high users on hotel prices and choices, to questions from newbies about what is on and how much it costs. An example of the advice provided, and the value of that advice is provided below.

Well, apparently Bath Row is full of hotels, and this one is just one of the pricier ones, and that somebody else has already booked Travellodge for £15 a night, so it can’t be that far away - forums are amazing things. *g*

Members collaborated by researching cheaper hotels, providing advice on airline discounts and travel to the event from the airport. There were extended discussions about the price and value of the tickets, for example,

And Bob - with the £75 ticket, 2 free autographs (from randomly selected guests) are included, so it's not a bad deal all in all. That said, I'm hoping to punish my credit card and go for the Silver deal. We'll see though

The forum showed how members could influence others in their choices of tickets, hotels and transport options and provide stories of previous events they had been to where they had met with other plaza members.

Last time a con came round in England, we turned it into a rather amusing Plaza meet (complete with Hostel of Doom - though this time I guess I'll be smuggling folk into my room. *g*), as well as attending guest talks and all that jazz.

While members collaborated on travel to events, they also used other members as sources of information, and
trusted advisors in their travel planning. The results concur with the findings of Obst et al. (2002) who suggested that sci-fi fans felt a strong psychological sense of community, which is enhanced by attending sci-fi conventions. The data suggests that going to the event will enhance their sense of community, by differing providing opportunities for social interaction.

**Travel for vacation**

The willingness for fans to travel to LOTR filming locations in New Zealand, is well documented (Singh & Best, 2004; Tzanelli, 2004; Jones & Smith, 2005) and has been leveraged by the NZ tourism (Carl, Kindon & Smith, 2007). However, this study shows how the trust formed in friendships in the LOTR plaza assists in informing travel decisions, as well as promoting the destination. Many comments were found relating to the desire to go to New Zealand, to see the locations depicted in the films. For example,

> How could one not want to visit the sites of the movie scenes in New Zealand. Even though I have never been to NZ, my fondest wish would be to visit the Edoras site. It was so majestic and windswept, surrounded by snowcapped mountains. So gorgeous.

While these comments may not suggest the direct intention to travel, other discussions reflected more serious intentions to do so. Serious travel advice was sought by high users, suggesting that stronger ties, built over time, provided a better platform for trust in making travel decisions. Advice was not only centred on the sites of filming in New Zealand, but also to other destinations where high user member advice could be sought, as seen in the following example.

> Nearly summer (well, nearly nearly) so time to plot on vacation. England is my suposed destination for this year, and I intend on touring, but which area to pick? I like nature, but none too much. Culture, way too much, and other things that might be interesting/fun. Any ideas which area best to pick?

This request was met with 43 replies suggesting a wide variety of destinations. For example;

> GO TO LONDON! OKay it may be cliche to go to the capital but honestly there are a million things to see. If you like going shopping go to Oxford Street (blehg, shopping) If you like sightseeing go to the houses of parliament. Get lost on the underground! Lots of huge wonderful parks.

A further example demonstrates the utmost trust that a member places in the members of this forum.

> ...I'm a 23 year old caucasian female, with no solo travel experience and have
been reading horror stories on the Internet for the past hour. Friends who’ve both solo travelled and gone on organised tours say go alone. My friends who’ve never travelled say under no circumstances go alone. Destination-wise, I’m not talking about Europe or North America. Been there, done that. Would very much like to go to either Asia or South America. Money-wise, I have none, but I have to means to get some (my mum will give me an interest free loan). I’m willing to volunteer most certainly - this might be a good option, however, I’ve very little time for for-profit volunteer organisations such as eye-to-eye. Anyone have any advice? Thoughts? It can be dangerous stepping out on that road, you know ...

The study also found examples where advice was sort, not just for a short vacation, but for longer working holidays and as a place of immigration. The findings of this study concur with those of Boase, Horrigan, Wellman and Rainie (2006) who suggested social networks provide pathways to help when people face big decisions. The following example shows how occurs.

Of late I have been seriously considering applying for a working holiday visa to New Zealand. New Zealand appeals to me for many reasons, and I am almost at the point of sorting through the logistics of the trip.

With this in mind I thought I’d seek out the advice of any plazaites who hale from The Land of the Long White Cloud. Which of the two main islands is your favourite, and why? Where is most scenic? In your opinion, what are the respective benefits of city life and rural life, and where would be best for a newly arrived foreigner? Broadly speaking, how would you assess the cost of living?

The trust that is found through long term plaza membership, IC and OOC discussions, and various plaza activities, has allowed members to feel they can call on other members for advice, and in particular from those who have first hand knowledge of the destination. Members who have that knowledge reciprocate by providing detailed information on the destination and its qualities.

Virtual festivals

An unexpected result of the study was the discovery of virtual festivals. Many of the kingdoms in the plaza attempted to hold their own virtual festivals, with one member inviting all others to attend. For example, one kingdom held the Summer Festival Feast and Dance. Members were required to stay in character (IC) and write (post) a short contribution to tell others what they were doing and with whom. The example below
shows the entry of one member to the festival,

_Dromios came down towards the Feast area quite quickly, skipping down the road. It was going to be a good day, he could tell, hence the skipping. A broad grin appeared upon his face, for he was always well-liked by people at parties. Of course, he had only ever been to one, and that amongst his closest friends, but the man didn't let that affect his mood. Seeing the two little girls approaching, he did two quick little spins and ended it in a bow. Giggling, Amber and Katrina welcomed him and informed him that he would be chosen randomly for the dance. Dromios' face fell slightly, for he wasn't the best of dancers; in fact, many people said he had two right feet. The man shrugged it off, deciding to worry about that when the dancing actually started. Glancing at Golds and Shiva, he could easily see that they were busy, so he continued looking around and saw someone (Calena) down by the Babbling Stream, so he decided to go and pester her for a few moments._

Members were free to create parts of the festival for others to collaborate within. Activities undertaken at the event included eating, dancing and importantly, meeting with friends and making new acquaintances. The text illustrated the importance placed on the social aspects of the event, rather than the activities. The following post shows the level of detail these social descriptions

_Now she was going to find Calena, which might be a difficult task seeing as she didn't really know what she looked like. Frowning, she looked around. There seemed to be more people by a nice looking, babbling stream. That seemed like the best place to start. Maybe she would get lucky. Biting her lip, she walked over and saw a few people that she knew, and several she did not. At least she could rule out the people that she knew! As she stood over by the stream, looking about at the different places, she heard someone say Calena's name. Ha! She did get lucky._

The majority of posts began with who they were meeting and the responses they were receiving from those people. There were also contributions to the venue and atmosphere of the event. As with the findings of Reid (1995), the virtual festival allowed members to explore their own creativity, whilst connecting with other members, both known and unknown. The requirement to stay in character allowed them to play with their own character (and identity) in a safe environment. Other IC events were also created for the same purposes of social interaction and fun, including contests, ceremonies, rituals and battles and wars.
The data from the plaza suggests that network collaboration has led to several different outcomes which have included 1) creative production of art, poetry, interpretations of novels, 2) travel to destinations and conventions and 3) development of virtual festivals. The results highlight the great respect, trust and reciprocity that exist between forum members, which are partly due to the structure, rules and norms of the network, and partly to the devotion of the fans themselves in a fanatic’s forum. The collaboration between members of this network is typical of both the purpose and outcomes of many real world social and business networks (Nohria & Eccles, 1992).

**Centrality to their lives**

The constant activity on the website and the responsibilities that members take on, make the LOTR plaza a central activity in the lives of LOTR fanatics. This was observed in a number of areas in the website. Each kingdom made announcements that allowed members to announce their absence from the plaza. More fanatical members announce their departure for two days, or one weekend, and assure other members they will be back to take up their duties. Statistics from the site show that high users posted a thread to the site on average 10 times a day, and their comments show they access the site from whatever computer they can get to, from their place of work, airports and Internet cafés. Even at the point of death their minds revert to their passion for LOTR and for the social world of the plaza.

*I know what that feeling is like when your life flashes before your eyes and your first thought is ... Oh god No! not now! I have to post in the ... *insert thread here* [sic].

There is also evidence that the importance of the plaza overtakes the value of other responsibilities of member’s lives such as jobs and family. As the example below demonstrates, members discuss their dilemmas in participating in the plaza, against their RL roles.

*Willpower is just not working, and the plaza is trying it's hardest to interfere with my ability to get a job.*

The study has demonstrated that virtual communities offer new opportunities for fanatical fans to become involved in activities which foster their fanatical tendencies, providing opportunities to; express their devotion, demonstrate their involvement, seek new challenges and continue their commitment to making their fandom central to their lives.
Conclusion

This study set out to examine the social relations of participants of a virtual fan community, and examine how these relations influence travel decisions and behaviours. In so doing, the structure of the network has emerged as an important determinant in the social relations of participants. The rigid hierarchical structure provided a framework that allowed members to gain status as high ranking members of a kingdom. Within that structure, a network has formed that is typical of a brokered network, described by Heraclous (2003), featuring a strategic centre which establishes clear rules, structures and norms for members to follow. These rules have allowed members freedom to connect and share their passions for Tolkein in an accepting and supporting environment that is protected from spammers, and other negative influences.

Through the process of thematic analysis, four prominent themes were developed to generate meaning about the social relations of the network. The themes that were derived from the data included identity, connectivity, collaboration, and centrality.

The results found here suggest that this forum shares the characteristics of the social functions found in MUDs by Bromberg (1996) fostering strong connections between isolated individuals, and providing opportunities for identity play. Consistent also with the findings of Reid (1995), the rules that allowed development of a character-based identity also provided a level of anonymity, and allowed opportunities to play with an identity that was closely linked with their passion for LOTR. This identity was further extended to a social identity as a member of a kingdom. Members showed an ability to switch between in-character and out-of-character identities, which assisted in strengthening their connectivity with other members, and thereby strengthening the durability of the overall network. Rules that allowed out of character discussions provided the opportunity to strengthen social ties further, as members learn more about their plaza friends. The result was an open place where members felt respected and appreciated with the opportunity to connect with like-minded fans around the world. The social ties brought about many positive feelings of pleasure and relaxation and provide for hedonic needs, consistent with those suggested by Wang and Fesenmeir (2004) and Darling Wolf (2004). Importantly, in this case, recurrent connectivity, (sometimes up to 10 times a
day) has led to trust between members, which allowed them to seek advice on important matters and to work together collaboratively. Collaboration proved to be an important aspect of the social relations of the network, which is, not unlike that which is documented in the real world networks (Powell, 1998; Haythornthwaite, 2005). Collaboration led to several different outcomes which have included 1) creative production of art, poetry, interpretations of novels, 2) travel to destinations and conventions and 3) development of virtual festivals.

In relation to travel, the findings in this study are consistent with those of fan-based tourists in the real world who seek experiences that relate to their passion for a particular film, often in non-standard destinations (Tooke & Baker, 1996). The forum showed how members could influence others in their choices of destinations, tickets, hotels and transport options. This occurred with smaller festivals, and prominently with travel to RingCon. Importantly, this study has showed that special interest travellers such as fans can be found in their own virtual communities, where they make use of their own pool of knowledge about a destination and an event, drawing on their own experiences and research.

The discovery of the virtual festivals prompted more questions than answers. The creation of a virtual festival involved attempts to create and maintain social relations on a wider scale than in forum discussions. The virtual event allowed for further identity play, creative collaboration and development of a social identity that is connected with others. It is also possible that the event allows members to practice social skills in a very safe social environment. It was unclear, however, whether the opportunities for social interaction were being taken on-line, in place of real events, or in addition to them. It was evident that the participants had attended real events, as their knowledge of the venue and activities seemed to replicate real events, and yet some members were clearly attending real events and advising others to do the same. As such, the study concurs with the suggestion by Williams (2007) that real world and virtual fan communities are mutually reinforcing, and of Parks and Floyd (1996) that members can successfully integrate relations that began online to include offline communications. The phenomena offers interesting potential for event managers who could create their own virtual festivals, and offers further opportunities for research.
In recognising the limitations of this study, the context cannot be ignored. While being limited as a single site study, the results have been consistent with other fan-based research by Williams (2007) highlighting the use of the Internet as a place for fans to meet and plan travel. The fanatical theme of the website suggests that the members of the site are devoted to Tolkein and are likely to be looking for opportunities to partake in any activity that is LOTR related. As such they may be highly active users looking for ways to make LOTR more central to their lives. For fanatics that want utmost centrality the web provides intermediate activities between face-to-face events, and other real life activities. The results pointed to the conclusion that the virtual community supported the fanatical tendencies of the members, as much as the fanatical tendencies of the members supported the community.

The use of a qualitative approach to this study has allowed exploration of a little understood phenomenon. The approach proved especially useful in documenting the existence of virtual festivals in fandom forums, however opportunities now exist for further research in this area, which may quantify the relationships between fandom, Internet usage and travel planning.

Members of the LOTR plaza used the forums to create and play with a new identity, connect, collaborate, and find activities that can be central to their lives. The implications of these findings are significant for both tourism and event managers and marketers. Specifically, the knowledge that fans use the site for these purposes, offers opportunities to promote travel and convention products. Similarly, as suggested by Murray (2004) there are opportunities to create strategic partnerships with these existing networks. These partnerships can utilise fan knowledge, enthusiasm and devotion. These opportunities rely on the knowledge that the source of fan travel is often within virtual communities, from their own desires to travel to film destinations, sci-fi events and festivals. The study has shown how the network members are looking for opportunities to advertise and promote their network as part of their membership drive. It is important, however that companies do not try to infiltrate – true fans are valued; intruders, spammers and impostors are not welcome.

The LOTR forum is a dedicated fan-based website whose primary activities occur in forums which discuss, interpret and celebrate the LOTR books and films. This paper has shown how the strength of social ties formed in the fora has led to
collaboration toward other goals. Specifically, that the trust and on-going connectivity of other members is used to research and request travel advice and gather support for attending events such as sci-fi conventions. Opportunities exist, for tourism and event managers, to take strategic advantage of these types of virtual fan-based communities.

Note: Names have been changed to protect the privacy of members
biographical note

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Participants in Special Interest Events

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6.5 Reflections from the Study

This paper contributed to gathering deeper insights into the social leisure world of serious participants, and their use of the Internet as a place to connect with like-minded fans. The study continued to widen the context of serious participation, to fans and fanatics of Lord of the Rings (LOTR), finding many characteristics and behaviours consistent with those of previous studies in Chapters 2 to 5. The focus of this paper was on exploring the social networks of serious participants, and in relation to the development of the SerPa model, the study primarily explored the social characteristics of serious participants. In this respect, the paper has reinforced the social characteristics proposed in the previous studies, and yet many of the psychological characteristics and recreational and touristic behaviours were also observed and explored. Those elements that were most prominent in this study are highlighted as underlined in Figure 17, and discussed below.

Figure 17: SerPa model (4) showing additions from Paper 5

Source: Author
To a greater extent than previous studies, participants in the LOTR plaza used the Internet forum as a context to facilitate their leisure interests. The forum was designed as a place for sharing ideas and communicating about LOTR. The forum facilitated ongoing interest in LOTR by creating activities, contests and discussions which focus on the LOTR films and books. In this way, the study demonstrated how serious participants (fans and fanatics) join groups that sustain their beliefs, and create an alternative community, referred to by one participant as ‘This world we all love’. The security of the forum, and of being connected to like-minded fans, provided an established social identity as a valued member of the LOTR plaza. The plaza offered opportunities for public reward through fan fiction forums and competitions. Participants indicated they had attended events, such as Sci-fi and renaissance festivals, which met their interests.

While the study focussed on the social characteristics, it is increasingly apparent that the social characteristics of participants have developed as a result of many of the psychological characteristics proposed in the SerPa model. Characteristics, such as enthusiasm and commitment to a leisure interest, initiate fans’ interest in joining the LOTR plaza. As with previous studies, it is also apparent that both the psychological and social characteristics reinforce each other, fuelling enthusiasm and continued involvement in the leisure interest.

In reflection, some behaviour in the on-line forum was somewhat disturbing. Firstly, there was reliance on other members to inform their decision making, and on people whom they have never met face-to-face to guide them on decisions such as choosing jobs, abandoning studies and other personal issues.

Secondly, there was an unreserved feeling of community, and ‘feeling of we’. The amount of time spent in ‘the plaza’ and on its activities, to engage in the community, was also staggering.

Thirdly, collaboration of fanatical minds fuelled enthusiasm for all things Tolkein and led to intensive creation of fan art, and relentless interpretations of books, movies and languages. They provide references to other source materials that may help members gain greater insight into the writings of Tolkein. Again,
there is strong reinforcement for those who show their own insights into the works.

One member discussed his great project to ‘to make a body of more or less connected analysis on the subject of Tom Bombadil’. Others make mention of the effort they expend to ‘challenge each other with brain-benders of our own creation’. These characteristic behaviours of fans are also noted in other fan-based studies as aspects of scholarship and authority (Fiske, 1987; Jenson, 1992; Williams, 2007), where credibility is based on having extensive authority on the subject of their texts. It is unclear in this study if the members desire a level of credibility, or more simply mental stimulus and opportunity to indulge and divulge their passion.

6.6 Conclusion

The study contributed further to addressing RO4, to provide in-depth analysis of a social network utilised by serious participants, who in this case were self-confessed LOTR fanatics. The study built upon the basic social characteristics of a serious participant identified in the preceding chapters, to examine the intricacies of the social leisure world. The examination of the tight-knit networks of LOTR fans highlighted the importance of on-line forums as a primary source of communication. The on-line community provides an environment for like-minded fans to connect and share their passion and interest for LOTR. In this way, the on-line forum has been shown to provide similar functions to the context of an event, providing a supportive context for participants to connect with others and develop interests. This new knowledge of leisure behaviour can assist event and tourism managers to identify appropriate marketing strategies, which utilise existing special interest networks to distribute event information. Special interest Internet forums, such as the LOTR plaza, provide added opportunities for event managers to intercept and attract event audiences.
Chapter Seven

Discussion of Results
7.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis has been to explore the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants at special interest events. This discussion chapter summarises the results related to the research objectives (7.2-7.5) and the development of a Model of Serious Participation at Events (SerPa) in Section 7.6.1. As such, this chapter describes the development of each part of the model, the psycho/social characteristics and resultant consumer, travel and leisure behaviours. The discussion explains the origin of the model’s theoretical characteristics and the exploration of those characteristics over time.

As illustrated in the research cycle, each individual paper has addressed one or more of the research objectives described in Chapter 1, with each paper building the knowledge of serious participants and their participation at events. This chapter connects these findings and discusses the holistic meaning of the study and its relationship to previous research and theory.

Figure 18: Current stage of the research cycle

![Research Cycle Diagram]

Source: Author
Each of the four research objectives is now examined separately to consider the cumulative contribution from each study towards a holistic perspective of serious participants at events.

7.2 Discussion of results relating to RO1

To explain and model the diversity of events in a regional destination - according to the specialised interest of participants.

