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### Factors Contributing to Consumers Decisions to Attend a Sporting Event

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# Factors Contributing to Consumers Decisions to Attend a Sporting Event

## Abstract

Previous research on consumer attendance patterns has explored the impact of single factors on desired outcomes. This is problematic because people rarely have a single motive behind their decision making to attend a sporting event. This study aimed to determine which factors were the most important to college students when deciding to attend sporting events. Using a cross-sectional survey, the research found that desire for excitement, geography, and social media all had statistical significance in influencing decision making. Contradictory to existing research, on field promotions, level of fandom, and consumer emotion were not found to be tied to their decision to attend an event. Marketers of sport should therefore promote their events on social media and highlight game excitement in their marketing content.

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Factors Contributing to Consumers Decisions to Attend a Sporting Event

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### **Abstract**

Previous research on consumer attendance patterns has explored the impact of single factors on desired outcomes. This is problematic because people rarely have a single motive behind their decision making to attend a sporting event. This study aimed to determine which factors were the most important to college students when deciding to attend sporting events. Using a cross-sectional survey, the research found that desire for excitement, geography, and social media all had statistical significance in influencing decision making. Contradictory to existing research, on field promotions, level of fandom, and consumer emotion were not found to be tied to their decision to attend an event. Marketers of sport should therefore promote their events on social media and highlight game excitement in their marketing content.

### **Factors Contributing to Consumers Decisions to Attend a Sporting Event**

Imagine it is a beautiful summer day in mid-July. The sun is out, there are blue skies as far as the eye can see, and you have nothing to do. The local baseball team in your city has a game tonight at 7:05 and they are expecting a large crowd. What would convince you to attend the game?

There are a variety of factors that can have an influence on a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event. These factors are different for all individuals and can even vary based on the organization or the sport. However, one thing remains constant, consumers know what they want and expect from an organization. It is because consumers know what they want from an organization that these factors are so influential for consumers, because they set high standards and expect organizations to reach them. Organizations, especially in the sport industry have to take it upon themselves to get to know their target audience and consumers and understand what it is that drives them to their games.

In the sport industry, it is particularly important for organizations to understand exactly what it is that drives people to their games. Without a consistent fan base, any sport organization would fail. This is exactly why buyer behavior is necessary for organizations to understand. If sport organizations can begin to recognize how consumers think and what factors actually have the most effect on consumer decisions, they will be better off in the long run. In order to get consumers to games, we must first understand what actually persuades that consumer to purchase a ticket to the game.

Previous research has been conducted on the topic of consumer behavior and purchasing decisions when attending sporting events. Most research has only grazed the surface on consumer behavior, hitting on a certain factor but not expanding upon it (Boyd

& Krehbiel, 2003). Research on a variety of factors that affect consumer decision making, and dive deeper into which factors stand out more than others, would be more beneficial. Recognizing the factors that actually persuade consumers to a purchasing decision could be very important to increasing attendance for many sports organizations

## **Literature Review**

### **Promotional Factors**

Many factors can have an influence on a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event. Factors can include anything from marketing of the event and event satisfaction, to social media or word of mouth influence (Peden, Upright, Hey & Jordan, 2015). Due to the fact that there are so many different elements, it is important to be familiar with each one. There is a growing need to understand the factors that might increase game attendance (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003).

One of the most influential elements when it comes to fan attendance is promotions. A primary objective of sport marketers is to develop strategies to increase game attendance, which includes utilizing promotions (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). Promotions and special events are offered as a motivation for fans to attend a sporting event (Howell, Klenosky & McEvoy, 2015). Promotions can include anything from the actual promotions that take place on the field of play, to price discount promotions or value added promotions. The study conducted by Howell, Klenosky and McEvoy found that "an additional price promotion can be expected to yield at least 975 more fans preseason, while an additional merchandise promotion is predicted to generate 1,568 extra fans over a season" (2015, p. 3). The different types of promotions can clearly be significant to an

organization and need to be looked at in order to address the idea of fan attendance and what it is that drives fans into a stadium.

Price discount promotions can be defined as the act of offering a lower price temporarily, in order to enhance the effectiveness of product sales (Shapiro, Drayer & Dwyer, 2016). Price discount promotions include discounts on tickets, concessions or merchandise. Some examples of this during a game are two for one night, senior night or family night (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). This would mean that organizations would give discounted tickets for senior citizens, or discounted tickets if you buy a certain amount of tickets, say for a family. Price discount promotions seem to drive in more attendance because it is clear that fans love discounts, especially on tickets. Boyd and Krehbiel found the effects of price discounts to be significant (2003). The level of fan attendance increases dramatically when there are price discounts being offered. Shapiro, Drayer & Dwyer discovered that discounted games increased attendance and led to more sellouts of games (2016). As an organization in the sport industry, it is crucial to recognize that price discounts are important to use. However, it is also important to recognize that overusing this method could result in fans not recognizing or taking advantage of the promotion. "Price discounts that run on weekends seemed to draw a significantly larger amount of fans to games than price discounts offered during the week" (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003, p. 180). Price discount promotions are sometimes more beneficial at certain times rather than others and that should be taken into consideration.

