Where is Everyone? Examining University Students’ Constraints to Attendance at NCAA Division I College Basketball Games

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One of the most popular leisure activities in the United States (US) is sport spectatorship. Like many things, however, being a sport spectator is a process that is in a constant state of change, and when it comes to defining, attracting, and retaining this large population, all sport consumers are in play. To fully understand and segment this large group of fans it is necessary to investigate and identify the unique attitudes and behaviors with regard to sport products. Previous research has centered on numerous antecedents explaining why consumers choose to attend a particular sporting event; however, it is imperative that researchers examine possible impediments to sport consumption to fully understand how the sport fan behaves.

Previous definitions of sport consumption have traditionally resulted into two related categorical designations: participation in competitive, nature-related, and fitness activities, and spectatorship in the form of event attendance, television viewership, and reading of sport publications (Shohlan & Kahle, 1996; Sun, Youn & Wells, 2004). It is the combination of these two descriptions meshed with a considerable lack of information about barriers to event attendance that gained the authors’ attention and warranted further investigation. Thus, the aim of the current study is to investigate the relationship between consumption constraints, previous attendance, and previous participation in the sport for students living in on-campus housing at a university with a NCAA Division I basketball team.

Previous research cites positive links between group affiliation, entertainment, self-esteem enhancement, and a desire for camaraderie and identity construction as contributing factors leading to a person’s consumption of sport (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2001; Shohlan, Rose, & Kahle, 2000). Additionally, participation in high school sports was found to be a good predictor of sport consumption (Doyle, Lewis, & Malmisur, 1980). However, literature shows that depending on the type of consumption, barriers can moderate both attitude and behavior in consumers (Balabanis et al., 2006). Crawford and Godbey (1987) identified structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal concepts as primary sources to leisure barriers. Wellki and Zlatoper (1999) observed negative elements such as weather, ticket pricing, and rival teams and its influence at American football games. Pritchard et al. (2009) found the presence of constraints had little effect on product attitudes such as motivation and or involvement, but did hinder behavior.

Recently, Trail, Robinson, and Kim (2008) examined constraints of students attending university football games at the Division I level. The authors focused on venue and non-venue issues and identified 15 distinct structural constraint dimensions. The current study intends to investigate a similar set of proposed barriers to attendance with the exception of venue-related issues. In addition, this study looks to specifically examine students living on campus as opposed to upperclassmen. Division I men’s basketball is one of the few intercollegiate athletic programs with revenue generating potential, and while the cost of attendance is free for all students at the institution under examination, the opportunity to generate ancillary revenue through concession and merchandise sales is extremely important for the athletic department. In addition, a filled and ruckus student section adds an energetic environmental quality to an athletic event that is unrivaled and highly-sought after by event organizers not to mention advantageous to the home team. Thus, the results of this study will provide valuable evidence for college athletic administrators of the constraints that keep students in close proximity to a sport product from attending the event.

Data collection is currently under way and will be concluded by January 31, 2010. The study is being conducted at a mid-sized public institution in the Mountain West region. Participants represent a convenient and purposive sample of on-campus college students, and are being solicited from three different residential halls within one mile of the athletic venue. The survey instrument will include an adapted version of Trail et al.’s (2008) non-venue structural constraint items and additional interpersonal and intrapersonal items driven by a thorough review of sport consumption, leisure barrier, and event attendance literature. In addition, the survey will include items asking...
whether the respondent had ever attended a game (yes/no) and if the respondent played high school basketball (yes/no).

Once data collection has ended, analyses will include a principal component analysis (PCA) with promax rotation of the constraint items to determine the number of dimensions that are present within the items. The total number of factors will be determined by the following criteria: the Kaiser criterion, or eigenvalues greater than 1.0, factor loadings above .4, at least two items per factor, and ultimately, interpretability of the dimensions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In addition, reliability and convergent and discriminant validity analyses will be interpreted. Following the PCA, a two (attendance) by two (previous experience with the sport) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) procedure will be conducted including a Test of Simple Effects to determine the distinct relationships between the independent and dependent variables. In all, it is hypothesized by the researchers that significant main effects and an interaction effect will be present. The study including all data analyses will be completed by February 28, 2010.

Once again, a litany of previous research has investigated why individuals consume sport; however, a clear understanding of what inhibits sports fans from consuming sport is underdeveloped. Despite a relatively successful recent history and a large population of students living near the venue, the Division I basketball program under investigation has struggled to attract and maintain even a moderate level of student attendance. Numerous possibilities exist to describe this phenomenon; thus, the results of this study will provide insight into what obstacles must be overcome to ensure larger audiences. In addition, it can be assumed that this program is not alone; therefore, numerous intercollegiate administrators and marketers could benefit from the dissemination of this study's findings.