The diversity of events in Australia has previously been explained using a typology of events, such as the one proposed by Getz (1997) (Section 2.4, p.54), which categorises events based on their purpose. While this is a useful classification system, an alternate model can better explain why people attend different events in one region (and also more generally).

The results in Chapters 2-6 suggest the efficacy of using a spectrum to model the diversity of events in a regional destination, as opposed to a category-based typology. The spectrum, based on the work by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997), suggests that diversity in events themselves can be explained, at least in part, by differences in audiences’ interests from general interest to mixed interest and specialised interest. Consequently, as events reflect the interests and activities of their participants, events themselves can be placed on a spectrum. These two key findings are described further below.

7.2.1 Diversity in audience interests

The survey results from the study in the Tweed Shire (Ch.2) provided an examination of nine event audiences in one region. Using the same survey instrument at each event, the study produced profiles of the audiences, revealing a range of differing audience characteristics. Audiences at general interest events predominantly came from the local community, looking for a local social experience, and general entertainment. The results confer with studies of audiences at community based events, which suggest that audiences are often more interested in the social opportunities with family and friends and escape than any specific item in the program (Uysal, Gahan & Martin, 1993; Formica & Uysal, 1996; Van Zyl & Botha, 2004). The study also found events
acted as an umbrella for many diverse community groups and activities, such as cuisine, arts, youth, dance, heritage, environment and other disparate activities.

Audiences at mixed interest events demonstrated that this event was part of life’s mixed interests. The profile of the audience suggested a diversity of demographic and psychographic profiles. Audiences had attended a variety of different events in the past, and had mixed reasons to attend the event. This trend was often dictated by the theme of the event itself - the Kingscliff Art, Food and All That Jazz Festival provided three types of attractions for visitors. The program at the event provides a mix of activities.

Audiences at special interest events were shown to be attracted to the event by a distinct purpose related to their recreational interest. While there are scant studies in this area, researchers (Zeppel, 1992; Kim, Scott, Thigpen & Kim, 1998; Prentice & Andersen, 2003) had previously suggested that SI audiences attended SI events to satisfy certain needs for pursuing a hobby/recreation, as well as developing a social leisure world and adding to a central life interest. Similarly, in a study of a remote fishing event, Raybould (1998) found that development of the social leisure world and opportunities to extend social benefits were important aspects to participating in the SI event. The results of the study of events in the Tweed Shire strongly supported these studies, demonstrating the propensity of special interest audiences to attend specialist recreational events such as the Speed on Tweed, Wintersun and Wollumbin Festivals. Consequently, as suggested by SIT researchers (Hall and Weiler, 1992, Douglas et al., 2001; Trauer, 2006), SI events should follow the same basic principles as SI tourism in catering to individual needs and recreational pursuits.

As shown in Table 9, the pursuit of specialised recreational activities at events has important ramifications for the types of audiences expected at an event. This has led to a key finding of this thesis; general interest events can expect low tourist numbers, but higher interest and support from the community. Mixed interest events may attract some specialists depending upon the types of the activities on offer. Specialist events can expect high tourist numbers from special interest groups who are looking for specific activities and experiences.
Table 9: Audience characteristics at different events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>General interest event</th>
<th>Mixed interest event</th>
<th>Specialist event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourist numbers</td>
<td>Low tourist numbers.</td>
<td>Some tourists for special reasons.</td>
<td>High tourist numbers from across the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Travel</td>
<td>Local community groups.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Special interest group travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience interests</td>
<td>Linked to interest in the community and wide variety of interests.</td>
<td>Part of life's mixed interests.</td>
<td>Specific recreational interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>People spend some money on food and beverage and local markets.</td>
<td></td>
<td>People spend more on items unavailable elsewhere. Rare items. Personal &amp; social identity items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience event attendance</td>
<td>Attend other community events.</td>
<td>Attend a range of special and general events.</td>
<td>Travel to many other events on same theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience seeking</td>
<td>Looking for relaxed, fun, social experience.</td>
<td>Looking for social and new experiences.</td>
<td>Seeking experiences and items to add to their leisure career.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results suggest participants may progress along a spectrum of interest, just as they progress along leisure careers (Stebbins, 2001; Scott and Shafer, 2001). As per the examples at Wintersun (Chapter 4), participants may attend a mixed interest event and take a new interest in restoring cars, then graduate that interest over time, until they too have joined an enthusiast event circuit, seeking specialised experiences from niche events. As with other leisure research (Stebbins, 2001), progression may not be linear, but may be in stages, sometimes stalling for periods of time and then taking off again. Importantly, the results here suggest that leisure career progression has a direct effect on attendance at events, in terms of the events that participants choose to go to, who they attend with, and the frequency of attendance.
As explained above, the spectrum-based approach has explained new aspects of audience behaviours such as:

- Why people will travel from across the country to attend special interest festivals,
- Why people travel in special interest groups,
- What people expect from an event,
- How the events are linked to other parts of people’s lives,
- Why people spend more money at some events than others,
- What people spend money on,
- Which other events they will travel to.

Knowledge of these audience behaviours has a direct relationship on our conceptualisation of the events themselves, and can inform the development of marketing and management strategies in tourism and events, as discussed in Section 8.3.

### 7.2.2 The diversity of events in a regional destination

The findings discussed previously, suggest that the diversity of audience interest has a relationship to the diversity of events found in a regional destination. Put simply, specialist audiences attend special interest events, while generalist audiences attend local community-based events.

From this key finding, other results as related to RO1 can be summarised to explain the diversity of events in a destination. Firstly, the diversity of events can be plotted on a spectrum from general interest to middle interest to special interest, whereby the use of a spectrum allows the visualisation of a continuum of interest, and adapts SIT theory to event studies. In the case of the Tweed Shire, this allowed event stakeholders to visualise the Shire’s events on a spectrum of events as shown in Figure 19 and, as highlighted in the implications of the study (8.4), fostered an understanding of the differing needs of audiences at these events.
Other results as related to RO1 can be summarised to explain the diversity of events in a destination as follows:

i. The atmosphere and activities of events reflect audiences’ levels of interest - passionate car racers create an event full of excitement and noise, which is focused on the cars and drivers. General interest events reflect the many more disparate interests of broader community groups.

ii. Events cater for the diversity of audiences by offering different types of activities, themes and programs. While some events offer a broad mix of entertainment, food, family activities and music, others offer a narrow program of racing and/or contests.

iii. Leisure and recreational choices affect event choices – e.g. if you choose to be a fan of Elvis, this affects your decisions to attend events related to him.

iv. One region can successfully host a mix of GI and SI events, thus satisfying the recreational and cultural needs of locals and visitors.

The image and identity of the region are affected by the diversity of events in a region. In the case of the Tweed Valley, the development of car events may assist enthusiasts to see the destination as an ideal location for racing cars on
challenging mountain roads. In contrast, hosting community events promotes an image of an active and vibrant community (see also Derrett, 2004).

The diversity of events in a regional destination has flow on effects to the amount and quality of tourism and leisure in a destination. The implications of this are discussed in detail in Section 8.2, extending to changes in government planning and policy in tourism and leisure and events, niche marketing and event strategy development.

The results from the study in the Tweed Shire provided an exploration of the differences between events in a regional destination. Successive studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provided deeper insight into the dabblers, enthusiasts, experts and fanatics in other event contexts, and focussed attention on those who are at the upper end of the spectrum. The study initiated findings that special interest groups will attend events that are related to their recreational choices. This key finding had not previously been proposed to explain why we have the events we do, and why audiences are attracted to certain types of events.

As shown in Chapter 4, serious participants at Wintersun only attended other special interest events related to dancing or cars. They attended for specific reasons related to developing skills, social club identity and furthering knowledge. Similarly, the fans and fanatics at the Elvis Revival Festival only attended special, high quality Elvis events. This decision was part of their devotion to Elvis and a reflection of their larger lifestyle decisions. The constant activities involved in being an Elvis fan left little time to attend community events, and little interest in any other events that were not related to their recreational passions. Similarly, in Chapter 6 the Lord of the Rings fanatics developed worldwide connections, to seek Sci-fi conventions where they could promote their interest in LOTR. This key finding suggests that event planners must understand broader leisure and recreational choices in order to understand who comes to events and why.
7.3 Discussion of results relating to RO2

To explore and model the psychological and social characteristics of serious participants at special interest events.

Analysis of serious participants has been provided throughout the five studies which contribute to our understanding of their psychological and social characteristics and behaviours. In essence, we are asking: What is distinctive about the psycho/social make-up of these people and how will that affect their behaviour at events? The following discussion looks at these issues separately before discussing the way they affect each other.

7.3.1 Summary of psychological characteristics of serious participants

The psychological characteristics of event participants were first explored in (Paper One) (Ch.2) where the profiles of audiences attending different events in one region of Australia were identified. The study explored differences between specialist and generalist events, as related to the levels of interest in event activities. The study highlighted the existence of specialists or enthusiasts at some events, but not others, and sought to understand why this occurs. In so doing, it discovered the tendency for specialists to attend specialised events where they can pursue their passion, and not attend general interest events, such as community events, where their own interests were not represented. Although not a direct objective of the first study, the psychological characteristics of specialised audiences were initially identified as passion and enthusiasm for their pursuit, which resulted in regular and extended travel to other events on a circuit. They also exhibited a commitment to their clubs, their pursuit and other specialised events, as discussed in Section 2.5.
Participants in Special Interest Events

Chapter 7 Discussion of the Results

Table 10: Psychological characteristics in the SerPa model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced value of other needs</td>
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<td>Holder of the absolute</td>
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<td>Narcissistic thrill</td>
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Paper Two identified the psychological characteristics of serious participants (fans and fanatics) using a combination of literature found in the theoretical areas of fanaticism, leisure, recreation, tourism and consumer behaviour. Examining these fields of literature revealed shared characteristics that could be synthesised and modelled as a leisure fanatic. As previously stated in Section 3.2, the purpose of the model was to give order and insight to what is observed. The inductive drive of the study required a flexible framework where the theory and the data could inform one another, rather than create a definitive model for testing. The resultant SerPa model (i) pointed to the expected behaviours of serious participants resulting from their psycho/social characteristics. The eleven psychological characteristics posited in the model (Table 10), are now discussed individually.

**Intensity of enthusiasm**

Intensity was initially identified in Study 1, at special interest events in the Tweed Valley. Participants displayed passionate intensity for their pursuit, which was beyond what others would consider normal or acceptable. Their enthusiasm for cars, dancing and classical music was outwardly expressed and easily observed. Their intensive behaviour was seen in their enthusiasm to join in activities, dress in costume and take part in contests and displays as enthusiastic participants. Their intensity (and skills) led to less active spectators encouraging them with applause and congratulatory comments.

In Study 2, the observed intensity was defined as one of the two primary principles of fanaticism in ‘the degree of energy with which one lives, feels, thinks, works, and in general confronts the objective world’ (Rudin, 1969, p.19). Intensity is shown in the passion and goal driven behaviour of fanatics, described by Rudin as a ‘rage of will’ (1969, p.19). The study examined fans and
fanatics in a more general leisure context, as well as in relation to events and their participants.

The observational study of serious participants at Wintersun identified this intensity of enthusiasm for classic cars and rock’n’roll dancing. As noted in Section 2.5, the word ‘fanatical’ recurred in conversations with event staff, spectators and the participants themselves in reference to the enthusiasm and almost religious zeal shown for amateur car racing and other pursuits.

Similar results were found in certain segments of the audience at the Elvis Revival Festival. Elvis fans and fanatics showed intensity of enthusiasm from the moment they entered the train station, and throughout the weekend event. Elvis fanatics showed a frenzied excitement towards the Elvis Impersonators, wanting to be next to them and sing along during their performances.

In studying event participants in an online environment, enthusiasm was observed in a different context. While there were no visual behavioural clues to observe, the enthusiasm to be involved with all things Tolkien and Lord of the Rings was highly evident in art and discussion forums. The website forum allowed self-confessed fanatics to be involved and demonstrate their enthusiasm for Tolkien on a daily, if not hourly basis.

Value-attitude

The concept of value-attitude featured highly in the literature as a defining characteristic of fanaticism and a key indicator of serious participation in leisure and recreation. Serious participants clearly had a different set of values in life, which placed their specific recreational pursuit at a very high priority. These values affected their attitudes toward travel decisions, such travel to specific events, and to their decisions to buy clothing and merchandise related to their pursuit. As discussed below, this was clarified and explored in studies of event participants.

Value-attitude was a psychological characteristic identified in Study 1, at special interest events in the Tweed Valley. However, at that stage in the development of the thesis, it was observed as attitudes, which were clearly beyond what others would consider normal or acceptable. It was a
distinguishing feature of serious participants at more specialist events, not seen at generalist events.

In Study 2, value-attitude was identified as the second of Rudin’s (1969) defining qualities of fanaticism. Value-attitude describes the changed values of fanatics that allow them to place their pursuit central in their lives and reduce the value of other human needs, often including family and friends. However, changed values often result in changed social networks. As Haynal et al. (1987) suggested, participants find reassurance given by the fanatical ‘system’ in which they invest so much faith. Further, this reassurance ‘implies a conversion that changes his value system and gives him permission to unleash his instincts’ (1987, p.37). The use of this theory added meaning to the observations in Study 1, but provided an impetus for exploring this concept in greater depth at other special interest events.

The study of serious participants at the Wintersun Festival (Study 3) identified that the values of participants towards their pursuits of cars and dancing far surpassed those in regular society. The value of the car was not only central to serious participants’ lives, but also determined their personal and social identity (described in later sections).

Similarly, in Study 4, the importance of Elvis to Elvis fans and fanatics far surpassed that given in regular society. As highlighted by previous researchers, such as Doss (1999), fans share similar values and beliefs about Elvis that may have originated from the era/s when Elvis was popular. These similar values allow them to place their pursuit central in their lives, beyond their job, family or other obligations.

The results from the final study (Study 5) identified Internet forums as providing a place to indulge fanatical interests. The LOTR plaza offered serious participants more activities and responsibilities to indulge their interest in LOTR, and heighten the value of LOTR in their lives. The importance of participating in the LOTR website far surpassed that of other responsibilities in life, with participants apologising for needing to be away from the site, and finding ways to check back in at airports and other people’s houses.
Reduced value of other needs

The concept of value-attitude gives rise to a subsequent psychological characteristic of serious participants. The reduced value of other needs was a concept which was predominantly derived from literature on fanaticism (Rudin, 1969; Lehmann, 1987; Redden and Steiner, 2000), which highlighted the potential for fanatics to overly focus on some life goals at the expense of other life interests and even basic needs. As stated in Chapter 3, p.82, ‘The values attached to the fanatic’s pursuit take on a meaning that allows them to reduce the value of other seemingly normal human needs. These may be as extreme as eating, clothing and shelter as well as health and self preservation.’

As discussed below, these ideas were explored in studies of participants at events. While the results did not uncover extreme examples of the reduced value of other needs, discussions with car owners in Study 3 revealed that the countless hours involved in restoring old cars and participating in car events reduced the value of other needs, such as work or family. The financial commitment required to pursue these leisure goals also required participants to adjust (or reduce) the value they placed on other possessions or experiences.

Commitment

The concept of commitment featured highly in the literature as a key indicator of serious participation in leisure and recreation and as a defining characteristic of fanaticism (Lehmann, 1987; Taylor, 1991). Taylor (1991) found fanatics have an unyielding and excessive focus on their beliefs and goals, which persists despite all social norms and/or consequences. Commitment was also a key element in leisure studies of recreation specialisation studies (Bryan, 1977, 1979; Scott & Shafer, 2001), where commitment, skill and knowledge helped to define how high specialists differed from medium or low specialists in terms of their travel behaviour and motivation. The studies within this thesis reinforce these findings, showing that car, dance and Elvis enthusiasts and fanatics had been highly committed to their pursuit over an extended time. Furthermore, this commitment extended to clubs and networks, which they were committed to maintain. Elvis fans were committed to preserving the memory of Elvis, as car restorers were to preserving the authenticity and heritage of the cars they
restored. These findings support those of Scott and Shafer (2001), who suggested that commitment can be personalised commitment which ‘entails a strong affective attachment and inner conviction that the activity is worth doing for its own sake’ (p.329), as well as behavioural commitment – the costs and penalties that make withdrawal from the leisure activity problematic such as loss of identity or friends.

Commitment was also a central idea of the concept of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001; 2002), where participants sought to achieve milestones toward leisure goals requiring commitment to a leisure career. As stated by Kane and Zink (2004, p. 331), ‘commitment, belonging and the ethos of a defined culture are at the core of the concept of serious leisure’.

In particular, results from Study 1 highlighted participants’ commitment to attending numerous other club related events and provided new insight into the strength of some participants’ interest and the commitment to their chosen recreational pursuit. The results were surprising, in demonstrating how far, and how frequently, some audiences will travel to other similar events. For example, over 60% of the audience at Speed on Tweed reported attending other car events such as the Leyburn Sprints in SE Queensland and the Indy Grand Prix on the Gold Coast, with a small percentage also reporting attending car events in Melbourne and Canberra (over 1000 kilometres from home). Their commitment to their sport, their clubs and to their own leisure career required travel to numerous events every year.

In Study 2, commitment was defined as a core characteristic of leisure fanatics, and of participants at specialist events. In considering commitment as a psychological characteristic to add to the SerPa model, studies by Kane and Zink (2004), Gillespie, Leffler, & Lerner (2002), Lehmann (1987) and Kerstetter, Confer and Graefe (2001) provided the empirical findings of the theoretical concepts described above.

Further empirical evidence gathered at special interest events in Studies 3 and 4 highlighted the strength of commitment to clubs, brands and authenticity of the era. Commitment was observed as a core psychological characteristic in the results of Study 4. Serious participants at the Elvis event showed characteristics consistent with other studies of Elvis fans (Jenson, 1992; Doss,
1997), committed to ensuring the public maintained a lasting and fitting memory of Elvis Presley. Participants freely discussed their lifetime devotion, shrines in houses, and trips to Graceland as expressed devotion to Elvis.

Similarly, car and dance enthusiasts at the Wintersun festival expressed their commitment to their recreational clubs, to car brands and to maintaining enthusiasm for their chosen leisure pursuit. Thus in this study, commitment was shown to be required to keep clubs operating, to persevere, and to ‘stick with it through thick and thin’ (Stebbins, 2001).

Subsequently, commitment was identified as a key psychological characteristic of serious participants – and as a defining difference between generalist and specialist audiences.

**Holder of the absolute**

The concept of absolute, or truth, featured highly in the literature as a key characteristic of serious participation in fandom (Jenson, 1992), where fans held an unshakable belief in their idol being the omnipotent entertainer, or even human being. The concept also was featured in studies of fanaticism: ‘In his illusion of having found the absolute and superhuman, the fanatic believes himself to be in possession of the truth which confers upon him omniscience, omnipotence, and invulnerability’ (Haynal et al., 1987, p.37). As discussed below, this was also identified and explored in studies of event participants.

