Senior Citizens: The Motivations and Benefits of Tailgate Participation

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Socio-Cultural - Other (College Sport)
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Tailgating is defined as “a social phenomenon that involves gatherings of people before and after an event,” that typically occurs in a parking lot (Gillentine, 2011, p. 1520). Tailgating began in the 1860’s due to the lack of refreshments provided inside of sporting venues (Gillentine, 2011; Kerstetter et al., 2012). Since its origination, tailgating has become a popular ancillary event pre-and post-game, especially for the sport of football (Gillentine, 2011). Today, individuals travel in RV’s from great distances, bring an elaborate assortment of food and beverages, and tailgate for hours, if not days, before an event. Tailgating has truly become a social and cultural phenomenon (Gillentine, 2010; Iarmolenko, 2013; Kerstetter, 2012; Rode, 2015; Rode & Hardin, 2017). With this in mind, modern motivations for tailgating need to be continually examined.

Tailgating has become more prevalent due to findings that it has become lucrative, both socially and economically (Brown, Gillentine, & Grady, 2011; Chalip, 2006; James et al., 2001). The subject has also been studied extensively when it comes to risk management and motives of participation (Miller & Gillentine, 2006). However, recent literature does not examine the motives of participation and trends of consumption for those who are considered senior citizens. The lack of knowledge of the motives for participation of senior citizens is alarming. As the participant base ages, the importance to know what attracts the senior citizen population to events within the field of sport management continues to grow.

The aging population continues to grow, meaning that the percent of individuals aged 65+ will increase to 20 percent (from 13 percent in 2010) by 2050 (American College of Sport Medicine, 2012; Bernhardt, 1976; Ortmann et al., 2014). Senior citizens, although typically categorized as individuals aged 65 years of age or older, are defined as any individual aged 55 years or older for this study. The criteria for senior citizens was determined based on population estimates provided by The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). Both organizations indicated that adults aged 55-64 years old made up approximately 13 percent of the population. Furthermore, James et al.’s (2001) data collection in 2001 placed 27 percent of the population that tailgates in the age range 35-44 years old. Even more important, the population above the age of 44 years old in the study totaled 45 percent of participants. Due to the initial study being conducted nearly two decades ago, one could determine that many of the tailgaters in the age range of 35-44 years old are approaching the age of 55+ years old. Furthermore, with such a large proportion of the participants from the study now easily falling into the age group of 55+ years old, it is important to re-address the motivations and collect more current data. The researchers, after taking all of this into consideration, found that the percent of the desired tailgater population (older adults) could therefore be greatly increased by extending the age range.

Due to the scant amount of literature, social activity of senior citizens was studied to determine potential motivations of senior citizens to tailgate. Sniadek and Zajadacz (2010) identified that senior citizens seek mental and intellectual stimulation, a successful social life, and to maintain communication with their families. Adams, Leibrandt, and Moon (2011) also emphasized the importance of senior citizens experiencing social interactions for their wellbeing. Furthermore, Pettigrew and Roberts (2008) found that senior citizens alleviate loneliness by having these social interactions with friends and family; senior citizens also partake in eating and drinking rituals to reduce perceived loneliness. The necessity of senior citizens to engage in social interactions directly aligns with one of the main motives of tailgating, social interaction (Delaney, 2008; Drenten et al., 2009; Gillentine, 2003; James et al., 2001). James, Breezell, and Ross (2001) more specifically identified that tailgaters desired to have their social interactions with friends and family while consuming food and beverages (Kerstetter et al., 2012). With this in mind, it is evident that the motivations of tailgaters and senior citizens parallel one another.
Using an adapted instrument developed from James et al. (2001) and Gillentine (2003) data will be gathered during tailgate events at a university in the Southeastern Conference of the FBS football division. Surveys will be dispersed at tailgating events by students who will be trained on the proper technique to administer a survey. The survey will be reviewed by experts to confirm its reliability and validity prior to it being utilized (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013, pp. 301-305). Once the data has been collected, the data analysis software (SPSS) will be utilized to examine the data accurately and to show if there is, or isn’t, a significance to the data as it relates to motives of tailgating.

Although the aging population continues to grow (American College of Sport Medicine, 2012; Bernhardt, 1976; Ortman et al., 2014), the research surrounding senior citizens in sport management continues to be absent. The goal of the researchers is, not only to advance the knowledge about senior citizens in sport management, but more specifically, to identify the motives for senior citizens to participate in tailgating at collegiate football games. Along with the motives of participation, the researchers seek to identify the aspects that may hamper the participation of senior citizens in tailgating events. After exploring these objectives, whether or not senior citizens benefit from tailgating will be determined.