High School Athletic Ticketing: Adapting to Emerging Technology

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High school athletics are popular among the students participating and provide excitement for their respective communities, attracting more than 500 million spectators in 2011 (Coakley, 2015; Howard, 2011). For example, the Red Rovers from Eason, Pennsylvania, average 5,000 fans at their home football games, including 1,700 student tickets and 1,500 season ticket holders (Groller, 2010). Coakley (2015) also identified that focus on winning has increased, resulting in an arms race similar to that seen at the collegiate level, with HS athletic departments competing to provide better facilities, equipment, and coaches’ salaries. The competitiveness has placed added pressures on high schools to generate revenue through ticketing, creative private fundraising (e.g., advertising, sponsorship, television rights), and even “pay to play” (Cook, 2012; Pierce & Bussell, 2011; Pierce & Peterson, 2011). Several factors could inhibit a consumer from attending a sporting event, such as weather, mood, and team performance, so advanced ticket sales provide sport organizations with the security of guaranteed revenue (Dwyer, Drayer, & Shapiro, 2013). While revenue from multimedia rights are at an all-time high, event attendance remains the largest revenue source for several professional leagues, including Major League Baseball (Fisher, 2010).

Therefore, advanced selling has become a clear marketing objective and ticketing strategy that organizations, including high schools, cannot ignore if they wish to survive consumer power, uncertain event outcomes, and a highly competitive marketplace (Hendrickson, 2012). DURING THE 2013 SPORTS FACILITIES & FRANCHISES/TICKETING SYMPOSIUM HELD IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, CULLEN MAXEY, EXECUTIVE VP OF BUSINESS OPERATIONS FOR THE ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS, REPORTED THAT HE WAS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE MOVE TO PAPERLESS/DIGITAL TICKETS, AND THE USE OF SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGIES FOR TICKETING PURPOSES (SBJ, 2013). DIGITAL TICKETING INVOLVES THE USE OF INTERNET VIA DESKTOP COMPUTERS, LAPTOPS, TABLETS, AND MOBILE PHONES TO ORDER, PAY FOR, OBTAIN, AND REDEEM TICKETS. DIGITAL TICKETING PROVIDES AN EASY AND CONVENIENT WAY FOR CUSTOMERS TO PURCHASE TICKETS AT ANY TIME AND PLACE USING MOBILE DEVICES (ZHANG, CHEN, WANG, & WANG, 2016). HOWEVE,...
spectators’ willingness to adopt digital ticketing. The model is grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, & Fishbein, 1980) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The TAM has been established under the assumption that technology acceptance is influenced by the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of the individuals (Ibrahim, 2014). Its focus is on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. An abundance of studies aimed at extending our understanding of user adoption of technology have been conducted in the past and have added trust and attitude as measures (Cheng, Lam, & Yeung, 2006). However, few of these studies were conducted on digital ticketing within a sport context. Previous research within sports has used the TAM to study the effects on behavioral intentions towards mobile gaming services (Ha, Yoon, & Choi, 2007), as well as the online purchase of tickets by spectators during the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Dhurup, Surujlal, & Mahlangu, 2011). By using the TAM, it is possible to understand the adoption of the new ticketing technology being launched in the HS space. Additionally, the profile of high school spectators may influence their attitudes towards digital ticketing and willingness to use the technology. As high schools begin to transition into the world of digital ticketing, understanding the key factors that influence the adoption of new technology by spectators will be of great value to athletic directors, sponsors, and other industry professionals.

Method and Data Analysis
We developed a 52-item paper-and-pencil survey grounded in the TAM (Davis, 1989). Participants responded to items using a 7-point Likert-type scale. The survey items included: previous usage of digital tickets (2 items), ease of using digital ticketing (4 items), trust of digital ticketing (4 items), attitude toward digital ticketing (4 items), perceived usefulness of digital ticketing (5 items), intention to use digital ticketing in the future (4 items), demographic information (10 items), attendance (3 items). We surveyed HS football game attendees (N = 525) during pregame and half-time intermissions across the southeastern United States at 12 football games in the fall of 2017. Data analyses will include descriptive statistics of factors affecting acceptance and MANOVA to determine if there are differences in perceived ease of use, perceived trust, attitude, perceived usefulness, and intention to use digital ticketing based on spectator demographics (income, education, gender, race, affiliation with program).

Discussion and Implications
The study will provide an understanding of the importance of the TAM factors and the profile of people willing to adopt digital ticketing for non-student HS football spectators. The findings of this research will provide valuable information to HS athletic departments and booster clubs, as well as marketing specialists and sponsors who are seeking to serve the HS athletic event attendees better. To tailor the overall sport experience and satisfy the needs of those present at the stands, sport organizations must first understand their spectators and the factors taken into consideration when making their decision to purchase tickets and attend HS athletic events week after week. Additionally, this research may identify TAM factors that influence ticketing preferences that are different from other sport levels, providing theoretical implications for future study.