Study 3 highlighted the dogmatism that was expressed over dance styles and car brands. Rockabilly was clearly delineated from rock’n’roll, requiring different music, fashion and dance styles. Similarly, the superiority of car brands such as Ford and Dodge, were defiantly defended over Holden and Mustang.

The phrase ‘Elvis is King’ clearly summed up fan’s and fanatic’s opinion of Elvis, not only as the absolute in entertainment, but as a role model for society. There was no other music played at the event, no other costumes and no other performers. Participants believed Elvis was the absolute.

Similarly on the LOTR plaza, there was scant mention of any other fantasy novels. LOTR is believed to be the finest of all fantasy novels, dominating discussions and activities.
Events seemed to compound these feelings, as they reinforced the omnipotence of the featured artists, as well as the behaviours and interests of participants. Participants would leave the events with a sense of confirming their own beliefs about the importance of their leisure pursuit.

*Narcissistic thrill*

Related to the concept of finding an absolute is the feeling of narcissistic thrill, to believe that participation in a pursuit is a significant and important part of society, community or history. The concept of a narcissistic thrill was predominantly derived from literature on fanaticism (Haynal, Molnar & de Puymege, 1987), to describe the self-absorbed and self-important activities of fanatics. The selfish thrill may also be related to the hedonic consumption described in consumer behaviour literature by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) and Gursoy et al. (2006), among others.

These concepts were further clarified and explored in studies of serious participants. Primarily the concept was observed at the Elvis Revival Festival where participants allowed themselves a narcissistic thrill to be close to an Elvis impersonator – and to suspend disbelief that this was not the real Elvis Presley.

Similarly, observations at the study of Wintersun suggested a narcissistic thrill was achieved in finding the absolute dance or car experience at the event.

*‘Injured by life’ and ‘Finds security in fanatical system’*

In studies of fanaticism, Haynal et al. (1987) suggested that fanatics may be injured by life, and that immersion and involvement in a fanatical system can assist in overcoming other insecurities.

Elation could heal the anxiety of individuals injured by life, who have not been given enough security ... what distinguishes him from other members of suffering humanity like ourselves is that he finds security, a way of being reassured, in the fanatical system in which he invests so much faith.

*(Haynal et al, 1987, p.37)*

In the empirical studies of event participants, there was some support for this concept, although it creates an interesting area for more in-depth research. In the study of the Elvis Revival Festival, observations were made of Sandy, a teenager who was ‘injured by life’ through social and intellectual disability. The
study suggested that ‘in wider society her social and intellectual pursuits are limited, however being an Elvis fan was very central to who she was and what she did with her time, finding great security in the Elvis fan family and the systems within’ (Ch.5, pg. 148). However the study went further to suggest that the event itself provided an extension of that environment, providing support from the fans at the event, to allow her to express her passion for Elvis.

There were other indications that the commitment to leisure pursuits and recreational clubs described earlier, were replacing other social systems such as families. Participants expressed feelings that they were part of the Elvis family, or that their car club was like a family to them. Participants found security at special interest events, feeling reassured by the enthusiasm and intensity of other participants with the same interests and passions as them. As proposed in Chapter 3, pg. 84, ‘It is possible, that recreationalists use recreational clubs, icons and outlets to find the truth, elation and security where they have not been able to find this in their personal or professional lives’.

Support for the concept was also found in the study of Tolkein fanatics who declared their comfort and reassurance in being connected to their Internet community as a priority in their life.

It should, however, be noted that the research methods used in the studies limited enquiry into this concept to any great degree. Other methods of ethnographic enquiry, such as diaries or interviews, used in psychological studies, could explore this concept in more detail. These may include exploring the role of events as a type of therapy for participants.

*Potentially aggressive*

Theorists of fanaticism (Rudin, 1969; Redden and Steiner, 2000) suggested that highly fanatical participants may become aggressive; that the preceding list of psychological traits may combine to create potential aggression. However, the study did not find evidence that serious participants may become potentially aggressive. While there was evidence gathered at the Wintersun Festival regarding the stoic and dogmatic opinions of rockabilly and rock’n’roll participants toward their leisure pursuit, there was no direct evidence that this had turned to violence or aggression. The potential for violence was, however,
noted by the festival organiser, who himself was the target for heated aggression from unhappy participants, who were not satisfied with the level of specialised facilities for their particular dance group.

Similarly, while fans were dogmatic in their certainty of Elvis as king, aggression was not seen in the ‘safe’ environment of Parkes where there are no threats to the image of Elvis. It is important to note that the event environment is well controlled to avoid clashes with conflicting fans. It would, for example, be unwise to put a Rolling Stones event in the same town at the same time. Event managers had implemented strategies to reduce the risk of disruption.

It is also noted that these events do not hold competitions against opposing fans or recreational groups, where competing rivalries could incite violent behaviour. It should, however, be noted that this potential does exist, as seen in other studies of football fans. The fanatics’ rage-of-will has been exposed in the soccer hooliganism often seen in the UK and Europe (Redhead, 1997; Piotrowski, 2002) and has been blamed for other acts of aggression. As noted in Ch.2 pg. 84, the events of September 11, 2001 in the USA have raised awareness and attention to religious fanatics across the world. The extreme side to fanatical behaviours and the other characteristics described above can result in aggressive behaviour in order to defend, and/or propagate the absolute.

*Incoherence of decisions*

Redden and Steiner (2000) added a dimension of incoherence to the potential behaviour of fanatics, suggesting that they are affected by their passion and their value-attitude, to make choices that appear, to most, to be incoherent. However, this study found evidence to the contrary, where participants made very coherent decisions in regard to planning travel to events and destinations, which were milestones in achieving an overall life goal. Far from being confused and illogical, their decisions regarding accommodation, for example, were made well in advance to secure bookings in desirable areas. Similarly, decisions about tickets, transport and costumes were all planned in advance in line with their leisure goals, which may last for many years. As such, this characteristic was removed from the list of psychological characteristics in the SerPa model.
Leisure identity

Beyond the initial psychological characteristics posited for the SerPa model, the concept of leisure identity featured highly in the literature as a key indicator of serious participation in fandom (Jenson, 1992; Wu, 1999; Darling-Wolf, 2004) and in leisure (Green, 2001; Stebbins, 2001; Kane and Zink, 2004), as well as in Internet leisure studies (Reid, 1995; Bromberg, 1996). The studies in this thesis confirmed the importance of developing and maintaining a leisure identity as part of being a serious leisure participant. The concept of leisure identity was clarified and explored in studies of event participants at both Wintersun and the Elvis Revival Festival. For many of the serious participants in these studies, their leisure identity was their primary identity in life. It defined them beyond their job title, social status, or family status. As noted in the Wintersun study, ‘a large part of their leisure identity was the display of 1950’s style clothing, cars and music...participants had expended time and effort in creating an image that would reflect their chosen leisure identity’ (Ch.4, pg.120). This characteristic was also observed at the Elvis Festival, where participants proudly displayed the hand-made clothing and hairstyles which defined them as true fans of Elvis.

Participating in activities such as competitions, displays, and workshops also provided opportunities for the attainment of special personal rewards, as discussed by Stebbins (2001), which included self-expression, self-image and self-gratification. Many of these rewards are intrinsic; that they ‘pursue their vocations and avocations primarily for self-interested reasons’ (Stebbins 1992, p.96), but they also help to develop and reinforce a valued leisure identity.

The study of LOTR fanatics provided an interesting twist in adopting a leisure identity whereby participants were encouraged to adopt a new name and identity in order to join the plaza activities. Consistent with past research (Bromberg, 1996; Wu, 1999; Darling-Wolf, 2004), this study found participants enjoyed that leisure identity, sometimes using it in the real world as well.

Summary

The psychological characteristics of serious participants can best be summarised by what they do, and not by their birthright, social status, jobs or past deeds. It is the commitment and passion for their leisure activity (what they do), which
defines them, and their psychological characteristics. Their passion for their leisure pursuit takes over their lives – providing new thrills and belief systems as well as personal rewards. Consequently this reduces the value of other needs, such as friends and family. Being a serious Elvis fan, or rock’n’roll dancer, or ‘rodder’, brings its own psychological rewards of self-actualisation and self-identity, which as shown in this study, can be reinforced by attending events, and meeting other serious participants. These rewards encourage further participation, and often progression, in recreational pursuits. The implications of these findings are discussed in detail in Section 8.2 extending to changes in government planning and policy in tourism and leisure and events, niche marketing and event strategy development.

Being a serious participant also presents new social opportunities in specialised leisure worlds. This is highlighted in the quote – it’s what ‘we’ do—referring to an assumed social network of car drivers, both close and un-met. Attending events allows participants to pursue ‘what we do’ with others who do it too. The social network defines and reinforces the social characteristics. The following section discusses the social characteristics of serious participants found throughout this thesis, and demonstrates the often intertwined nature of social and psychological characteristics.

7.3.2 Summary of social characteristics – it’s what we do, and love it

Primarily, for many participants there was a feeling of ‘we’, reflecting a feeling that they were part of a valued social network, and a feeling of belonging and social support.

The leisure choices made by serious participants led them to social situations where they could meet like-minded people and share passion, ideas, identity and values in a supportive context. The social contexts also allowed them to learn new skills and knowledge from others. These contexts included clubs and Internet forums, as well as events. As described below, each of the five studies has added to our knowledge and understanding of the social characteristics of serious participants in recreation and leisure generally, as well as at events.
This was not a field of research which had been explored previously, and so to begin, the first study demonstrated that special interest events attracted larger groups, predominantly special interest groups who had travelled together to celebrate their chosen pursuit. Also observed were the groups who displayed a unique social identity with their club jackets and fashion that highlighted their like-interest in a certain lifestyle. These initial observations informed the investigation of the literature related to the social characteristics of leisure enthusiasts, experts and fanatics.

**Table 11: Social characteristics in the SerPa model**

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<th>Social characteristics</th>
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<td>Join groups that sustain beliefs</td>
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<td>Join an alternative community</td>
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<td>Established social identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek public reward</td>
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<td>Feeling of ‘we’</td>
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A review of the literature in theoretical areas of fanaticism, leisure, recreation, tourism and consumer behaviour revealed four shared social characteristics, shown in Table 11, which could be expected in the observations and discussions with serious participants. The literature suggested serious participants, such as fanatics and enthusiasts, would gain membership of groups (or networks) that promoted enthusiasm for their pursuit and reinforce their ideals, as well as attending enthusiast and fanatic events in search of a social context to fulfil their leisure careers. However, the ethnographic studies that followed the literature review, found three additional social characteristics to include in the SerPa model (shown in italics in Table 11). These seven characteristics are described below.

*Contextual facilitation*

The most prominent finding of the seven characteristics related to the social context that was being created by, and for, serious participants. The concept of contextual facilitation has been discussed in theory of fandom (Lawrence, 2004), leisure (Unruh, 1979; Stebbins, 2001) and fanaticism, where according to Taylor:
Fanatics engineer supportive social contexts for themselves which sustain and develop fanatical behaviour. This behaviour involves choosing social contexts, friends, media, current events and entertainment that sustain and legitimise their beliefs, feelings and behaviours of fanatics. Intolerant fanatics surround themselves with people, opinions and experiences that they can tolerate. (Taylor, 1991 cited in Redden & Steiner, 2000, p.329)

The exploration of serious participants at the Wintersun Festival allowed an inductive view of the social context of serious participants, finding support for Taylor’s proposal. Participants at the event provided supportive social contexts for themselves and others who participated in the same recreational pursuits as they did.

The concept of social context was also described by Unruh as ‘an internally recognisable constellation of actors, organisations and events and practices which have coalesced into a perceived sphere of interest and involvement for participants’ (Unruh, 1979, p.115 , cited in Stebbins, 2001).

The Wintersun Festival provided different opportunities and environments to compete, shop and attend workshops together. Serious participants recognised each other as being part of the same constellation by their dress and activities.

Similar results were found in the study of the Elvis Revival Festival where fan groups socialised and shared experiences with each other. They referred to their social leisure world as the worldwide Elvis family and sought out the company of other fans who had ‘acceptable’ knowledge and passion for Elvis.

Participants in the LOTR plaza used the Internet forum as a context to facilitate their leisure interests. For the most fanatical, the forum was of vital importance to them to meet with like-minded fans to share ideas and passions about LOTR. The forum facilitated ongoing interest in LOTR by creating activities, contests and discussions on the LOTR films and books.

Join groups that sustain beliefs

The original suggestion by Taylor (1991) that fanatics would join groups that sustain beliefs was also found to be true of fans, enthusiasts and experts in
recreational groups and clubs. The four field studies found participant groups, such as car clubs, dance clubs, rockers clubs, fan clubs, Internet forums and social networks. The members of the groups shared the passion and interest in the same activities, but also shared similar beliefs. For example, many car enthusiasts at Wintersun proudly displayed stickers which read ‘classic not plastic’ – sharing a belief that classic model cars are better than the newer plastic versions of current models. Events provided an environment to join larger networks of other enthusiasts and fans.

The study also agreed with the findings of Lawrence (2003), identifying the change in fan clubs’ structures from real world fan clubs to Internet-based fan clubs. Special interest Internet forums create a place to join and reinforce social networks, as well as a way to reinforce and justify fanatical behaviour. The study of self-confessed fanatics of Lord of the Rings showed that the Internet allows fanatics to join groups on an international level, to discuss their passions at a level that may not have been found locally or at events. The paper also demonstrated how these virtual communities collaborate to make plans for travel to special interest events, and other destinations.

*Attend events that reinforce ideals*

As an extension of the first two characteristics, the studies in the thesis have found that serious participants attend events which reinforce their ideals. This finding does not reflect any existing research, but builds upon the concept of contextual facilitation discussed previously. Attending events extends contextual facilitation found in the clubs and meetings of participants’ local communities to a wider network at a festival. For example, Wintersun provided a context within which participants could make visual statements about their lifestyle choices through fashion, music and cars. The spectators and other participants provided reinforcement of values, beliefs and identity, by showing appreciation of their efforts. It was also observed that the sheer numbers of other participants reinforced the ideals of the chosen pursuits. As one participant from Rockhampton stated;
Last year, we didn’t realise how strong rock’n’roll was til you come and see the thousands that do it, you know, even though there is (sic) two clubs in our town we couldn’t believe it (Ch.4, pg. 120).

For Elvis fans, attending the Elvis Revival Festival provided another way for them to keep the memory of Elvis alive, and to reinforce fans’ ideals that Elvis is still the King. As shown in this study of the event, fans and fanatics carry out activities related to Elvis on any given day, but attending events allows them an outlet to show their devotion and receive adulation for their efforts.

An alternative community

The concept of an alternative leisure community for serious participants is derived from the concept of contextual facilitation described above, where participants are attracted to, and develop a community that shares the same values, beliefs and activities as the participant. In a study of Star Trekkers, Lawrence (2003) found that the social constructs of some fan-based environments provide an alternative to today’s fast paced society. She suggests that the rules, regulations and decision processes are easier to interpret and follow in alternatives such as the Star Trek system. The results of this study confirmed these findings in relation to fan behaviour, as well as with recreational enthusiasts.

In relation to fans, the study of LOTR plaza website examined the hierarchy, rules, norms and duties which fans operate under as an alternative to live society. The hours spent in discussions and activities on the website provide an alternative to engaging with family or friends in a home community and create an alternate society in what one participant called - ‘this world we all love’. These participants were characterised by a desire to be engaged in a community of interest that was an alternative to their home community.

Similarly, the many references made to ‘The Elvis family’, both in this study and in others by Doss (1999), show that fans facilitate an alternative system of support and trust.

The results from Wintersun also highlighted the importance of the event as an alternative social scene to everyday society, where likeminded fanatics and enthusiasts could meet and pursue their interests. As the evidence from
Wintersun showed, SI events create a time and environment when serious participants can escape, to get away from their home lives, and interact with their social clubs and networks.

Established social identity

One of the key themes (or domains) from the study of Wintersun was the identity reinforcement of participants as dancers, rodders or rockers. Visible costumes, club jackets and club identities were displayed which celebrated their lifestyle choice. As noted in the paper, the suggestions of Green and Jones (2005) were very pertinent, in discussing the specific roles of sport tourism to serious leisure participants as:

1) A way to construct and/or confirm one’s leisure identity, 2) a time and place to interact with others sharing the ethos of the activity, 3) a time and place to parade and celebrate a valued social identity, 4) a way to further one’s leisure career and 5) a way to signal one’s career stage.

(Green and Jones, 2005, p. 175).

The study of the Elvis Festival identified segments of Elvis fans and fanatics who had defined their identity as an Elvis fan, and in so doing joined the Elvis family. It was observed at the event, that the fanatic segment had ‘created their own Elvis leisure world where they could meet other fanatics and interact with those who could tolerate and reinforce their own commitment and values’ (Ch5, p.159). Similarly, fans of LOTR had a shared social identity, which they celebrated in the activities on the plaza.

Seek public reward

As noted by Stebbins (2001), participants in serious leisure often seek personal rewards for the effort and commitment they have expended in their hobby. These often appear as rewards for participating in competitions, displays, and workshops, and often eventuate in public events such as festivals, competitions or championships. Public rewards were gained at Wintersun through participation in parades, contests and public exhibitions, where spectators applauded and recognised their efforts. Similarly participants at the Elvis Revival Festival participated in parades and impersonator contests where they
could receive public adulation and recognition. Serious Elvis tribute artists sought out opportunities for public performance in hotels, clubs and other venues and, as noted in Paper 4, their performances were met by frenzied excitement from Elvis fans.

In the enclosed forum of the LOTR fanatics, participants submitted their fan art and fan fiction into a member’s arena for others to review and comment upon. As noted previously, public appreciation provides incentive to continue the leisure career, as well as providing interaction between participants.

**Feeling of ‘we’**

A consistent finding of this thesis has been the inclusion of others (known and unknown) in special interest groups. The object of passion, be it cars, dancing, Elvis or LOTR, creates an instant connection between individuals. Participants have a connection with other participants, described here as a ‘feeling of we’. In the phrase ‘it’s what we do, and love it’, the participant is referring to all the drivers in Targa Tasmania, both those he has met and those he has not. He is referring to a network of members in a ‘community of interest’.

These findings support those of Scodari and Felder (2000) and Wakefield (2001) to suggest the community provides mutual support for fans who support each other, and provides a sense of belonging. Fans and fanatics share a mutual social identity – as Elvis fans or rodders or rockers, which contributes to their feelings of connecting to a community.

**Anti-social fans and fanatics**

The participants that were observed and conversed with in this study were all in public places, such as events and the Internet. However, there is no assumption or evidence that all serious participants enjoy public interaction. Previous studies have shown the private fanatical lives of fans enjoyed in the privacy of their own home, without connecting with others with the same interest (Doss, 1999). However, it is argued from the evidence in this thesis that interaction amongst fellow fans and enthusiasts is a more likely behaviour. The literature and empirical evidence both point to the fact that there is a point where enthusiasts and fanatics will most likely need reinforcement and/an outlet to
display their efforts to others, and to share their experiences and thoughts about their pursuit. Increasingly it seems, the Internet may allow people to do this without meeting face to face, or without revealing their true identity. Prior to the introduction of leisure forums such as LOTR plaza, serious participants may have needed to attend club meetings or events to fulfil their social needs and connect with like-minded individuals, or may have been left isolated in communities that did not understand their interests.

