

## An Examination of Constraints that Influence Spectators' Attendance in Women's Intercollegiate Sporting Events

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**Marketing**

**Abstract 2009-029**

**May 28, 2009**

**1:30 PM**

**25 minute oral**

**(Richland C)**

Over the past decade, women's sport has become increasingly popular and a growing number of women athletes have participated and competed in intercollegiate athletic events (Brownlee & Hambrick, 2008; Lough & Kim, 2004). Despite the popularity and growth of women's sport in intercollegiate athletics, it has been a challenge for college athletic departments to generate revenues for their women's athletic programs. Such a challenge is mainly due to the current financial difficulties caused by a lack of awareness and low attendance records (Howard & Crompton, 2004). In order to increase attendance and awareness, it is essential for sport marketers to understand sport spectator behavior (Armstrong, 1999).

Among sport spectator behavior studies, a number of research has been aimed at spectators' motivation to attend women's sporting events (e.g., End, Harrick, Jacquemotte, & Dietz-Uhler, 1998; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000; Gantz & Wenner, 1995; James & Ridinger, 2002). However, although some researchers suggested that investigating barriers to attending sporting events is also important, there has been a lack of research on constraints that prevent potential fans from attending women's games. Identifying plausible constraints will benefit attendance records for women's intercollegiate programs and possibly increase the enjoyment level for spectators and fans. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify constraint factors that prohibit potential spectators from attending women's intercollegiate sporting events. The second purpose was to examine the effect of the constraint factors on spectators' attendance behavior. Demographic differences on constraints were also examined. The theoretical basis for this study was the Crawford and Godbey's (1897) model of leisure constraints, which identified the three major constraints: intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints. Work by Alexandris and Carroll (1997) also served as an important theoretical base of this study, which identified the seven subscales of constraints: individual/psychological, lack of knowledge, facilities/services, accessibility/financial, lack of partners, time, and lack of interest.

Participants for this study were 224 randomly selected people from the university and the local population in a Midwestern state. Of the 224 participants, 64 % were male (n =144 ), and 35% were female (n= 79). The majority of the respondents were White/Caucasian (68%, n= 148), and 26% of them were African Americans (n= 57). Fifty three percent of the respondents considered themselves as sport fans of the university, while only 23% perceived themselves as fans of the university's women's athletic programs. Approximately 56% have never attended women's sporting events at the university. Based on the literature on leisure constraints (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997, 1999; Carroll & Alexandris, 1997; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), the researchers identified the four constraints: Accessibility, Lack of Time, Reference Group, and Lack of Social Interaction. Five additional constraints specific to attending sporting events were identified, based on the sport motivation literature, expert interviews (i.e., two athletic administrators and three female athletes), and a pilot study (n = 37). Those five constraints included Game related Constraints, the Success of the Women's program, Low Awareness, Lack of Promotion, and Lack of Personal Ties. Three faculty members from sport psychology and special education reviewed the questionnaire for the content validity of each scale.

Items relating to the nine constraints were subject to an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS V.16. A seven-factor solution emerged, explaining 70.2% of the total variance in the data. The seven constraint factors were comprised of Accessibility (alpha =.79), Time (alpha = .85), Reference Group (alpha = .68), Social Interaction (alpha = .84), Game (alpha = .89), Success/Promotion (alpha = .87), and Awareness (alpha = .86). Most of the subscales demonstrated a reasonable reliability. Descriptive statistics revealed that the Reference group (M = 4.1 with 7 being most important) was the most significant constraint, followed by Time constraint (M = 4.05 Awareness (M = 3.8), Game related Constraint (M = 3.08), and Accessibility (M = 2.78). Multiple regression analyses were conducted to investigate the effects of the constraints on intention to attend. Demographic variables and sport fan loyalty explained 33 % of the total variance in the attendance behavior. After controlling for the demographic variables and sport fan loyalty, the seven constraints jointly explained a significant amount of the variance in attendance behavior (R square change = .11). The significant predictors included Reference group ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $t = 2.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Time ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $t = 2.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Game ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $t = 3.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Awareness related constraint ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t = -2.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine differences related to demographic variables on the constraints. Time constraint was significantly related to ethnicity and education (Wilk's  $\lambda = .92$ ,  $F = 1.48$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

## **2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)**

Univariate analysis of variance on each constraint subscale (tests of between- subjects) revealed significant main effects of gender for Game constraint ( $F = 10.26, p < .01$ ), and Success/Promotion ( $F = 5.07, p < .05$ ). In addition, the effect of Ethnicity was significant for Awareness ( $F = 2.98, p < .05$ ) and for Accessibility ( $F = 3.00, p < .05$ ).

This current research will contribute to the sport marketing literature on women's sport by identifying constraint factors limiting sport fan's attendance in women's sporting events. In addition, this study can contribute to the leisure constraint literature by extending the concept of constraint to spectator sports. For practical implications, the results provide sport marketers insights into why people do not attend women's games. The results related to the demographic variables can also help them segment their target market and develop more effective promotional strategies to reach their market audience. Regarding the reference group constraint, it may be effective for sport marketers of athletic departments to develop referral programs that provide incentives or rewards to individuals or groups who bring family members, friends, or co-workers to sporting events. In addition, sport marketers can develop promotional attractions during the women's sporting events in which family members or friends of their fans can get involved. As with the game constraint that had the greatest impact on attendance behavior, sport marketers need to make each experience of the sporting events more enjoyable (i.e., assigned seats for fan club members).