

Student Support of Intercollegiate Athletes: An Investigation of Constraints and Differences

Lynn L. Ridinger, Old Dominion University
Daniel C. Funk, Griffith University

Session 19: Marketing Presentation (25-minute)

Friday, June 1, 2007

3:20 PM - 3:45 PM

Research on sport spectators and fans has focused on motives associated with attendance (Funk, Mahony, & Ridinger, 2002; James & Ridinger, 2002; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). To date, research has not examined reasons for non-attendance at sporting events. Understanding reasons that prevent or reduce attendance of potential spectators could provide valuable information for sport marketers. In particular, on many college campuses, garnering student support of athletic teams is a continual challenge for financial viability. Although a packed venue full of cheering students such as the Cameron Crazies at Duke University would be every college sport marketing director's dream, the reality is that not all schools have a student body that display such a high level of school spirit.

This study investigates perceived constraints that prevent or reduce student attendance at basketball games at a Division I university located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Crawford, Jackson, and Godby's, (1991) Leisure Constraints Model was used to develop a multi-attribute questionnaire for this study. A series of 5-point Likert-type scales were used to measure items pertaining to each of the three categories of constraints: 1) Structural Constraints - factors that intervene between leisure choices and actual participation, 2) Interpersonal Constraints - limitations that originate from relationships with others, and 3) Intrapersonal Constraints - factors that reflect psychological states and individual preferences. In this study, Structural Constraints include items related to class and job conflicts, commuting hassles, and lack of communication about the basketball games. Interpersonal Constraints assess the affect of friends and family on attendance decisions while Intrapersonal Constraints focus on an individual's interest in sports.

The questionnaire also included a variety of questions to assess demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics and open-ended questions related to cultivating more student support and enhancing school spirit. The questionnaire was deployed on-line to a random sample of 4000 students enrolled full time during the 2006 spring semester at the institution being studied. There were 1010 surveys completed for a response rate of 25%. The frame for this study included the entire student population to allow for the examination of students who may or may not be supporters of the intercollegiate athletics program. This represents a broader approach than most prior studies on sport consumers that generally have obtained responses from people in attendance at sporting events or from students completing questionnaires in sport-related courses.

Respondents ranged in age from 17 to 67 with a mean age of 23. Sixty-four percent were female and 36% male with ethnic representation primarily being White/Caucasian (60%) or Black/African American (17%). The sample provided an adequate number of respondents from each class from freshmen to graduate students. Regression results revealed a significant inverse relationship between all of the constraint factors and attendance at both the men's and women's basketball games ($p < .05$). Students perceiving more constraints in their lives were less likely to attend games. The three constraint factors explained 36% of the variance in attendance at men's games and 20% of the variance for attendance at women's games.

Gender comparisons revealed that constraint factors impact females more than males. Significant differences for type of support were also present. The mean score for all support groups was below 3.0 for Structural Constraints, indicating that respondents did not agree that conflicts, commuting, and communication concerns interfere with attendance at games. The Interpersonal Constraints factor (friends to attend games with) was more problematic for supporters of the women's team and for those who did not support either the men's or women's team than for supporters of the men's team or those who supported both teams. Intrapersonal Constraints (lack of interest in sports) was only relevant for respondents who were not supporters of either team.

Implications of this research indicate that intercollegiate sport marketers should develop strategies to help students negotiate through constraints. Part of building a student fan base requires an understanding of factors that may be obstacles to attendance. Combating constraints and developing strong student support has important public relations and social implications for collegiate sports programs.

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

References

- Crawford, D.W., Jackson, E.L., & Godbey, G. (1991). A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leisure Science*, 13, 309-320.
- Funk, D.C., Mahony, D.F., & Ridinger, L.L. (2002). Characterizing consumer motivation as individual difference factors: Augmenting the Sport Interest Inventory (SII) to explain level of spectator support. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(1), 33-43.
- James, J.D., & Ridinger, L.L. (2002). Female and male sport fans: A comparison of sport consumptive motives. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25(3), 260-278.
- Mahony, D.F., Nakazawa, M., Funk, D.C., James, J., & Gladden, J.M. (2002). Motivational factors impacting the behavior of J. League spectators: Implications for league marketing efforts. *Sport Management Review*, 5(1), 1-24.
- McDonald, M.A., Milne, G.R., & Hong, J. (2002). Motivational factors for evaluating sport spectators and participant markets. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(2), 100-111.
- Trail, G.T., & James, J.D. (2001). The motivation scale for sport consumption: Assessment of the scale's psychometric properties. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 24(1), 109-127.
- Wann, D.L. (1995). Preliminary validation of the sport fan motivation scale. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 19(4), 377-396.