### 7.3.3 Summary of psycho/social characteristics

The individual studies in this thesis have contributed to a holistic representation of the psycho/social characteristics of serious participants. They have shown that serious participants have distinct characteristics related to their pursuit of certain leisure goals both in fandom and recreation. The studies have shown that serious participants range in their levels of intensity and enthusiasm from fans and enthusiasts to fanatics and true believers.

**Figure 20: Circle of influence**

There is no single path toward becoming a devoted fan or car fanatic. The hundreds of participants involved in the study come from different backgrounds and have chosen to pursue their hobby for a multitude of different reasons, too
varied to describe in any one study. What has emerged from this thesis is an understanding that the influences identified in Chapter 3 (reproduced in Figure 20) have varying degrees of power over the decisions to continue to be involved in the community of interest and to progress in a leisure career.

In the case of the participant attending the Wintersun event, dressing in 50’s fashion, riding in old cars and mixing with other car clubs was the ‘the one time when I can feel normal’ (Ch.4, p.126).

The study has repeatedly shown how psychological characteristics such as enthusiasm and dogmatism are reinforced by social contexts such as clubs, as well as events, where fans and fanatics support each other’s values and aspirations. These results thus validate the psycho/social perspective championed by Iso-Ahola (1980, 1982,1983) which suggests the continual reinforcement of psychological and social behaviours.

The SerPa model posited in Section 3.5 has served to inform the studies, and has confirmed the relevance of the psycho/social characteristics to literature in travel, leisure and consumer behaviour. However, from the studies, new elements have developed which can inform the development of the SerPa model. As shown in Figure 21, the elements added to the model include leisure identity, established social identity, opportunities for public reward and a feeling of ‘we’.

*Figure 21: Psycho/social characteristics of the SerPa Model Revised*

![Diagram of SerPa Model Revised](image)
The psycho/social characteristics are directly related to participants’ behaviours as consumers, travellers and recreationalists. The enthusiasm, commitment and thrill of participating drive participants to travel to events as a way of meeting their social needs as well as developing their skills and knowledge. Throughout the thesis these characteristics were found to result in distinct travel, leisure and consumer behaviours, as described in the following sections.

7.4 Discussion of results relating to RO3

To explore and model the behaviours of serious participants as consumers, recreationalists and travellers.

Analysis of three key behaviours of serious participants has been provided throughout the thesis, providing new knowledge of leisure participants generally, and more specifically as audiences at special events. Each paper has added new information to the picture of serious participants as consumers, recreationists and travellers, described in the following sections.

7.4.1 Consumer behaviours

The development of the SerPa model 1 in Chapter 2 suggested that as consumers, serious participants were similar to fixated consumers as described by Schiffman et al. (2005), who would go to great lengths to secure objects which related to their passion. Primarily, serious participants were driven by a goal that was fixated upon one pursuit, such as car restoring, or one person such as Elvis Presley. Their consumer behaviours were influenced by their passionate leisure interests, and their desire to collect items that reflected their leisure identity. As described below, and depicted in Figure 22, nine consumer behaviours were identified throughout the study.
Figure 22: Consumer behaviours of Serious Participants

Deep and passionate interest in a particular object

Consistent with the research by Redden and Steiner (2000), the studies at the Elvis and Wintersun festivals showed consumers to be driven by their deep and passionate interest in a single passion, showing enthusiasm and intensity towards a goal. This interest had been fuelled by a developing leisure career, and leisure identity, discussed previously in 7.3.1. The results of the Wintersun study have demonstrated how car enthusiasts and fanatics consume a range of items that are all centred upon their cars. These items were shown to include the cars themselves, and the authentic accessories which adorn them, as well as items which reflect their leisure identity such as fashion, or branded merchandise. This behaviour was also seen at the Elvis festival where kitsch and authentic Elvis items were sought after to add to personal collections and/or fashions, described further below.

Collecting products and icons

Serious participants at the Elvis and Wintersun Festivals both referred to the objects of their consumption as ‘stuff’. As described by Doss (1999, p.60), both the act of collecting and the stuff itself is powerful to devoted fans;

Fixated Consumer

Deep and passionate interest in a particular object
Irrational to outsiders
Excessive
Frequent display of objects
Predictable purchase decisions
Sharing their involvement
Will go to long lengths for examples
Time and money for product searching
Collecting products and icons

The Macleods rely on visual touchable stuff to signal Elvis’s special status and stake their claims on him. They dress like him, to be sure, but the ways they collect and display their stuff also conveys the responsibility they feel for Elvis. The stuff itself ranges from the mundane.... To the absurd... from the valuable... to the trivial....It doesn’t matter. Inscribed with his image or his name or touched by him in some way, it all embodies Elvis and, as such, is very powerful. “We know he’s gone”, says Paul Macleod, “These things keep him alive in our hearts.” (Doss, 1999, p60).
This study highlighted how events provide an opportunity for serious participants to purchase the stuff to which Doss refers. Market stalls and retail shops at events offer a variety of objects from kitsch souvenirs to authentic pieces. The objects they bought were significant to them as an addition to their already extensive collection of stuff that adorned their homes and clubhouses. It could be argued that the souvenirs and paraphernalia purchased at the Wintersun festival serve to keep an era ‘alive in their hearts’, as much as the Elvis stuff collected by the Macleods.

Irrational and excessive?

Studies by Lehmann (1987) and Holbrook (1987) also suggest the collection of souvenirs, memorabilia, autographs and other collectors’ items relates to enhancing self-image. They suggested that these collections may appear irrational to those outside the social leisure world, but are well within the rationality of a serious participant. The evidence found by Doss (1997, 1999), substantiated by the findings of this study, suggest shrines and rooms devoted to Elvis, which mean so much to devoted fans, may have very little meaning to non-fans. The continued collection of stuff related to one interest may seem irrational to others, who have more varied interests. Similarly, the collections of stuff may appear excessive to those who do not understand the devotion of serious participants, but may appear highly appealing and inspirational to others in the same social leisure world.

Frequent display of objects

The frequent displays of objects related to leisure interests was something that participants recalled with much pride at both the Wintersun and Elvis festivals. Participants such as Frank (Ch.4, pg 124.) recounted the importance of displaying stuff in their homes,

When we go back home we do up our rooms and that, at our houses, with all the rock’n’roll gear and juke boxes and dance floors, we buy all the paraphernalia here to decorate them, the Marilyn Munroe pictures, the Elvis pictures and all that sort of stuff, then we’ve got one (room) for the cars.
Importantly, this study identified the role of events as a time and place to purchase items that can later be displayed at home.

**Extensive search for more examples**

Schiffman et al. (2005) suggested that fixated consumers would go to considerable lengths for more examples. The discussions with Elvis fans in Chapter 5 revealed the lengths that participants will go to for authentic Elvis items and experiences. Mel had been to Graceland five times and proudly claimed to have ‘touched the horse that Elvis rode on when I was on a trip to Graceland’. These experiences are expensive, and require detailed planning and persistence.

The fact that many participants had travelled from across Australia to attend events such as the Speed on Tweed, the Elvis Revival Festival and Wintersun, highlighted their willingness to travel to consume experiences and products related to their leisure interests. Participants also revealed their willingness to travel overseas to other events of the same theme, to collect more examples and engage in more experiences.

**Time and money spent for product searching**

Schiffman et al. (2005) also suggested that fixated consumers dedicate a considerable amount of time and money to search out an object or product. Results from Chapters 3 and 4 reinforced this idea demonstrating participants’ propensity to travel to find specialised experiences and products. Participants at the Elvis Festival enthusiastically purchased items from the market stalls, looking for both authentic and kitsch items to buy and add to their collection. Participants at Wintersun had spent large amounts of money to restore classic cars and achieve their recreational goals. Discussions with participants also revealed the increased use of the Internet to search for specialised ‘stuff’.

**Sharing their involvement**

Schiffman et al. (2005) also suggested that fixated consumers share their involvement with others who have a similar interest. Nowhere is this more evident than at a special interest event, where one of the key motivators for
participants is to share an experience with like-minded people. As highlighted in Ch.4, pg. 124, shopping is often an experience that is shared with other club members.

*Although shopping is often an activity that satisfies personal needs, shoppers were observed to seek out their items in packs, mostly as a club activity. They sought authentic items of clothing, music and accessories to the era and style of their pursuit that are provided by niche retailers who sell products at market stalls.*

Driven by their need for a social context, serious participants frequently display the objects of their passion in their homes, at events and whenever the opportunity arises.

**Predictable purchase decisions**

The findings from these studies do not agree with Redden and Steiner (2000, p.332), in their suggestion that ‘fanatical consumer behaviour is fragmented because the intensity and intolerance of fanatics in their single minded pursuit of goals makes thinking, behaviour and goal coherence unlikely’. Instead, the findings suggest that the serious participants in this study made highly coherent decisions to find and consume products, services and experiences that will contribute to achieving their leisure goals. To those outside their leisure world, the decisions may appear excessive or misguided, but predominantly they have been coherent. Specifically, participants made coherent decisions related to travel planning, car and fashion purchases and merchandise.

The results suggest that consumer behaviour of serious participants is *predictable* in relation to returning to specific events every year and purchasing event related merchandise. Travel planning, in particular, requires highly coherent processes well ahead of the event, which will ensure accommodation is booked in advance and that money and resources are secured for long haul trips. Both time and money are expended in searching for items of interest as well as significant travel destinations. This study concurs with the suggestion by Swarbrooke and Horner (2007, p.4), that travel decisions are important in consumer’s lives, and that ‘the decision to purchase by a consumer is of emotional significance’. However, in this case it is also of social and personal significance.
The background to theory in consumer behaviour in Section 1.3.6 suggested that participants at special interest events are likely to be consumers of event, travel and fandom products and experiences; and that these may include tangible products such as merchandise and fashion, or intangible experiences such as escape, fantasy and emotion. As discussed below, the characteristics of consumer behaviours were found to be most prominent as related to fashion and merchandise, as well as travel discussed in 7.4.3.

**Fashion**

An important finding in the two event-based studies was the importance of fashion choice. Consistent with previous research by Kane and Zink (2006), participants’ purchase and display of clothing were an important statement about their lifestyle choices and their commitment to their pursuit. Participants bought fashion items from specialised retail outlets and market stalls at events, as well as from websites. The most fanatical had gone to great lengths to obtain materials from the USA to highlight their devotion.

Their choice of clothing provided an opportunity to share their interest publicly with others at the event. For example, participants who made their clothes by hand (from materials sourced in the USA) were seen by others at the event as having high levels of commitment. Fashion choices and their willingness to wear them were part of the *frequent display of objects*. For Elvis fans, the fashion included clothing and hairstyles from the sixties, or items of jewellery with Elvis emblems. The rockers at Wintersun also chose fashions from the era, as well as club jackets and T-shirts, which expressed their social identity. These findings were consistent with Kane and Zink (2004) who suggested that these displays were a type of symbolic capital, which recreationists use to show their knowledge and status within their social leisure world – and to outsiders of that world. The Wintersun study found that authenticity was important in some consumers’ purchases, for symbolic capital, as well as for other more practical reasons.

*Authenticity was important to both groups in the study, but especially to dance enthusiasts. Two reasons were discovered for this. Firstly, for practical reasons, the right type of shoes and skirts will allow certain...*
types of dance moves that improve performance. Secondly, there is symbolic capital (Kane and Zink, 2004) in displaying/wearing the right types of shoes, skirts and jackets that highlight your seriousness toward the activity (Ch. 4, p132).

Similar results were discovered at the Elvis Festival, where items that were authentic to the era were sought after. The shoes shown in Figure 23 are handcrafted in the USA, and imported to Australia specifically for sale to rock’n’roll enthusiasts, and Elvis fans. They are predominantly sold at events and on the Internet.

**Figure 23: Handcrafted shoes at the Elvis Revival Festival 2007**
**Event Merchandise**

Event merchandise relates to products that are sold at events that have logos and branding of the event attached to them. According to Allen et al. (2002), they are useful to event organisers as a way to increase revenue, as well as provide a lasting souvenir of the event for consumers. Merchandise can include, T-shirts, hats, stickers, drink holders and videos of past events.

While there was no direct sales data to compare, observations from the studies in the thesis shows that events at the upper end of the SI event spectrum could sell items to serious participants that related to their sense of social and personal identity. Serious participants at the Elvis and Wintersun Festivals showed an interest in consuming event merchandise, in part as an addition to their collection of stuff, but also as recognition of their commitment to the event. Event merchandise formed part of their wider *collection of products and icons*. In particular, T-shirts of past events were worn, as a visible display of participants’ commitment to the event over time. In effect, these participants were saying, ‘I’ve been here before’ as a show of symbolic capital, and of social and personal identity.

As with the example from the Elvis Revival Festival, merchandise can also be linked to the destination as a way to enhance tourism branding. Such was the case linking a local tourist attraction, The Dish, with images of Elvis to promote the town of Parkes and the event.

**Summary**

The analysis of the consumer behaviour of serious participants contributes to a greater understanding of ‘why people buy the product they do and how they make that decision’ (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999, p.6). Serious participants are driven by a deep and committed passion for their leisure pursuits, which manifests in the purchase of items, which will reinforce their leisure identity. They can be considered fixated consumers, who go to great lengths to secure objects which relate to their passion. In the context of events, participants are fuelled by the excitement and social reinforcement of the event, to buy more items to add to their collections. The identification of predictable consumer
behaviours allows event managers to plan experiences, services and activities that will suit consumer needs.

However serious participants consume more than the products of the event, or the event itself; serious participants are also consumers of leisure and travel products and experiences discussed in the sections following.
7.4.2 Leisure and recreation behaviours

The results of the studies suggest that serious participants at special interest events are seeking numerous ways in which to develop their leisure careers, and that this occurs in both recreational and fandom activities. As suggested in the SerPa model, when participants in leisure are suitably affected by certain psycho/social characteristics, they tend to exhibit distinctive leisure behaviours. This thesis has argued that distinctive leisure behaviours are expressed at special interest events, where there is a supportive environment for their development. The activities, atmosphere and social meaning of the event itself can meet the psycho/social and leisure needs of the participants.

**Figure 24: Recreation behaviours of serious participants**

As detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, the identification of the ten recreation/leisure behaviours in this thesis were principally influenced by the theories of serious leisure proposed by Stebbins (1992, 1996, 2001) and the recreational specialisation framework (Bryan, 1977, Scott & Schafer, 2001), thus providing solid theoretical foundations to support and inform the research. As a result, the ten behaviours described below reflect those influences and show how this thesis has advanced and developed these theories.

**Progressing**

The concept of progression in recreation and leisure featured prominently in the literature as a key characteristic of serious leisure, as distinct from casual leisure. Stebbins (1992, 2001) had suggested that interest in a leisure activity has stages of development, turning points and temporal continuity, and that participants can progress, and gain rewards and prestige. These suggestions were also paralleled in recreation research (Scott & Schafer, 2001) to describe the development of skills, behaviour and knowledge of recreationists.
The examination of Wintersun participants strongly reinforced these theories, and showed how the event itself offered a context for recreational growth and progression. As noted in Ch.4, p.130, skill development often occurred through testing skills in contests, but also through the exchange of ideas. As rocker dancer Betty suggested: *The reason we came is for the exchange of ideas, we all do things a bit differently.*

The recognition of a festival as a context for recreational progression was an important finding of this thesis, and contribution to the leisure literature.

*Seeks new challenges*

Serious participants came to the events looking for challenges in activities and contests. While Stebbins (2001) had suggested that those involved in serious leisure sought to persevere, and make a personal effort to attain the next step in their leisure career, there was little evidence to show where or how that occurred. Kane and Zink (2004) had described how serious kayakers had sought to advance their career by looking for new challenges in new destinations. However, this study demonstrated how participants sought out competitions and opportunities for public performances as a way to challenge their own abilities. For many rodders attending Wintersun, just getting a classic car to the event from 1,000’s of kilometres away was a new challenge in itself. Elvis impersonators also sought out new challenges in participating in the Guinness Book of Records attempt for the largest number of Elvisses in one place.

*Joins social groups and clubs*

As described previously in relation to the social characteristics of serious participants (7.3.2), the study has highlighted the importance of social networks such as recreational clubs, car clubs or fan clubs, which provide reinforcement of values and beliefs. Social clubs facilitate the development of skills and knowledge through sharing of activities and support of participants’ development (these findings are examined in discussions of RO4 in Section 7.5)
Seeks 'just right' reinforcement

The involvement in social groups and clubs provides what Bryan (2000) calls a ‘just right’ reinforcement. He suggests that sustained involvement in an activity is ‘fuelled by a just right reinforcement schedule of success and recognition of that success by peers having similar values’ (2000, p.19). These observations and descriptions of recreationists had described a key behaviour of participants at Wintersun and Elvis festivals. Success was achieved in bringing cars across the nation to a contest and participating in car runs and shows, where participants could showcase their skills and perseverance. The success was then recognised by peers in other car clubs and rocker groups who fuelled sustained involvement. As one participant noted, attending the event ‘keeps you enthused’ (see 4.5).

Just right reinforcement was highly prominent in the study of LOTR forum, where participants sought a safe environment where they could practise their skills and seek success and recognition. As noted in the reflections from the study (6.5), collaboration of fanatical minds fuelled enthusiasm for all things Tolkein and led to intensive creation of fan art, and relentless interpretations of books, movies and languages.

Participate in a ‘leisure social world’

The concept of a leisure social world was introduced by Bryan (1977) as a way to describe the all-encompassing sphere of human activity that occurred with specialised recreationists such as anglers. The term was adopted by other recreational researchers (McFarlane, 2004; Ditton, Loomis, and Choi, 1992), to describe member’s tendencies to share similar attitudes and beliefs, and to create a sense of group identity.

As noted in previous discussion of social characteristics, serious participants desire participation in social groups, which facilitate their leisure interests. The concept is similar to the unique ethos and social world with its own informal norms and ethos, described as a characteristic of serious leisure by Stebbins (2001).

A new finding of this study shows how events can create an enticing environment that is themed to emulate and celebrate participant's identity and
beliefs, and therefore contribute to the longevity of the leisure social world. As highlighted in the study of the Elvis Festival, participants revelled in the non-stop Elvis music that played in the town all weekend. Similarly, participants at Wintersun were surrounded by the music, fashion and cars which reinforced their beliefs in their own leisure social world.

The psycho/social characteristics described previously, drive participation in leisure social worlds, which in turn reinforce these characteristics.

