

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

Using Conjoint Analysis to Examine Constraints to Student Attendance at College Football Games

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25-minute oral presentation

(including questions)

Students represent an important, yet unique target market for intercollegiate athletic marketers. Student ticket buyers typically purchase tickets for reduced prices and spend less on concessions, due to lower income levels, meaning they generate less revenue for the athletic department. On the other hand, a raucous student section can enhance the atmosphere for other fans and create a significant home field advantage for the team. Investing in cultivating student identity and passion for the school/team also has the potential to payoff down the road in the form of ticket purchases and donations. While it is common to turn on a football game in the fall and see students out in force, a recent study conducted by the *Wall Street Journal* (Cohen, 2014) revealed student attendance at college football games declined nationwide at a rate of 7.1% from 2009-2013. Given the various benefits athletic departments realize from students, it is important for college marketers to understand the factors influencing student decisions to attend football games, in particular, constraints to attendance.

Prior studies have sought to better understand the drivers of student attendance at sporting events (Greenwell, Popp, Brownlee, & Jordan, 2007; Lee & Bang, 2011; Perrault, 2016). While findings from these studies aid scholars and practitioners in identifying the wants and needs of college students, even those who are motivated to attend face constraints, both internal and external, that could inhibit attendance (Trail & Kim, 2011). Such constraints have been considered in prior research on student attendance (Havard & Dwyer, 2012; Lee & Bang, 2011; Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008).

Most recently, Simmons, Popp, McEvoy, and Howell (2016) tested the intensity of constraints on students not in attendance during their school's football game. A total of 33 constraints representing six constraint categories (stadium-related, prior commitments, intrapersonal, event-specific, marketing-related, and substitution) were included. Multiple significant differences existed in the extent to which each constraint affected students' decisions based on: (a) conference tier affiliation, (b) passion for the team, and (c) number of games attended. That said, constraint mean scores across the sample were relatively low overall, with only one (school commitments) exceeding 4.0 out of 7.0, while the majority were under 3.0. Havard and Dwyer (2012), Lee and Bang (2011), and Trail et al., (2008) reported similarly low mean scores, making it difficult for practitioners to determine which constraints truly act as barriers to attendance.

What is clear is that students face a myriad of potential constraints when deciding to attend home football games. Prior research has asked students to consider the impact each constraint has on that decision, however, the limitation with this approach is two-fold. First, when presented with dozens of potential constraint options, respondents likely experience some, but not most of the constraints. As a result, the majority of constraints are scored low, bringing down overall mean scores for individual constraints. Second, it fails to account for the trade-offs consumers make when considering constraints (Lyu & Lee, 2015). An appropriate alternative approach is conjoint analysis, which assesses consumer preferences across a set of attributes to determine the relative importance of each constraint (Greenwell et al., 2007). By using conjoint analysis, researchers can mimic the consumer decision-making process in order to understand underlying influences on those decisions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand the influence of various constraints on college students' decisions to attend college football games relative to other commonly cited constraints.

Data will be collected from students attending three different NCAA Division I FBS universities. Working collaboratively with each school's athletic department, electronic questionnaires will be distributed to student mailing lists comprised of students having previously claimed/purchased a ticket to a football game. Constraint attributes

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and levels for conjoint analysis will be drawn from prior student constraint literature that are within the marketing department's control (e.g., opportunities to socialize with friends, food and beverage costs, ticket cost, wi-fi accessibility, student seating location, student body interest in the event). Respondents will be given a set of scenarios featuring iterations of all constraint options and asked to rate each scenario on a Likert-type preference scale. A measure of fan passion (Wakefield, 2015) will also be included to better understand constraint intensity among students with varying levels of passion for the team.

Results from this study will have implications for both scholars and practitioners. For scholars, this study represents the first effort to assess trade offs students make when negotiating constraints to attending football games. For marketers, results should provide valuable insight into the most prominent barriers to student attendance at football games, allowing marketers to make corrective actions.

References

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