Innovativeness of High School Athletic Departments: Digital Ticketing Adoption

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The adoption of digital/mobile ticketing is a common feature for fans attending professional and collegiate sports. However, digital ticketing adoption is slow at the high school level (Marquez, Cianfrone, & Kellison, 2018). Marquez et al. explored factors affecting spectators’ adoption of digital ticketing for high school football, but the reality is that if a school does not adopt the technology, this decision will not reach the fans. Recognizing the need to secure revenue through advanced ticket sales, over 1,000 high schools nationwide are providing fans with the option to purchase tickets digitally during the 2018-2019 school year; however, Griffin Pugh, General Sales Manager at Huddle Inc., attests that many schools remain cautious to make the transition (personal communication, August 30, 2018).

The diffusion-of-innovation theory (Rogers, 1962) attempts to model the adoption of an innovation through consideration of four distinct elements—the innovation, communication channels, time, and social systems. Researchers have applied the theory across numerous disciplines, including management, marketing, public administration, communications, psychology, technology, and sociology (e.g., Gopalakrishnan & Damanpour, 1997; Premkumar & Ramamurthy, 1995; Tornatzky & Klein, 1982). Within sport, researchers examined varying topics, such as adoption of training methods by coaches, in the context of professional and amateur sport organizations, the English rugby union, and pro-environmental design (Caza, 2000; Kellison & Hong, 2015; Loy, 1968; Newell & Swan, 1995; O’Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004). Within the context of high school digital ticketing (i.e., the innovation), the athletic department’s decision to offer this option to spectators represents innovation adoption, while the embracing of such technology across high schools nationwide represents diffusion. The purpose of this study is to analyze the diffusion of digital ticketing across high schools in the United States by presenting a profile of schools that have adopted the technology.

We will examine a total of 783 high schools across the United States that have adopted digital ticketing over the last 3 years. The school characteristics (private/public, enrollment, student body demographics, and free and reduced lunch percentage) are obtained through the National Center for Educational Statistics. We will analyze the characteristics to present a profile of schools leading the adoption of digital ticketing as a strategy to secure revenue related to athletic events. The diffusion-of-innovation S-Shaped curve of adoption and normality will be used to present the ticketing adoption.

The discussion will center on school attributes of those early adopters of the innovation. The results provide high school ticketing companies, like Huddle Inc. and Ticket Spicket, a profile of adopters to develop strategies to identify similar schools to sell their products. Theoretically, the study adds to the literature of diffusion-of-innovation framework, which has yet to explore the adoption of technology within sports or study the high school athletic space. As Kellison and Hong (2015) point out, “adoption represents just one element of the larger diffusion process” (p. 250); our study can serve as a basis for future research considering the remainder of decision making process through which high school athletic directors adopt digital ticketing.