**Highly Involved**

The concept of involvement also emanated from the recreation specialisation framework (see Section 1.3.2), where, according to Kim et al. (1997), involvement could be measured by frequency of participation, money spent, miles travelled, ability or skill, ownership of equipment/books and number of memberships. While this study did not seek to measure participants’ involvement, the qualitative data described the depth of many of these behaviours. In particular, the Elvis fanatics told of their extended involvement with Elvis as a daily activity, which took them around the world to seek rare artefacts and attend many Elvis performances. Wintersun participants were similarly involved in their activities, practising dancing, attending dances and club meetings and fashioning dance costumes.

**Highly Committed**

The concept of commitment, as related to recreation, is often considered one of the basic dimensions of the recreation specialisation framework (Scott & Schafer, 2001; Lee & Scott, 2004). Drawing on previous work in the area, these authors suggest that commitment involves personal and behavioural constructs. Personal commitment involves ‘an affective attachment and inner conviction that the activity is worth doing for its own sake’ (Scott and Shafer, 2001, p. 329). Behavioural commitment describes the costs and penalties, which may make withdrawal from the leisure activity problematic.

Serious participants examined in this thesis primarily displayed both personal commitment to their pursuit and often to the clubs which facilitated it. The passion and dedication that serious participants show to their pursuits such
as cars and dancing was indicative of their personal, affective attachment. Further research may also explain the types of costs and penalties involved in withdrawing from these pursuits.

*Holds central life interest*

An indicator of strong commitment to leisure activities is often cased in the term central life interest, where participants hold a persistent personal and behavioural commitment (Scott & Schafer, 2001). Centrality refers to ‘the extent to which a participant’s lifestyle and social networks are connected to his or her pursuit of a given leisure activity. Moreover centrality implies a rejection of alternative leisure activities’ (Kim et al. 1997). Consistent with these contentions, centrality has been observed throughout this study as a result of the psycho/social characteristics of the serious leisure participant. As seen in the Elvis fanatics, the combination of passion, involvement, commitment, progression and rewards for those characteristics drives deeper involvement in recreational activities, until there is little, if any, time left for life activities which other people would consider normal. Jobs are a means to an end – to provide money to continue recreational pursuits. The centrality of interest for serious participants has clearly been in their leisure activity.

The role of events also assists in keeping the momentum for participants. The circuit of events can provide year-long activities which become the focus of life; going to, and preparing for events (or other significant destinations). This new finding provides a contribution to our knowledge of the role of events in leisure.

*Finds new ways to anchor oneself*

Further to the idea of centrality, serious participation in a leisure pursuit, such as dancing, rodding, Elvis or LOTR, provides an alternative lifestyle. Rockers clubs, such as the Gold Coast rockers provide participants with a leisure identity, goals for the future and friends. As noted by a participant at Wintersun, *I enjoy the friendship, dancing of course, music, working together, achieve goals, all that sort of stuff.* As Kuentzel (2001) would describe it, these elements provide a new way to anchor oneself. This study has highlighted situations for
participants where the real world offers little excitement or belonging and the leisure life offers responsibility, reward, exciting social identity, self-actualisation, self-enrichment, self-expression and social attraction. This was especially evident in observing the serious Elvis impersonators, who receive public adoration for their leisure activities. The results are reflective of Kuentzel’s suggestion that recreation specialisation is ‘...a leisure elite of late modernity where security in the traditional realms of work, family and community has eroded, and people seek alternative ways to anchor one’s sense of self’ (2001, p.355). Moreover, the results demonstrate the way in which the psycho/social characteristics lead to leisure behaviours.

**Creative expression and participatory fandom**

Results from studies at Wintersun, the Elvis Revival Festival and the LOTR fanatic’s forum demonstrated the propensity for participatory fandom behaviours to occur in some respondents. While fandom researchers Jenkins (1992) and Murray (2004) suggest these can occur in cyberspace and in special interest groups, this study highlighted the occurrence in preparation for, and during special interest events.

The study has identified examples where serious participants are involved in the creation of fan art, car-art and other forms of creative expression. These expressions allow indulgence in their pursuit and create more time to be involved in the activity. Consistent with the findings of fandom researchers such as Jenson, (1992), these behaviours allow fans, ‘the ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture’ (1992, p. 291). As such, participatory fandom is considered one of the central characteristics of fandom.

As shown in Figure 25 creative development has been a common occurrence in the studies, expressed in the forms of handmade fashion, visual art, poetry and literature.
Serious participants who were members of special interest clubs and Internet forums found reinforcement for their creative works from the members. In the case of LOTR it was found that the connections made between participants solidified the ties between members and kept them returning to the forum. The feedback they received from other LOTR fanatics provided a surprising boost to inspire them to keep going.

*hugs* I’m glad you like it so. I’m actually been very surprised to see it so well received here (Paper 5, p. 188).

Contributions to the pool of fan art also promote new understanding of art techniques, with information exchanged about paint mediums, design software and other painting techniques.
However, while these findings were connected to those in previous research (Jenkins, 1992; Murray, 2004) understanding of the phenomena was also extended to behaviour at events. Events offered a place and time to display creative items to a wider audience, where participants received public accolades for the time and effort they have expended. Importantly, as shown at the Wintersun Festival, events provided an opportunity for those in remote locations to feel more connected to others in the same special interest community, and to exchange ideas.

7.4.3 Travel behaviours of serious participants

Results from across the studies have shown serious participants to be highly specialised travellers, who have specific needs related to their singular pursuit. This thesis has demonstrated that mainstream travel destinations would not satisfy the participants of this study. Travel to mass tourism destinations would literally be a waste of time and money that could have been better spent on pursuing their interest. Serious participants, including fans and fanatics, seek to fulfil their psychological and social needs through travel to events and to other destinations that have a significant link to their pursuit. As such, travel is an important part of the lives of many serious participants.

The study of the literature in Paper Two proposed eight travel behaviours in the SerPa model that were likely as a result of serious and fanatical pursuit of leisure based goals. Many of these were derived from research into SIT (Weiler and Hall, 1992; Douglas, Douglas and Derrett, 2001; McKercher and Chan, 2005; Trauer, 2006), where special interest travellers have shown their propensity to seek out meaningful tourist experiences which relate solely to their field of interest. As shown by the ticked boxes in Table 12, many of the proposed behaviours were observed and discussed as part of the studies of events in Chapters 2, 4 and 5.
Table 12: Travel behaviours of serious participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel behaviours of serious participants</th>
<th>Tweed events</th>
<th>Wintersun</th>
<th>Elvis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel to pursue their activity</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel with their own equipment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very highly skilled individuals</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide range of experiences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent travellers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓*</td>
<td>✓*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pose significant marketing difficulties</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to travel to ‘non-standard’ destinations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualisation and customisation of travel</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to escape</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, as highlighted with asterisks in Table 12, two behaviours were not easily identified, which raises questions about the validity of these two behaviours in this model.

Firstly, it was shown that serious participants were not highly independent travellers. While they make many of their own arrangements, they are often influenced by their social clubs as to where to go, where to stay and other travel details. Many social groups planned travel together. And so while their travel arrangements were not part of a packaged tour, they were highly influenced by group activity and often travelled with small groups.

Secondly, serious participants posed no real significant marketing difficulties, as their tight social networks allow simple relationship marketing. While it was visible that participants wanted some level of VIP treatment, the group activity also allowed marketers to easily target networks of participants, in the form of clubs, and design activities for them.

The following section summarises the results for the other seven travel behaviours shown in Table 12, which originated from the literature to inform the SerPa model.

*Travel to pursue their activity*

The studies have demonstrated that serious participants travel to pursue their chosen activity as part of their leisure career. These results are consistent with
the defining principle of special interest tourism, suggested by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) that;

\[
SIT \text{ is conceived as tourism undertaken for a distinct and specific reason; thereby indicating that the special interest tourist has a specific, interest-based motivation for his/her travel to another destination (1997, p.12).}
\]

This trend was initially observed in the study of the Tweed Shire (Ch.2) at events such as Speed on Tweed where serious participants had travelled from many regions to pursue their interest in racing cars. Specialised events attracted participants who had a specialised interest, and would travel to pursue that interest. These behaviours relate well to the travel behaviours identified in the early research of Bryan (1979, p. 42), who suggested that travel by generalist anglers was characterised by fishing in close proximity to their home or region, while more specialist anglers travelled outside their region. As he noted, ‘more specialised anglers may travel all the way across the continent to “fish the circuit” each year’ (Bryan, 1979, p. 42).

Further research at Wintersun in Ch.4 highlighted the importance of the specialised travel experience to the participants and the role of events in fulfilling their personal and social goals. These findings were further supported by the study of fans at the Elvis Festival (Ch.5), who demonstrated that they would travel specifically to pursue an interest in Elvis.

*Travel with their own equipment*

Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) had also suggested that special interest tourists would travel with their own equipment, preferring to rely on equipment that had been tailored to their needs. This behaviour was notable in the Tweed Shire study, where events such as Speed on Tweed attracted participants who brought trailer loads of equipment, cars and support teams to assist them in the competition. From these initial observations, conversations with participants at Wintersun (Ch.4) also revealed the extent of equipment that would accompany them to car rallies and contests.

There was no equipment needed to attend the Elvis Revival Festival – although serious impersonators brought their own costumes.
Very highly skilled individuals

The attainment of skills is a common theme in the special interest tourism literature, (Brotherton and Himmetoglu, 1997; Trauer, 2006) but also is a characteristic of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001). Both fields of literature indicate that individuals will travel in order to develop skills, and seek new challenges. There can be no doubt that the participants observed throughout this study had high levels of skills in very specialised areas. From the skills of driving old cars at high speeds initially observed at Speed on Tweed, to the highly technical moves of rock’n’roll dancers at Wintersun, a range of specialised skills were observed and documented throughout this thesis. Some serious participants at the Elvis festival also exhibited highly developed skills in impersonating Elvis, and in re-creating his costumes and other fashion items.

Wide range of experiences

Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) had suggested that highly specialised tourists, described as fanatics, would have a ‘wide range of experiences in their chosen activity/interest’ (1997, p. 18). The results of this study suggest that this is true of a broader group of special interest tourists than just fanatics. As described in 2.5, serious participants include fans, enthusiasts and serious leisurists, who may not be fanatical in a literal sense. This wider group of serious participants were also observed to have a wide range of experiences. Attending events added to their range of experiences. In the study of events in the Tweed Shire (Ch.2), various specialised audiences had attended other events in the same theme. This was identified at the Tyalgum Classical Music Festival, Speed on Tweed and the Wollumbin Festival, where participants had sought out other experiences which aligned with their leisure interests.

The wide range of experiences sought by serious participants was also identified at Wintersun (Ch.4), where rodders described the circuit of car events which they undertook each year. Similarly, rock’n’roll dancers competed at other events and had gathered experience in the process.

Elvis fans also showed a propensity to travel in order to gain more experiences of Elvis. Serious fans had a wide knowledge of all things connected to Elvis, which they had gathered from books, documentaries and other Elvis
events. The very serious fans had sought out experiences at Graceland to add to the depth of meaningful Elvis experiences.

*Want to travel to ‘non-standard’ destinations*

Many SIT researchers agree that as tourists become more experienced, they move away from an interest in the destination *per se*, and develop a further interest in the alternative destination choices which match their own interests (Weiler & Hall, 1992; Brotherton & Himmetoglu, 1997; Douglas, et al., 2001; Trauer, 2006). The studies of serious participants in this thesis, were all in non-standard destinations. Tweed Shire could be considered a non-standard destination, as a regional destination with little other mass tourist attractions. Parkes is also a highly non-standard destination, especially in the scorching heat of mid-summer. And yet this research has shown that serious participants will travel to an event in non-standard destinations to pursue their interest. Similarly, fans of LOTR demonstrated their interest to travel to the depths of New Zealand to find the original filming locations. As highlighted by a participant at Wintersun, ‘a good dance is worth the time it takes to get there’.

*Individualisation and customisation of travel*

The provision of ‘customised leisure and recreational experiences driven by the specific expressed interest of individuals and groups’ is also suggested as a founding principle of SIT (Douglas et al., 2001; p. xvii). Behaviours relating to customisation were initially observed in the study of Speed on Tweed in the Tweed Shire, where arranging travel for drivers and racing teams to non-standard destinations required customised travel. As previously described, specialised equipment and trailers were transported across the country to the event. Customisation was also found to be necessary at Wintersun, where highly customised cars required specialised services such as trailered transport and secure car parking. Rock’n’roll dancers required highly specialised dance floors. As discussed in later sections (8.3), this presents opportunities for small niche enterprises to capitalise on the needs for customised travel services.
Travel to escape

The mutually supporting bases of tourism and leisure were determined as essential to fully understand the behaviours of serious participants. The results reinforce contentions by other tourism authors (Brotherton & Himmetoglu, 1997, citing Iso-Ahola, 1982, 1983, 1984), who have suggested that,

\[ \text{...the motivation for both leisure participation and tourism travel can be categorised into two broad types: escape from routine and intrinsic experience rewards.} \]


The findings of this thesis stem from this basic tenet, that attendance at a special interest event was motivated both by a desire to seek rewards (e.g. of competition and social interaction) as well as escape (from routine of everyday life). The findings consistently reinforced Iso-Ahola’s suggestion that ‘tourism provides an outlet for avoiding something and for simultaneously seeking something’ (Iso-Ahola, 1982). Serious participants, such as Jack, showed how participation in dance contests at the Wintersun Festival helped him to escape to a time gone-by.

\[ \text{It's a chance to relive the past, that's what its about, and I think everyone gets caught up in it. Just takes you completely away from your present-day lifestyle and takes you back into the past (Ch. 4, p. 123).} \]

Travel to significant places

Consistent with the research by Macionis (2004) and Beeton (2001), serious participants had travelled to, or showed a desire to travel to, destinations (such as Graceland) which are significant to their leisure pursuits. The most fanatical of participants returned there several times. Paper Four highlighted this fact further, identifying the propensity for Elvis fanatics to travel extensively to visit Elvis monuments, events and festivals. Similarly, Paper Five highlighted the importance of the Internet in developing and informing interest for fans to go to places which remind them of LOTR, or were the locations of the films.
Special interest club travel

The studies demonstrated that pursuit of the recreational activity is a dominant motivating factor to travel, and yet other factors were also influential in travel decisions, such as the need for a social context as reinforcement and support for a social identity. These needs were often met in special interest clubs, networks and events. It is therefore suggested that the SerPa model include behaviours that have emerged in Chapters 4-6 to include special interest club travel and special interest event travel to recognise the importance of these social influences.

As highlighted in studies of the Wintersun and Elvis festivals, special interest clubs are highly involved in encouraging travel to events. The establishment of fan clubs, recreational clubs and friend networks, discussed in 7.3.2, lends itself to group travel. Fans and fanatics of Elvis travelled in groups to indulge in a weekend of non-stop Elvis activities. Participants at Wintersun travelled with recreational clubs. In the case of car clubs, runs and shows were organised by different clubs throughout the year, highlighting the cooperation that occurs in wider networks between clubs.

There is a surprising lack of existing research to describe the interactions of recreational group travel; however, this study has identified that special interest group travel is organised through websites, meetings, newsletters and word of mouth. In a few cases, the club organised travel arrangements, but mostly, they act as a conduit through which event organisers can distribute information about the event, accommodation and other important messages.

These findings are consistent with the fan club activities suggested by Lewis (1987) and Murray (2007a), however there is little research on recreational club activities to compare these results to, suggesting a fertile ground for new research.

Special interest event travel

The nine events examined in Paper One highlighted the increasing propensity for audiences to travel to events where there was a program which was specialised and tailored to special interest tourists. Travel to special interest events is significant because it is a ‘one-stop shop’ for serious participants. It
provides a social context to meet like-minded people and ‘feel normal’. Events provide market stalls to fulfil consumer needs, and provide authentic entertainment and atmosphere in a themed environment to fulfil experiential desires. As identified in Ch.4, serious participants are provided with workshops and contests to develop their skills and are offered an accepting and appreciative environment to display their commitment.

It was also found that specialist audiences attend many other events that are based on the same theme. As highlighted in Paper One (Ch.2), the results were surprising, in demonstrating how far, and how frequently some audiences will travel to other similar events. For example, over 60% of the audience at Speed on Tweed reported attending other car events such as the Leyburn Sprints in SE Queensland and the Indy Grand Prix on the Gold Coast, with a small percentage also reporting attending car events in Melbourne and Canberra (over 1000 kilometres from home). A similar result was found for the Wollumbin Festival where over 60% had attended other indigenous/environment-based events. The study has found that for some participants, attendance at regular events was a necessary part of their leisure career.

Summary of consumer, leisure and tourist behaviours

The consumer, leisure and tourist behaviours that have been identified throughout this thesis interact in a complex pattern. As described in the summary of results (7.6), the consumer, leisure and tourist behaviours occur as a consequence of the psycho/social characteristics of serious participants. What is evident from the discussion of these behaviours in the preceding section is firstly, that the choice of leisure interests can have a powerful influence on the consumption of products and travel experiences. Secondly, that consumer, leisure and tourist behaviours are interrelated, so that a choice in one area has flow on effects to behaviours in other areas. As discussed in the Summary of Results (7.6.2), the interrelated behaviours form a reinforcement feedback cycle, ensuring ongoing involvement and commitment in participants’ leisure activities.
To understand the social networks utilised by participants of special interest events

This objective sought to learn more about the structure and relations of social networks used by serious participants. Previous research by Knoke and Kuklinski, (1998) and Bower (1993) had shown the importance of social networks to disseminate information, collaborate and cooperate. These network characteristics were illuminated throughout the studies of this thesis. As a direct result of their social characteristics, the social networks of serious participants were found to be hubs of social activity that resulted in numerous outcomes.

The results from all five studies suggest that special interest social networks existed in the forms of formal recreational clubs, Internet forums and groups, and informal friendship groups, such as those observed throughout the thesis (summarised in Table 13).
Table 13: Types of social networks identified in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of social network</th>
<th>Sub-type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreational clubs</td>
<td>Rock’n’roll clubs</td>
<td>KO Rockers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Car clubs</td>
<td>Chrysler Restorers Club of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The PT Owners Club, Inc. Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monaro Car Clubs of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet forums</td>
<td>Pop culture</td>
<td>Star trek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lord of the rings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elvis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fly fishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal friend groups</td>
<td>Friends connected by SI</td>
<td>Fran’s 60th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The structural and relational characteristics of these networks are influenced by the social characteristics described in 7.2.2. Specifically, that contextual facilitation is found in joining clubs and informal groups, which will reinforce their ideals and provide an established social identity. The time spent engaged in this SI network provides an alternative to real society, providing responsibilities and relationships that rely on trust and reciprocity. The more formal networks are therefore tightly knit (dense), and sometimes hierarchical (high centrality), with a president and established norms of communication.

Throughout the thesis, activities in the social networks were identified which fulfilled many functional purposes. These included:

- Distributing stories of past events from which others can learn,
- Distributing information about upcoming events and finding travel accommodation and travel partners,
- Distributing information about insurance, finance and other technical issues,
- Collaborating to produce art, role play games and photo galleries,
- Planning to formalise event circuits and travel,
- Travel planning to scope who is going and where to meet up,
- Planning and deciding on club activities to invite other clubs.
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Chapter 7 Discussion of the Results

The activities were important to the continued functioning of the network and added to its durability. However, it is important to note that not all serious participants are members of networks, but it the contention of this thesis that at some point, they will need to join in network activities to gain the skills, experience and expertise that they seek as part of their leisure career. The Internet has opened new opportunities for these people, who may not feel comfortable in physical social situations. The Internet has allowed the development of shadow networks which, as shown in Paper 5, provide mirrored opportunities for the social activities offered in the real world of events and club meetings. For some serious participants, the Internet is used as an alternative to physical social networks such as clubs, whereas for others the Internet, as an extension to the social network, has been shown as a method to extend their commitment and activities. This study has shown how the Internet is used to:

- Maintain connections at any time of day and night
- Extend commitment to the pursuit through website duties and responsibilities
- Extend communications to a worldwide audience
- Find like minded individuals that may not exist in a local community
- Change/create identities for role-play, identity play.

Whereas the research in this study is consistent with the majority of previous research demonstrating the characteristics and outcomes of social networks (Knoke, Kuklinski, 1988; Nohria and Eccles, 1992) and virtual communities (Wellman, 1997; Li, 2004), it has also reinforced other alternative results from social network participation in terms of social identity and creative collaboration.

The results have shown that social networks offer opportunities for reinforcement of social identity for its serious participants. Consistent with the ideas of Green and Jones (2005) who suggested that sport tourism events were a way to construct and/or confirm one’s leisure identity, this thesis suggests that SI events are also a place where this could occur. Specifically, SI events offered an opportunity for clubs’ members to feel pride in their clubs as an extension of self, as well as an opportunity to share values such as ‘classic not plastic’.
As stated previously, serious participants use their networks to find out about events, and plan the activities necessary to attend them. Importantly, the role of events has also been identified as a place where networks are strengthened, clubs are showcased and members are recruited.

7.6 Summary of model development

The discussion of results in the previous sections, has summarised the many characteristics and behaviours of the serious participant. In responding to the four research objectives, findings were summarised in relation to their psycho/social characteristics, as well as their consumer, travel and leisure characteristics. The following section synthesises this analysis to present the final model of serious participation at events (SerPa model) (7.6.1), and provides an overall summary of these results (7.6.2). In so doing, a framework is provided for the implications of the study in the following chapter.

7.6.1 The Model of Serious Participation at Events (SerPa)

As described in the introduction to this study (1.6), a framework was developed in the interpretive paradigm, to generate theory from the data, to ‘give order and insight to what is, or can be observed’ (Henderson, 1991). It was designed so as to allow the theory and the data to inform one another, rather than be a definitive model for testing. The framework evolved throughout the research cycle from initial fieldwork conducted in Chapter 2, literature reviewed in Chapter 3, and from data and analysis in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Its final development has occurred as a result of the discussion of results in Section 7.2, which sought to synthesise the characteristics found across the entire thesis. In this process, some characteristics suggested by the literature were discarded, and other new findings were included.

The result in Figure 27, summarises the psycho/social characteristics, as well as the consumer, travel and leisure characteristics found in serious participants in this study. It suggests that, in the context of an event, a combination of certain psycho/social characteristics leads to identifiable behaviours related to consuming, travel and recreation. The implications of the model development are described in Chapter 8.
The model is provided, not as a definitive model ready for testing, but as a framework and reference for future academic research, or for consideration by industry professionals in both tourism and leisure industries.

**Figure 27: Final Model - The serious participant at special interest events**

7.6.2 Summary of results

While the characteristics can be summarised and modelled, it is prudent to remember that analysis does not always provide synthesis (Mintzberg, 1994). Who are serious participants at events?

Serious participants are a segment of an audience attending a special interest event. The enthusiasm, fashion, passion and perseverance of this segment usually make them easy to identify. As participants, they make the event happen, and are perhaps more important than consumers (Getz, 2007). They are defined by what they do in their leisure time, more than who they were born as, or by their profession. They have a leisure identity that defines them.
They can find support and security in the fanatical system that they subscribe to. This system is usually found in special interest clubs, on-line networks and at events. These social systems help sustain their beliefs, and provide a leisure world where they feel a sense of ‘we’. From their serious devotion and social connectivity, serious participants receive social and personal rewards, which in turn provide more stimuli to develop their skills and/or knowledge. These psycho/social characteristics result in participants searching for new challenges and new destinations, which can facilitate their needs. These are often found at events that are designed specifically with serious participants in mind. Serious participants are also reminiscent of fixated consumers searching for products and merchandise that can reinforce their identity, and help them to share their involvement with others.

Just as other descriptors of behaviour are somewhat arbitrary, so too is the seriousness of participation. Similar issues arise when one attempts to describe behaviour as unethical, enthusiastic or frivolous. A judgement on that behaviour is dependent upon your own perception, driven by your values, attitudes and personal biases – as well as the context it is placed. In this sense, it is worth repeating a quote from the first paper, 'one mans fanatic is another’s foursquare saint' (Rudin 1969). However, what this study has shown is that a number of characteristics and behaviours can be used to help identify serious participants. When identified as a segment of larger audiences, they can be targeted for promotions and product development. These types of implications are described in the chapter following.
Chapter Eight – Conclusions
8.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the third stage of the research cycle, shown in Figure 28, which includes the implications of the study (8.2 to 8.4), limitations of the study (8.5) and contributions to knowledge (8.6). Suggestions for further research (8.7) are made from this discussion, and conclusions are drawn (8.8).

**Figure 28: Current stage of the research cycle**

The implications of the study’s findings are considered in this section as related to tourism and travel management and marketing (8.2), leisure management (8.3) and events management in Australia (8.4). The implications discuss what the study may lead to, as a consequence of the results, and provide twelve strategies to improve the effectiveness of event and tourism planning and marketing in Australia. The strategies are intended to inform the policies and projects of the many stakeholders involved in event tourism in Australia, as well as those involved leisure and recreation based organisations. These organisations were discussed previously as comprising the tourist product as described by Hall (1995) in Section 1.3.3, and outlined again in the Significance to the Study (1.8).
8.2 Implications for tourism and travel management and marketing

The analysis of serious participants at events has identified their behaviours as special interest tourists, and consequently identified their specialised travel needs. This presents five major implications for tourism and travel management and marketing, those being: specialised travel needs, special interest tourism planning, tourism market segmentation, planning for tourism and leisure, and cooperative and participatory marketing.

8.2.1 Specialised travel needs

The necessity for tourism operators to respond to the specialised needs of participants at events has been repeatedly highlighted in this thesis. During the ethnographic studies, instances have been conveyed where participants have required specialised venues, accommodation and transport such as dance venues with specialised floor surfaces or accommodation with secure car parking. Alternatively, event organisers have offered specialised products as a service to suit audience needs such as specialised trains for transport. Importantly, it should be noted that the provision of the aforementioned specialised services - accommodation, transport and dance venues - comes from the surrounding tourism industries, as well as from the event itself. It is therefore useful for tourism managers to take a market systems approach, such as that proposed by Hall (1995) (Section 1.3.3), which allows them to envisage all organisations necessary to create a successful experience for specialised participants.

The focus of this thesis has been the event tourist experience, where the motivations, preferences and expectations of participants met the industry (Hall, 1995). The industry (or industries) in this thesis has included many of the elements of the ‘tourist product’ in Hall’s market system (see Figure 29) – and as such the study has implications for all those within it.
The thesis provides positive examples, or cases, where regional destinations, such as Parkes and the Tweed Shire, have cooperated with local communities and special interest groups to create special interest events, and have provided for the specialised needs of participants. These cases may be useful for other regions considering the development of new events. The cases demonstrate why it is important to plan and manage the industries’ response to its consumers. As identified by Hall (1995), this response has a direct impact on the long-term sustainability of an event. In this thesis, the ability of event organisers to respond appropriately to the needs of serious participants has already had an impact on participants’ decisions to return and to promote the event in their own circles. The results of this study are consistent with Hall’s
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suggestion that a positive connection and experience between the tourists and the tourism industry promotes sustainability. The Elvis event’s 13 year and the Wintersun’s 11 year development support this contention. Consequently, these implications form the first of the twelve suggested strategies:

**STRATEGY ONE: PLAN AND MANAGE A COMPREHENSIVE MULTI-INDUSTRY RESPONSE TO SPECIAL INTEREST EVENT PARTICIPANTS**

8.2.2 Special interest tourism planning

The second of the two implications for tourism management and marketing relates to the distinctive behaviours and characteristics of serious participants as a type of special interest tourist. This conceptualisation provides opportunities to adapt the SIT spectrum proposed by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) to further understand the differences in tourists’ characteristics and behaviours. It had been noted previously, that special interest tourists have been treated as homogenous (1.3.3), with little planning to discover differences in the characteristics and needs of various participants. This type of strategy may be best suited to Federal and state governments where initiatives such as the *Tourism White Paper (2004)* are created to correctly identify tourist markets, and opportunities to develop tourism in various regions in Australia. Failure to correctly identify market segments at this level can have dramatic flow on effects to the state and local governments, and to the tourism businesses that rely on the accuracy of segmentation data. This leads to the next suggested strategy:

**STRATEGY TWO: THE SPECIAL INTEREST SPECTRUM MAY BE USED AS A BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOURS OF SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISTS.**

The spectrum can be used as a tool for planning and policy development, as described above. However it also may be used as a marketing tool, for purposes of segmentation, described below.

8.2.3 Tourist market segmentation

The importance of segmenting tourist markets cannot be understated. Segmenting what appears to be a similar group of tourists into discrete segments assists tourism managers (such as local government tourist officers
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and RTO directors) to respond to the needs of tourists, heighten their experience and maintain sustainability (Hall, 1995). Segmentation assists the industry to define and understand the market.

As demonstrated in this thesis, the special interest spectrum may be utilised as the basis of SIT segmentation, to understand the differences in audiences at special interest events. The study of the Elvis Festival demonstrated the differing profiles of the audience and how those market segments require different responses to devising product and promotional strategies. Paper Four (5.4) demonstrated behavioural differences between four segments (social, dabbler, fan and fanatic), where behaviours at the Elvis Revival Festival were related to levels of fandom, social identity and the emotional attachment to Elvis Presley. It also demonstrated the widely differing needs and expectations between those who are fans of Elvis Presley, and those who are looking for musical and social entertainment.

The important implication of these findings was in determining the differing strategies required for product and marketing development, but also in gaining a deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of this somewhat specialised audience.

The knowledge from this implication has informed the development of the next tourism strategy.

**Strategy Three: A special interest spectrum may be used as a basis for segmenting tourist markets.**

While this thesis has demonstrated the utility of market segmentation at one event, it has much wider implications for the way that SIT markets are perceived in Australia. The Federal Government’s *Tourism White Paper* (2004) suggested niche markets (or SIT markets) are developed as a way to encourage long-term economic growth, especially in regional areas in Australia. It identified niches as being in a non-exhaustive list which includes caravan and camping, cruise tourism and cycle tourism, to name a few. Tourism marketing organisations, such as Tourism Australia, promote niche tourism as a marketing strategy, which aims to attract high yield tourists, and yet these strategies often assume niche markets to be homogenous groups. This thesis has contributed to other academic studies (McKercher, 2002; Ritchie, Mosedale, & King, 2000),
which have demonstrated the very different needs and demands of SIT tourists in one niche. It is in the interest of these marketing organisations to fully understand the range of behaviours and characteristics in one niche, and create appropriate marketing strategies.

At a state level, Tourism Tasmania has demonstrated this understanding with a special interest tourist program which seeks to research and target niche markets. The program offers funding to special interest groups to hold their events in Tasmania. Further, it has developed an events strategy targeted to special interest tourists that also carefully matches their branding strategies (www.eventstasmania.com/grantprograms).

As discussed in the results, serious participants showed a propensity to travel to significant destinations relevant to their pursuit. Elvis fans wanted to go to Graceland, Lord of the Rings fans wanted to go to New Zealand. Greater understanding of SIT segments allows tourism marketers to work in partnership with events to respond to the needs of tourists, heighten their experience and provide the products and services they are looking for.

8.2.4 Planning for tourism and leisure - a mutual approach

Importantly, as shown in Section 7.2.3, this thesis has identified the mutually supporting foundations of both recreation and tourism to special interest tourists’ experiences. This suggests that tourism and recreation agencies would benefit from working in partnership to manage the needs of these travellers. Despite the practical links found in this thesis between recreation and tourism, it is surprising to find a fragmented approach to strategic planning, promotion and legislation in state and Federal Australian governments. Previous research by Stokes (2004) and Whitford (2004) has identified gaps in planning for event strategies, where a lack of coordination between government authorities results in an uncoordinated approach, duplication of effort and misplaced responsibilities.

In 2006, initiatives were undertaken by Federal Government for recreation, arts and cultural agencies to work in partnership to promote and provide for the needs of participants at events. The Culture and Recreational Portal recognises the links between festivals, arts, and recreation
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(www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au). The portal allows access to other websites which promote events and activities in these areas, and lists tourist festivals as an area of interest. Similar efforts by the NSW Government allow access to a range of information on culture, recreation and some tourism enterprises, such as accommodation. Thus strategies are often made to promote events, or to promote recreation opportunities; however there are few links made between the two in areas of planning and legislation. Planning often remains confined to one field, such as recreation, neglecting the opportunities to integrate events. Planning for the types of events studied in this thesis remains fragmented, with research and strategy development confined to isolated government departments.

At state and local government level these cooperative strategies are not well implemented with the division of departments often separating the responsibilities of tourism and recreation. This results in situations where festival funding is mostly available from tourism agencies, where festival coordinators must prove its value as ‘a tourist event’ without regard to its recreational or community value.

For example in NSW, the Department of Tourism is separate to the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation (DASR), and yet only one of these agencies is responsible for implementing plans to encourage more people to use parks, sporting and recreational facilities and participating in the arts and cultural activity (see: www.arts.nsw.gov.au/AboutUs/PoliciesDocuments/TheStatePlan Theme E).

The implications of these divisions within government are for reduced efficiencies in planning, implementation and resourcing of recreational based tourism, and leads to the fourth proposed tourism strategy.

**STRATEGY FOUR: ENCOURAGE MUTUAL PLANNING BETWEEN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST AND RECREATIONAL EVENTS.**

In developing mutual planning and marketing strategies for tourism and leisure, governments can learn more from successes in other industries, such as media and entertainment, as described below.
8.2.5 Cooperative and participatory marketing

The findings in this thesis (Section 7.2.3) have highlighted the propensity for tourists to travel as an expression of their fandom, both to events and film-based destinations. These findings support previous research by Macionis (2004) and Beeton (2005) and similarly suggest that event managers, and the wider tourism industry can leverage that interest into attracting special interest tourists to destinations.

A further implication was discovered which relates to fans’ willingness to design and create images, texts and conceptual ideas which could form the basis of event and destination design. The lessons learned from film production company, New Line Productions, in incorporating fans’ ideas into new production material, and in creating a strategy of collaboration (Murray, 2004) may well be highly relevant to those marketing SIT and SI events.

Similarly, tourism marketers may wish to embrace fans’ willingness to share information and assist in publicising new events, destinations and merchandise. In effect, they can harness the enthusiasm, energy and intensity with which fans create and develop ideas related to their pursuit.

Design competitions, such as photographic or art contests, may attract fans and fanatics to create images that can be used in marketing campaigns, merchandise and other image based marketing and help develop the relationship between events and consumers.

As suggested by Murray (2004), the participants themselves should be seen as savvy targeted segments that can contribute to the promotion of the product. The power of their expertise and knowledge of the product should not be underestimated or under-utilised. This knowledge informs the development of the fifth tourism strategy.

**STRATEGY FIVE: TO CREATE A STRATEGY OF COLLABORATION WITH FANS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT SIT TOURIST EXPERIENCES.**

Collaborating with fans is one way in which event managers and marketers can develop and promote events based tourism. However, cooperation with other private organisations and recreational networks can also assist in providing resources to attract tourists to events.
8.3 Implications for leisure policy and planning

The examination of participants at events has highlighted the range and diversity of leisure interests which people pursue in Australia, as well as the range in skills and commitment in those pursuits. The thesis has focussed on a small segment of the population who actively and seriously engage in leisure and recreation activities, and has identified the psycho/social characteristics of serious participants that led to certain leisure behaviours. The implications of those results are now considered in relation to leisure policy and planning. Two major implications for leisure planning are discussed, firstly, the facilitation of active participation in recreation, and secondly the development of cooperative strategies with recreational organisations to promote active participation.

8.3.1 The encouragement of active participation in recreation

Policies in Australian Federal and state governments suggest that participation in leisure is a desirable activity for personal and community wellbeing (Wills, 2001). Accordingly, recreation is promoted and developed through an array of strategies and grant programs. However, as discussed in the background to this study (1.2.2), study of participation in leisure in Australia is made difficult by a lack of reliable data (Veal, 2005). No one really knows how or why people participate in their chosen recreational pursuits, or the effect it has on society as a whole. The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of how events encourage active recreational participation, providing examples where:

- Car enthusiasts showcased their cars to dabblers who were encouraged to begin the hobby,
- Car enthusiasts joined in rallies and parades to celebrate their social identity,
- Participants in contests gained encouragement from spectators to continue their leisure career,
- Dance participants progressed from dabbler to fanatic as they learned and tested new skills at contests,
• Elvis fans shared their passion for Elvis, and encouraged others to enjoy his music and films.
• Members of clubs encouraged new memberships to begin their leisure career.

As such, the development of recreational events can have a positive impact for both new and experienced recreationalists. The results concur with those of Stebbins (2001) to suggest that the willingness to commit to a leisure pursuit with increased and sometimes excessive enthusiasm can have many positive implications. Numerous positive benefits for the wellbeing of the individual and the wider community are possible from increased active participation in recreational activities.

Consequently, the encouragement of serious participation aligns with many of the objectives of Australian governments to encourage, greater participation in recreational activities, and to promote health and wellbeing. As such, encouraging active participation in games/hobbies/arts/crafts by 17% of Australians (ABS, 2006), may be seen as a better alternative than the main leisure activity of watching television. This discussion informs the first of the leisure-based strategies.

**Strategy six: To encourage the development of active participation in recreational activities through the support of recreational events.**

A central aim of this thesis has been the exploration of the psycho/social characteristics that drive serious participation at events. The results indicate that the passionate and, at times, fanatical tendencies of participants make them prone to join clubs, Internet websites and networks, which help sustain their beliefs and interests. The implications of these findings rest in the suggestion that leisure and tourism organisations can support, cooperate and form partnerships with these groups. As an example, the travel company, ‘The Fanatics’ (www.thefanatics.com), describe their charter as being, ‘to form an organised, passionate and patriotic support group that would follow Australian sport at home and around the world’. Cooperation with this type of organisation provides direct access to the participants desired at destinations and events to
promote and support the development of recreational events and experiences. Examples of potential private organisations are provided in Table 14.

Table 14: Examples of organisations targeting serious participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of organisations</th>
<th>Business name</th>
<th>website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Businesses</td>
<td>Fishing Tackle Shop</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fishingfanatics.ca">http://www.fishingfanatics.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fanatic Snowboards</td>
<td><a href="http://www.boardsportsource.com">http://www.boardsportsource.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Fishing fanatics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fishingfanatics.net">http://www.fishingfanatics.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NASCAR fanatics</td>
<td><a href="http://nascarfanatic.net/">http://nascarfanatic.net/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Windsurfing fanatics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fanatic.com">www.fanatic.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bowling fanatics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rap music</td>
<td><a href="http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/a-bowling-fanatic">http://sports.groups.yahoo.com/group/a-bowling-fanatic</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.rapfanatic.com">http://www.rapfanatic.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These businesses have been able to take advantage of the identifiable characteristics and behaviours of serious participants in sport, recreation and events. They offer excellent opportunities for governments and event managers to engage in cooperative marketing strategies to develop new and existing recreational events. As such, they inform the development of the next leisure based strategy.

**Strategy Seven: To create cooperative strategies with recreational organisations to promote active participation in leisure experiences.**

**8.4 Implications for event management and marketing in Australia**

The examination of serious participants at events recognises unique aspects to the events themselves. The discussion of the results repeatedly acknowledged the fact that special interest events need to be tailored to the specialised needs of the audience. This has several implications for event management. The implications discussed here include the development of an interest based event
spectrum, new events, the event circuit, relationship marketing and cooperative marketing strategies.

8.4.1 Developing an interest based event spectrum

This study has repeatedly shown that events can be visualised on a spectrum of interest and, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, using the same survey instrument at numerous events allows comparison of data, and the placement of events on a spectrum. Opportunities exist to adapt the SIT spectrum proposed by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) to further illustrate differences in events, in terms of the interests of their audiences. From this process, implications and opportunities arise for both local government and regional tourism organisations (RTO’s) to achieve the following:

- Compare the value of events in attracting differing audiences,
- Identify community and tourist events on a spectrum of interest,
- Identify the special interest events which attract more tourists,
- Plan and develop destination brand through the development of SI events, which reinforce the image of the destination (see Chalip & Costa 2005),
- Plan and develop a calendar of events, where the timing of tourist events coincides with times of the year when tourist numbers are low.

While the study applied the spectrum at a regional level, the concept may also be useful to state and Federal governments to understand the differences between community and tourism events and may assist to inform funding and resource allocation. These implications inform the development of the next event strategy.

| STRATEGY EIGHT: UTILISE A SPECTRUM OF INTEREST TO CONCEPTUALISE THE DIVERSITY OF EVENTS IN A REGIONAL DESTINATION |

8.4.2 The development of new events

In Australia, events emerge from communities themselves, or are assisted in development by local, state and Federal governments. The findings of this study suggest that events can be created to specifically target leisure enthusiasts and fanatics. The events should be specialised, and attract audiences with a very targeted special interest. This study has identified many which currently exist in
Australia. However, there is great scope to develop more festivals, especially in rural areas of Australia in need of economic rejuvenation.

So what are the likely new festivals and how can they be designed? Examples of successful special interest events can be found elsewhere in the world and used as a basis for designing a similar event in Australia, including the Kansas International Photo Festival, Texas Birding Festival and other fan-based events such as the Star Wars EXPO.

Governments at all levels can utilise the results of this study to assist local communities in developing new events, albeit with a sustainable approach which ensures the best fit for the host community and the specialised tourists. The results of this study have pointed to eleven ways in which this may be successfully achieved:

i) Consultation – Experiences at both the Elvis and Wintersun festivals, and discussion with event organisers in the Tweed Shire suggest that wide consultation is required both within the local community and within the special interest community. Success is achieved when there is support from both locals (as volunteers, hosts, service providers and spectators) and participants (as visitors and main attractions).

ii) Use recreational interests of locals as a basis for theming the event – While there is no need for a long or deep historical connection with the recreational theme of the event, the passions of a group of locals are needed to drive the success of the event. A small group of local fanatics can be assisted by a wider community to make a special interest event successful. If there is no local basis of interest, it is unlikely that an imposed theme will be sustainable.

iii) Wide network of input from beyond the community – Many SI events have very similar events overseas, which can be used for modelling strategies such as event activities, theming, planning and risk management. For example, much of the design and planning of the Speed on Tweed event was based on the Goodwood Races in the UK.

iv) Encourage special interest groups to be involved in planning – The sustained evolution of the Wintersun Festival has been due in part to the inclusion of special interest groups in the management
committee. This ensures the very specialised needs of participants are planned for and acted on.

v) Design authentic elements for fanatics – The inclusion of special interest groups in planning will also ensure that the authentic elements are included which serious participants demand, such as merchandise, contest areas and workshops.

vi) Design introductory elements for dabblers – The inclusion of beginners workshops or entry level activities allows those who have a passing interest in an activity to try it out, under the guidance of the experts and fanatics at the event.

vii) Design social elements for locals – Locals become important as spectators and, as such, require different elements to the participants. Elements that encourage social activity for locals include adequate quantity and quality of food and beverages, amenities, open public spaces and seating for gatherings and timely information on activities.

viii) Target existing networks of special interest groups from the Internet. Serious participants have their own virtual communities, which can be leveraged to assist in the design and promotion of the event (care is needed in approaching these networks where intruders and spammers are not welcome).

ix) Encourage an un-wavering understanding that the participants are the ones who make the event a success – They may be dogmatic and intense to deal with, but they are the crucial factor.

x) Responding to participants’ specialised needs will result in satisfaction and loyal patronage in future events - Where special interest participants have specialised needs, an open line of contact is needed to someone who can fix the problems quickly.

xi) Design feedback systems for gathering information on the satisfaction of those with specialised needs - added attention will assist in their willingness to promote the event within their networks.

The knowledge from these implications has informed the development of the first event management strategy.
STRATEGY NINE: DEVELOP NEW SPECIAL INTEREST EVENTS USING THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND WISHES OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND SIT GROUPS

8.4.3 Developing and leveraging the event circuit

The study has identified trends for serious participants to attend a circuit of events in a year, travelling to several events around Australia to compete (or spectate) in recreational events. Knowledge of this trend suggests a number of implications and opportunities for event marketers to respond to the needs of serious participants and to leverage the opportunities the event circuit offers. It also presents important opportunities for RTO’s to promote tourism destinations around the upcoming event. These two opportunities are described below.

The existence of an event circuit allows event managers and marketers to schedule yearly activities, which will entice participants to their event. Specifically, event managers may develop:

- Pre-event promotion, using the site (and or the program) of one event to promote their own up-coming event.
- Circuit tickets –which includes pre-paid entry to several events in one year.
- Merchandising opportunities on hats, T-shirts stickers etc., which feature more than one event.
- Pre-registration for the next event - allowing event managers to collect funds earlier and expedite the participant registration process.

Cooperative marketing across multiple events may also provide efficiencies in reducing costs, such as insurance and printing, as well as provide other marketing opportunities. Furthermore, it may provide an opportunity for circuit branding, to develop a brand for the yearly circuit, enticing serious participants to be part of all the year’s events. While there is a great likelihood that serious participants will travel to the next event in the circuit, targeted marketing strategies can ensure this occurs, and may include for example:

- Rewards for completing all events in one year, e.g. Gold membership.
- Championship event that lasts all year.
Participants in Special Interest Events

Chapter 8 Implications

Joanne Mackellar

- VIP privileges for circuit participants.

Participating in an event circuit provides excellent opportunities for participants and event managers; however opportunities for the surrounding tourism industries may also be developed. The results of this study indicate that a percentage of serious participants who attend car enthusiast (rodder) events, will travel to the next event, thus providing opportunities to secure bookings and extend the stay and yield of visitors. Examples of promotional tactics to achieve this may include:

- Placement of destination promotion materials at the event,
- Extension of activities beyond the event,
- Packages for accommodation and tours,
- Value/discount books of tours, restaurants and other attractions,
- In addition, the images captured at these events can be used to attract participants.

**Strategy Ten: Event and Tourism Managers Can Leverage Benefits and Opportunities from Recreational Event Circuits**

Targeting participants who may be involved in the event circuit may be best achieved through relationship marketing, as described below.

8.4.4 Relationship marketing

The use of relationship marketing is particularly relevant for serious participants who enjoy developing a relationship with an event, and intend on returning. Relationship marketing can be described as:

*An integrated effort to identify, maintain and build up a network with individual customers and continuously to strengthen the network for the mutual benefit of both sides, through interactive, individualised and value added contacts over a long period of time.* (Shani & Chalasani, 1993, p.59)

The results from the study in the Tweed Shire suggested that the intention to return to SI events was higher than to GI events. So what can be done to turn this intention into purchase? SI event organisers currently use more targeted means of marketing to SI groups, such as advertisements in special interest magazines, personal communications with clubs and associations and contact via the Internet with SI websites. This type of marketing can be developed...
further to be more personalised with participants who have an on-going interest in one event. As suggested by Morgan and Hunt (1994), relationship marketing requires relationship trust and commitment. Serious participants who repeatedly attend events such as Wintersun and the Elvis Revival Festival have been shown to have a commitment to their hobby, their clubs and the event itself. The implications of these findings suggest that relationship marketing methods would be suited to segments of the audience, and may include activities such as:

- Event newsletters sent throughout the year;
- Personal invitations to certain activities at the event;
- Emails advising of updates and developments on websites.

The value of this type of marketing is already acknowledged by the Elvis Revival Festival with the implementation of their Elvis Festival Fanatics program, which keeps members informed of festival announcements and news (see Appendix 3). The implications of implementing relationship marketing programs for special interest events inform the development of the events strategy;

**STRATEGY ELEVEN: DEVELOP RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PROGRAMS WITH TARGETED SEGMENTS OF SPECIAL INTEREST EVENTS.**

As described below, relationship marketing can be implemented in cooperation with other organisations such as sponsors.

### 8.4.5 Cooperative marketing

Throughout this study, small niche enterprises have been identified as capitalising on the highly identifiable characteristics of serious participants at events. While many businesses are small organisations, others have grown as a result of their acknowledgement of these segments.

As an example, Shannons Insurance has created a business strategy to focus on providing insurance to motoring enthusiasts. They claim to provide insurance from enthusiasts, to enthusiasts, with their slogan: ‘Share the
Passion’. They sponsor and promote their business at motoring events as major part of their branding strategy.

The characteristics and behaviours of serious participants identified in this study, provide opportunities for event managers to;

- Work in cooperation with private enterprise to develop products and services for events,
- Engage private enterprise as sponsors for special interest events,
- Share costs and resources in the development of marketing images and resources.

These implications and opportunities inform the development of the third event management strategy

**Work in cooperation with niche enterprises who share an interest in serious participants at events.**

### 8.4.6 Summary of implications and strategies

The discussion provided in the preceding sections (8.1 to 8.4) has identified the implications of the findings of the thesis as related to tourism management and marketing, leisure management and events management in Australia. Subsequently, twelve strategies have been suggested to improve the effectiveness of event, leisure and tourism planning and marketing in Australia. The discussion of the implications shows that serious participants form a targetable and viable segment of event audiences, that can be leveraged by event, tourism and private organisations to increase and heighten participant experiences. Many of the strategies also highlight the cooperation and collaboration required between tourism, leisure and event managers to respond to the opportunities available. Moreover, an important inclusion in collaborative strategies is the serious participants themselves who can contribute to event planning and promotion as well as participation.

Serious participants are highly likely to be members of clubs, Internet forums and other networks, referred to collectively here as serious participant networks (SPN). Finally, as reinforced by Hall (1995), the host community
should also be involved in the development of tourism, events, or recreational plans to create a sustainable experience for both visitors and hosts.
### Table 15: Summary of strategies for tourism, leisure and event organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy area</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Organisations Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
<td>Plan and manage a comprehensive industry response to special interest event participants</td>
<td>Tourism industries, Event organisers, Federal, state and local govt., SPN*, Host communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A special interest spectrum may be used as a basis for understanding behaviours of special interest tourists.</td>
<td>Tourism Australia, Federal &amp; state govt., Event managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A special interest spectrum may be used as a basis of segmenting tourist markets.</td>
<td>Tourism industries, Event organisers, Federal, state and local govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage mutual planning between government departments to support the development of tourist and recreational events</td>
<td>Federal, state and local govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To create a strategy of collaboration with fans to develop and implement SIT tourist experiences.</td>
<td>Local governments, RTO, SPN, Event managers, Host communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leisure</strong></td>
<td>To encourage the development of active participation in recreational activities through the support of recreational events.</td>
<td>Federal, state and local govt., RTO, SPN, Host communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To create cooperative strategies with leisure based organisations to develop and implement SIT tourist experiences.</td>
<td>Local governments, RTO, SPN, Event managers, Host communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Event management</strong></td>
<td>Utilise a spectrum of interest to conceptualise the diversity of events in a regional destination</td>
<td>Federal, state and local govt., Event managers, RTO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop new special interest events using the skills, knowledge and wishes of the local community and SIT groups</td>
<td>Local governments, Event managers, SPN, RTO, Host community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event and tourism managers can leverage benefits and opportunities from recreational event circuits</td>
<td>Event managers, RTO, SPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop relationship marketing programs with targeted segments of special interest events.</td>
<td>Event managers, SPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work in cooperation with niche enterprises that share an interest in serious participants at events.</td>
<td>Event managers, SPN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(SPN) serious participant networks – see above for explanation*

*(RTO) – regional tourism organisation*
8.5 Limitations of the study

There are some noted limitations to the study. The first limitation is inherent within a qualitative research approach, where qualitative research is, by design, limited in its generalisability. As such, recommendations that stretch beyond the event itself are to be taken with some grain of caution. In this study, for example, the market segmentation proposed in Paper 4 (Chapter 5), should only be used for that festival. It could not be generalised to all special interest festivals. It does, however, suggest that these groupings could be considered as likely segments for other festivals, as a point of comparison. Implications and strategies for changing government policy, for example, should note this limitation of the research design.

Having said this, the combined results suggest that special interest audiences range on a spectrum, as suggested originally by Brotherton and Himmetoglu (1997) from dabblerst o fanatics, with various sizes of segments in that spectrum. The combined results also reinforce many of the findings of Stebbins (1992, 2001) in relation to the characteristics of serious leisure.

The second limitation of the study relates to the geographical location of the study. The participants were studies in Australia, and are influenced by the cultural setting in which the events take place. Consequently, the study is limited to the western paradigm in which the study was conducted, as recognised in the early stages of the study Section 1.3. The commercialisation of figures of popular culture, such as Elvis Presley, occurs mainly in the western world, as does the capacity to devote time and money to his following. The findings of the study are, therefore, related to those parts of the world in which participation in fandom and recreation are possible.

Temporal limitations should also be acknowledged, as the study has taken snapshots of events, and behaviours of participants at a particular point in time. While there is evidence that these behaviours have existed over a number of years, the approach of this study has not included longitudinal methods, and does not contend that these behaviours will continue in perpetuity.
8.6 Contribution to knowledge

This thesis has made a substantial and innovative contribution to knowledge, demonstrating abilities to critically assess the present state of knowledge and to extend and advance that knowledge. Key contributions have been made in the areas of methodology and academic literature, as discussed in detail below.

8.6.1 Contribution to the development of research methodology

The thesis has demonstrated innovative use of methods to extend the knowledge about audiences and their participation at events. Whereas in previous event studies, methods have been primarily quantitative, this thesis has discovered more about event participants through the use of mixed methods. Ethnographic studies in Chapters 4 and 5 have provided an inductive view from within festivals to discover more about the psycho/social characteristics and behaviours of event participants.

The use of participant observation provided a method that was unobtrusive to the flow of the event, and yet enabled observations and discussions with participants. The discussions took place as participants were actively participating, providing real-time examination of behaviours. These methods helped overcome some of the known challenges of event research as described by Smith (2004).

The method was also used as a basis of behavioural segmentation at events. As noted in Chapter 5, behavioural observation had not been used as a basis of segmentation before, thus contributing to knowledge of segmentation techniques.

Finally, participant observation was applied to an on-line community, as an unobtrusive method of observing interactions of a virtual community. The study demonstrated how this innovative technique could be used to discover more about the social relations between members, and the use of forums to engage travel behaviour.

Cumulatively, the development of these methods under different research environments has demonstrated an ability to conceive original ideas, and to further their investigation with an increasing independence.
8.6.2 Theoretical contributions

Contributions to the literature were made throughout the thesis, through the publication of peer reviewed papers in internationally recognised academic journals. The papers were published in the fields of tourism, events and leisure, reflecting the interrelationships between the three fields – also highlighted throughout this thesis. Individually, the papers demonstrate an awareness and understanding of literature relevant to the focus in each study, as well as to the topic as a whole. The development of research from that literature demonstrates the capacity to make considered judgements about the behaviours of participants at that event.

Specifically, each paper made the following contributions:

Chapter 2 - Special interest events in a regional destination – exploring differences between specialist and generalist events

The paper provided new data to suggest that event audiences can be placed on a spectrum of interest, in the same manner as special interest tourists. This was a new contribution to both the tourism and events literature. The study also suggested that a spectrum of events can explain the diversity of events found in a regional destination. This too, was a new contribution to the pool of knowledge developed by event researchers.

Chapter 3 - Fanatics, fans or just good fun? Travel behaviours and motivations of the fanatic

Chapter 3 provided a conceptual paper, and model as a framework for the thesis. The paper was accepted as a contribution to knowledge in the field of tourism and events, as it drew together and synthesised concepts about tourists who participate in recreational activities at a fanatical level. The term ‘leisure fanatic’ was used for the first time in the academic literature as a way to synthesise the concepts.

Chapter 4 – An examination of participants at the Wintersun Festival

The paper examined the concepts of serious leisure previously proposed by Stebbins (2001). The research extended the knowledge of the theory through presentation of new research into the roles of events in serious leisure, and
travel behaviours of serious leisure participants. The paper proposed nine domains (or themes) to describe serious participant behaviour, contributing to the literature on serious leisure (Stebbins, 2001). Other contributions were made toward event research to explain how the event itself offered a context for recreational growth and progression and consumer behaviour.

*Chapter 5 - Dabblers, fans and fanatics; exploring segments at the Elvis Revival Festival*

This paper extended the previous research of Chapters 2, 3 and 4, by utilising the concepts of a spectrum of interest, as a basis of segmentation of an event audience. In this way, the paper contributed to knowledge of event audiences, and their consumer and travel behaviours. However, knowledge has also been generated in the methods in which marketing strategies could be devised (see below).

*Chapter 6 - The structure and relations of virtual fan communities – Lord of the Rings*

The paper presented in Chapter 6 made contributions to travel and event researchers’ understanding of how the Internet is used to make travel decisions. While previous literature pointed to specific travel sites, this paper introduced the idea that communities of interest also provided forums where travel decisions are made. The study thus contributed to the literature on consumer behaviour related to travel.

In summary, each paper has made individual contributions to knowledge in tourism management and marketing, event management, marketing and planning and consumer behaviour. The papers have updated and advanced knowledge in the interrelated fields of tourism, events, leisure, consumer behaviour and fandom, identified and discussed in the background to the study in Chapter 1. As such, their combined contribution demonstrates the interrelatedness of the fields of study, and the mutually supporting nature of the theories.

The combined knowledge also makes a contribution to the wider understanding of participation at events. The combination of results, and the SerPa model presented in Chapter 7, provide evidence of the shared
psycho/social characteristics of serious participants, and conveys new
understandings of the likely behaviours of serious participants at events.

The results of the study contribute to our understanding of the differences
between audiences at events. However they also present new opportunities for
further research into event audiences.

8.6.3 Contributions to tourism, events and leisure planning

As identified in the study's methodology, professional influences of the author,
have promoted a utility of output, which suggests that contributions to tourism,
events and leisure planning have been made. Specifically, the research
conducted in Chapter Two has contributed to the development of the Tweed
Shire Events Strategy. The research provided direction for future event
planning, based upon the spectrum of events found in the Shire, and the
consideration of the values that each event provided.

Research conducted in Chapter Three provided the basis for a workshop at
the Events Xchange in Tasmania, which contributed to the basis of knowledge
from which policies and programs are developed in that state.

As highlighted in the summary of strategies in Table 15, the research in
this thesis has led to the development of twelve strategies designed to guide the
planning and development of special interest events in Australia. It is hoped
that identification of the characteristics and behaviours of serious participants
may contribute to the development of planning and management policies in
local state and Federal governments.

8.7 Suggestions for further research

As suggested by Spradley (1980), suggestions for further research are formed
from the knowledge and synthesis of results, and form the final stage of the
research cycle.
Investigations can continue the research process toward understanding participation at the nexus that is formed between leisure, tourism and events. Specifically, research can assist our knowledge and understanding in the following fields.

### 8.7.1 Tourism research

This study has emphasised travel to be a significant need and characteristic of serious participants. Further research can help to identify a range of influencing factors in the decision making processes of participants. The inductive research process used in this thesis has identified psycho/social characteristics of serious participants, and the influence of these on travel. These may be used as the basis of designing quantitative studies to examine the trends of serious participation in recreational travel in Australia.

Tourism researchers may benefit from studies, which examine behaviours of other segments, such as dabblers, or those identified by Stebbins as casual leisurists (2001). These may make useful contributions to understanding travel behaviour in Australia.

The focus of this study has been from the demand side, establishing the needs and motivations of participants. Tourism managers and other stakeholders would also benefit from research which examines the supply side;
examining the reactions and responses of communities and local industries that host special interest events, such as the Wintersun and Elvis Revival Festivals.

The growing number of studies in special interest tourism may benefit from using the psycho/social characteristics described in this study as a basis to explore other aspects of travel behaviour such as expenditure, and group travel. Advances can be made through the combination of research into recreational travel with special interest tourism, to establish a more exact range of psycho/social variables from which tourism studies can take place. In particular the lack of research into special interest club travel warrants further attention.

8.7.2 Leisure research

Whilst this study has continued the process of examining serious participation in leisure, other questions remain unanswered which relate to their psycho/social make-up. What stops the activities of a serious participant? Does their passion for a pursuit fade over time? Does it transfer to other pursuits when all 800 star trek dolls have been collected? Is there social pressure for their enthusiasm not to fade?

This study identified over 100 rock’n’roll dance clubs in eastern Australia alone. This is an area of high recreation activity, which seems to receive no research attention at all for its contribution to the recreational wellbeing of many Australians.

This study has highlighted the importance of research that seeks to understand leisure choice in order to understand event choice. Given the diversity and multitude of recreational clubs in Australia, it is surprising that there is little research undertaken on the clubs themselves to establish their role as facilitators of recreation and event attendance.

The focus of this research has determined the characteristics and behavioural outcomes of participants, continuing to broaden the focus of recreational studies, from purely describing the motivations of participants. A focus on behavioural outcomes has then assisted in determining useful strategies for managing behaviours, and suggests this as a approach for future research.
The nature of serious participation, as described in this thesis, suggests that further research can be undertaken to explore the psychological and social characteristics in various contexts. The development of the SerPa model identified characteristics, and explored the manifestations of those characteristics in tourist, recreational and consumer behaviours at events. It is possible, however to examine other contexts in which serious participation occurs, such as recreational clubs and the Internet. Other studies may also focus upon the contribution of serious participants to the cultural life and identity of Australians.

8.7.3 Event research

Academic studies into events, such as festivals, remain a lightly researched field, with studies into participants very scant. While this thesis has made some inroads to understanding the participant at events, there remains great scope for researchers to explore the many sides of participation at an event, as suggested by Getz (2007):

To understanding [sic] participants’ experiences requires knowledge of their motives, expectations, activities, emotions and cognitive processes in the specific context of the event ... participants are typically looking for mastery through meeting challenges, learning opportunities and sub-cultural identity or communitas. (Getz 2007, p.193)

This thesis has demonstrated the efficacy of employing a variety of methods to capture new information about participants and spectators. The differing techniques used in the mixed-method approach provide a range of useful data on participants’ experiences. Specifically the following methods would be recommended for future research.

The spectrum of interest developed in Chapter 2 may be used by other regional destinations, seeking to understand the diversity and value of the events in one region. The mixing of surveys and interviews provided useful results which may be replicated in other regions in Australia. Such replication would be a useful comparison of data, but also a useful tool for local and state governments to assess the true value of events to communities.
Participants in Special Interest Events

The use of participant observation was particularly useful for event studies, in Chapters 4 and 5, as an unobtrusive way to understand the cultural scene of the event. As a method, it is highly recommended where research seeks to understand how or why things are occurring within audiences.

The behavioural observation method of segmentation, successfully used in Chapter 5, suggests a reliable method to segment audiences and develop marketing and management strategies.

According to Getz (2000, p.10), event research remains an immature field of study, which suffers from a predominance of economic studies and a ‘dearth of other disciplinary contributions’. This thesis has contributed to developing a participant based perspective, which seeks to view the event from the needs and characteristics of the participants themselves. The study widens the perspective for event research, to include studies which are consumer-based, driven by an interest in their needs, rather than the destination or event managers. This perspective is highly recommended as a way to ensure event products meet participant expectations to form a positive event (and tourist) experience.

8.8 Conclusion

The wide diversity of events in Australia can, in part, be explained by the differences in recreational choice. General interest events, such as community fairs and local festivals, attract those with a wide selection of leisure interests. They attract audiences who are interested in the social aspects of an event, and its atmosphere.

For those who have a serious commitment to leisure clubs and activities, travel to events is an important part of developing a leisure career. Events offer serious participants opportunities to develop skills, exchange information and develop personal and social identities. Events offer an environment which is conducive to expressing leisure identity, and embracing special interest networks and clubs. This thesis has shown that participant events are the vehicle through which recreationists pursue their career and fans pursue their fandom.

Examination of participants at a variety of event contexts throughout this thesis has increased our understanding of their behaviour and characteristics.
While the results are dependent on the context of the event, patterns have emerged that point to shared characteristics and behaviours of serious participants as depicted in the SerPa model. The model frames the relationships between the psycho/social characteristics and suggests how these result in consumer, travel and leisure behaviours.

This study initially suggested that the journey from fan to fanaticism is difficult to define. It is a subjective judgement of what is excessive. However, throughout the stages of this study, it became easier to recognise both the intensity of enthusiasm and the output of participants. As Rudin (1969) suggested, the intensity of one’s passion can be seen in the degree of energy that one thinks, feels and confronts the world. This intensity is also seen in the degree of detail and precision that serious participants demand of themselves. Serious participation manifests in the time that is spent thinking, planning and pursuing related activities. Activities such as preparing for events, contests and shows, collecting stuff, practising and training for contests, creating new art works, re-creating fashions of the era, searching for authentic items to buy and maintaining websites and clubs, allow serious participants to indulge in their chosen pursuit.

These activities are time consuming and can ‘take over’ people’s lives. The activities are usually conducted in collaboration with other like-minded people who fuel the enthusiasm for the pursuit and its club. Together, they form a social leisure world, which reinforces each other’s values and beliefs and encourages more collaboration, and commitment and participation. Serious participants are reassured in finding a social context where they don’t need to change the subject and can freely communicate in the jargon and topics that they are thrilled by.

Events, such as festivals, provide a context to celebrate, share values, and provide rewards in the form of self-actualisation and foster enthusiasm for the pursuit. They provide a wider network in which serious participants feel reassured that they are part of a bigger social world. They can feel normal in seeing other people’s fanaticism for the same pursuit, and become immersed in the atmosphere that the event provides. Events provide activities that allow serious participants to progress and learn, and consume.
By attending events, and other club activities, the enthusiast becomes encouraged to progress to become a fanatic, to overcome barriers of family and job obligations, and to find ways around obtaining finance and permission to further the pursuit. The line between an enthusiast and fanatic is subjective. It lies in one’s own head, in one’s own perception of what is acceptable to oneself and to others around them. The rewards of serious participation in leisure activities appear tempting to those who have little reward in their everyday lives. As described by Kuentzel (2000) people seek alternative ways to anchor their own sense of self where security in the traditional realms of work, family and community has been eroded.

The insights provided by this thesis are useful both to those who study festivals and events as a social phenomena, and to those who study and practice tourism, leisure or event management. Providing event experiences which meet the needs of special interest segments, such as fans and fanatics, provides both a sustainable tourism product, and a rewarding event experience.
References


Participants in Special Interest Events

References


Participants in Special Interest Events


Participants in Special Interest Events

References


Participants in Special Interest Events


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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Guidelines for Incorporating Publications into Doctoral Theses provided by Graduate Research College, Southern Cross University 2007

Guidelines for Incorporating Publications into Doctoral Theses

Background

Southern Cross University supports postgraduate research students publishing their work during candidature. It demonstrates to examiners that the student’s work has been peer reviewed and that the research is deemed worthy of publication. It also maintains currency of the candidate’s work as it is completed and for students wishing to do postdoctoral work, having a publication record is essential. In the past most students have chosen to focus on writing the thesis and have found publications a distraction from that major task. More recently, given the pressures to publish, it has become increasingly common, particularly in scientific disciplines, to incorporate publications directly into the thesis as a series of stand alone chapters with a connecting introduction and conclusion.

The advantages of this approach are considered to be:

- working towards publication produces a more focused and concise thesis;
- it allows the candidate to engage with the broader scientific community in a way that validates and confirms their work along the way;
- the candidate can improve their thesis substantially from incorporating referees’ comments;
- the standards and expectations of published work are well-established, giving confidence that the candidate’s work is of high quality;
- the candidate will be competitive for postdoctoral fellowships and employment at the time of graduation with an established track record in publication;
- publication deadlines can contribute to a rigorous thesis milestone plan;
- it allows the candidate to develop the ability to accept critical comment and disseminate findings;
- the thesis will be easier to defend from adverse examiners’ reports if reviewers have accepted the research as worthy of publication;
- it resolves the conflict between preparing the thesis for examination and preparing papers for publication;
- it gives the candidate the opportunity to co-author papers with other academics, and
- it increases the opportunity for the candidate to present work at conferences.

However, there are also pitfalls and challenges that need careful consideration, for example:

- there is a risk that the thesis reads as disjointed and repetitive, without overarching coherence and integrity;
- examiners unfamiliar with the format can be unsympathetic;
- due to publication delays, the process can add to the time required to write the thesis;
- there is a danger that students will focus their research too narrowly;
- candidates may be tempted to publish sections of their work prematurely;
- skills generated through writing a thesis of book length may be sacrificed;
- things can go wrong without guidance early in candidature;
- it is more likely to suit candidates who have published previously;
- publication is no guarantee of quality of the work;
- chapters may be under review at the time of publication, so there may be an awkward timing issue in terms of the value of examiners’ comments;
- co-authorship may lead to uncertainty as to the contribution of the candidate to the research and to writing the thesis.
The following guidelines have been developed to minimise the impact of these issues and to ensure that a thesis incorporating publications is of high quality.

1. **Decide whether your project is suitable for this type of thesis format**
   (be aware that it is certainly not a quick or easy way to produce a PhD):
   - Does your topic lie within a discipline where publication is highly regarded?
   - Is it important to publish your results quickly to maintain currency of knowledge (particularly relevant in areas where a lot of research is being done and knowledge is changing fast, e.g. biotechnology)?
   - Does your research project involve several relatively discrete stages, topics or components that lend themselves to stand alone papers that can be linked to form a coherent research project?
   - Does your supervisor support this format for your thesis?

2. **Establish from the outset of candidature that you will use this format**, as it will influence how your and your supervisor organise your timelines and milestones. It may be too disruptive to decide on this later in candidature.

3. **It is desirable to have some publication experience**, but not necessary. Getting articles accepted for publication can be time consuming and frustrating. However, reviewers’ comments can be very valuable in improving your writing and argument.

4. **Normally publications would be written during the period of your candidature**, but if you have published one or more papers previously that have direct bearing on the current project, it may be acceptable to include them.

5. **There are no particular requirements for the number of papers** that should be included. Normally **three is considered a minimum**, but you may only want to incorporate one or two papers, as long as such inclusion does not disrupt the flow of your thesis.

6. It is expected that you would **target high quality or high impact journals**, but this may depend on your discipline. It may also be appropriate to include refereed book chapters or conference proceedings, but this is less likely to impress examiners. Again, this may depend on your discipline, so be guided by your supervisor on this one.

7. **Publications need to be at least reviewed and accepted to be included** in the thesis as stand alone chapters. Articles you have written but have not yet been submitted or accepted would not be appropriate to include as full chapters. However, you could incorporate parts of those papers into chapters and indicate clearly their status, so that examiners would know that they could usefully make comments that could assist your publication.

8. **Make sure you gain copyright permission from the relevant journals to reproduce your papers in the thesis.**

9. **If any of your papers are co-authored, ensure that you make your own contribution very clear.**

10. **While not prescriptive, the following format can be used as a guide for structuring your thesis.**
Thesis Format Guide

• Title page.

• Thesis declaration.

• Abstract of no more than 400 words.

• Acknowledgements: as well as acknowledging supervisors, technicians, other resource people and peers who have assisted the research, also acknowledge journal reviewers and editors whose comments have assisted the writing of papers.

• List of publications included as part of the thesis: include full citation details; statement that papers have been refereed (with evidence included in an appendix); and statement that copyright permission has been obtained (evidence in appendix). For instance the statement may say: "I warrant that I have obtained, where necessary, permission from the copyright owners to use any third-party copyright material reproduced in the thesis (e.g. questionnaires, artwork, unpublished letters), or to use any of my own published work (e.g. journal articles) in which the copyright is held by another party (e.g. publisher, co-author)."

• Statement of contribution of others: The purpose of this statement is to summarise and clearly identify the nature and extent of the intellectual input by you and any of your co-authors. The statement must be signed by you and your supervisor. A written statement from each of the co-authors should be included as an appendix in the thesis.

• List of additional publications by the candidate relevant to the thesis but not included in it (including conference papers).

• Table of contents

• Introduction/overview: The Introduction must establish a coherent and logical framework for the research. It should contain succinct statements describing the research problem investigated, overall objectives and specific aims of the study and an account of research progress within which the papers are situated. It should explain the design of the research project and how the papers are linked. This is important to provide continuity for the reader. You need to critically place any published works used in the body of the thesis in the context of current knowledge in the appropriate field of study and in the context of the thesis as a whole. It is best to choose the format that tells the academic argument in the most coherent way so that the contents of the thesis are established as a substantial and significant body of work, but without unnecessary repetition. The introduction should be your own work, be of a very high standard, not exceed 15,000 words and not have been submitted for publication.

• Literature Review: If your published papers include a comprehensive coverage of the relevant literature, then a short section within the introduction chapter which overviews (and references) key ideas from the literature will be sufficient. If the published papers together provide a more limited or piece-meal literature review (perhaps because of journal page limits), then a more substantial literature review will be required to demonstrate that you have broad knowledge of the field.
• **Methodology**

If your published papers include a comprehensive coverage of your methodology, then a short section within the introduction chapter which overviews (and references) your research design will be sufficient. If the published papers together provide a more limited coverage of your methods (again because of journal page limits), then a more substantial methodology chapter may be required – this requirement may vary between disciplines.

• **Published papers**: Papers to be included as separate chapters. Direct reprints from journals can be included if they are resized to A4. It is also acceptable to reproduce them in the same format as the rest of the thesis (see guidelines in the Postgraduate Student Handbook). It is desirable to include an introduction to each chapter that positions the paper within the overall argument of the thesis. It is also possible to include chapters that are not papers or chapters that incorporate papers.

• **Discussion/Conclusion/Synthesis**: This section should integrate and synthesise the significant findings of the thesis. Depending on the discipline, it may also identify the limitations of the research and highlight future directions. This section should not include a detailed reworking of the discussions from individual papers within the thesis and should not have been submitted for publication.

• **Appendices**: Appendices may include statements from co-authors, permission letters regarding copyright, evidence supporting refereed status of publications such as conference papers, and acceptance of papers which have not yet appeared in print. They can also include detailed data and methods descriptions not included in papers.

• **References**: This should be a list of all references cited in all papers included in the thesis as well as from the Introduction and Literature Review.

(End of document)
Appendix 2 - Video Footage taken at the Elvis Revival Festival 2007

Data collected in the form of videos and photographs were used in Chapter 5 during analysis (as described on page 134). The footage was then edited to create a short presentation to the Postgraduate Research Forum at the University, to allow other researchers to discuss the research. As part of the inductive research process, these ideas helped to confirm and inform the findings of author. The DVD is provided to show the dynamic sights and sounds of the event, and add richness to the written analysis provided in Chapter 5.

(see disc at the end of the thesis)

Note: Contents remain the property of the author, and may be used with permission.
Appendix 3 - Example of Festival Fanatics promotion materials

Join Festival Fanatics - FREE!

The Festival Fanatics Mailing List keeps you in the loop!

We send the Official Program and festival updates to the mailing list automatically. Join the FREE Mailing List yourself or give this to a friend so they can join too.

Please tick one...
- Yes, please add me to the Mailing List
- Please update my contact details
- Please remove me from the List

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms): ___________ First Name: ________________________
Family Name: ____________________________
Phone: __________________ Mobile: ________________________
Postal address: ________________________________________________

Email: _______________________________________________________

MY OLD CONTACT DETAILS (if updating your address)
Name: _______________________________________________________
Postal address: ________________________________________________

Your contact details will be used only by the Elvis Revival Inc Committee and only for contacting you with information relating to Elvis events.

Please return this form to:
Fax to: (02) 6862 1023
Post to: Parkes Visitor Information Centre
PO Box 532
PARKES NSW 2870
Or email the details to: tourism@parkes.nsw.gov.au

ClubsNSW Parkes Elvis Festival
9th-13th January 2008

Joanne Mackellar