Value added promotions involve the enhancement a company gives its products or services to be more appealing to customer. As far as value added items go, this can include fireworks shows, giveaways or family oriented events, which has been found to be a

significant factor in increasing attendance. According to Howell, Klenosky & McEvoy, giveaways and fireworks were among the top most significant factors reported as reasons for fan attendance at a sporting event (2015). Giveaways are always seen as a significant reason for consumer attendance. For instance, the Rochester Red Wings always have bobble head give away nights, and every time they have one the lines waiting at the gate are crazy. The Red Wings are a good reference when looking at value added promotions because there is always some kind of give away before the game to the first people who enter through the gate (M. Cipro, personal communication, June, 2016). People will wait for any amount of time when they know they are getting value added for their time and effort. According to Boyd and Krehbiel, giveaways have been found to be the most efficient promotion (2003). This is interesting because there are so many different types of promotions that can have an influence on consumers.

On field promotions tend to be an additional element to add to the overall entertainment of the game. For instance, between innings at a baseball game there is usually some kind of on field promotion occurring. Basketball games usually have some kind of on court promotions as well. An example of an on field promotion could be a mascot race around the field or a tug of war competition. On average, a promotion that will occur during a game increases attendance by 14% (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003). However, for this to be the case, "on field promotions need to be creative in order to attract fans to pay attention to them (Eden, Upright & Hey, 2013, p. 18). The whole point of on field promotions is to give the fans something to look at while the game or event is on a break. If the promotion is not entertaining people are likely to be annoyed and even be dissatisfied with the whole event.



Within the last couple years in the sport industry, there has been a growing trend toward corporate sponsors, which can include sponsored on field promotions. This means that corporations with sponsorship packages use their promotional nights to distribute a product, or giveaway to the fans in attendance (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). A specific example of a sponsored promotion could be the way in which the Genesee Brew House sponsors beer and other promotional nights for the Rochester Americans. Most recently, the Genesee Brew sponsored a happy hour before a Rochester Americans game featuring discounted beer and free music (C. LaFlair, personal communication, December, 2016). Sport sponsorship is a viable component in marketing strategies, and it should always be considered when thinking about promotions (Stutlar, 2004).

Marketing of an event or promotion is key to getting consumers into the event. The marketing of the event consists of a diverse collection of tools and designs to stimulate quicker and greater purchase of a product by a consumer (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). A marketer's job is to create unique ways to grab consumer attention. Due to the fact that consumers see tons of advertisements each day, it is important to come up with an advertisement that will make your organization's advertisement stand out to them. We've gone from being exposed to about 500 ads a day back in the 70's to as many as 5,000 a day or more (Johnson, 2006). It is also very important to know your audience and who the message is being targeted at. According to Eden, Upright and Hey, knowing your audience is important because you will be able to meet the needs of consumers and run an effective marketing plan (2013). It is important for a marketer to know where their advertising will be most effective, which means that a marker has to know when the best time is to run their advertisement, and where it should be advertised. An organization has to know if

their advertising is more effective on TV rather than on the radio, or on other advertising platforms. Promotions advertised and run during a non-rival game or on a weekend seemed to increase attendance most significantly (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003). During rival games, fans are most likely there strictly for that rival team, in that case it would be important to advertise that rivalry instead of trying to fit any other promotions into their marketing. The marketing of the event is really what allows promotions to be successful, and for that reason it is important to note the significance of marketing as well.

### **Social Factors**

Social media, word of mouth communication and socialization are all factors that can have an influence on consumers. All of these factors can be grouped under social factors because they all involve a way for consumers to mingle with others, whether it be online or in person. Though they are all different forms of communication, they are all ways for consumers to communicate with organizations and other consumers, as well as being reasons why a consumer might attend a sporting event.

Perhaps the most up and coming element that can influence a consumers' decision to attend a sporting event is social media (Warren, 2016). Today, consumers are engulfed in social media and constantly using their cell phones to go on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram among other things. Sales managers should consider incorporating more training in social media because social media is becoming a tool to leverage greater sales success (Warren, 2016). Social media has become a great tool for sales because it is the most efficient way to reach an organization target market. It is especially helpful because fans who follow a team's social media sites most likely feel a sense of identity or loyalty to that team (Wakefield, 2016). The more passionate a fan is about a sport team the more

likely they are to follow that team on different social media platforms (Wakefield, 2016). A lot of teams in the sport industry have a social media site because it is the best way to connect with fans as quickly as possible. In a study done by Warren he found that, “the power of social media is driving sales by connecting with potential customers at various points throughout the sales process” (2016, p. 230). Instead of the typical sales process, sales reps can now engage with potential customers much more efficiently, and at any time in the day instead of having to set up a specific meeting time to do so.

Social media is able to engage with potential customers and return customers that they might not have reached otherwise. According to Warren, social media has an influence on fan attendance because fans become a collaborative part of the marketing and sales process, instead of just being a tiny factor in the process (2016). Consumers like to know that they are actually a part of the sales process and that they have a say in what happens in an organization. They also like to know that they are being seen as the center of attention. In other words, they want an organization to pay attention to them and actually value them (Wakefield, 2016). Social media helps to create this idea because an organization is able to communicate with consumers much faster and take into account what they want or need in a more sufficient manner. New media offers the possibility of unlimited and constant interaction through which users can create, share and exchange content (Ristevska, 2016). New media and social media forms of communication with consumers seem to be more prevalent at times than that of traditional interactions with consumers. A traditional interaction with customers involves usually a long and detailed explanation of products or services offered (Wakefiled,2016). Where a social media interaction involves a quick process of communication that is very direct and to the point,

instead of drawn out and detailed. Warren found that social media does have an impact on revenue generated by an organization as well as consumer attendance at a sporting event (2016). It might seem strange to think that social media can have this much influence, but with most of an organization's target market on some form of social media, it only makes sense.

Social media influencing fans to attend in greater numbers leads to an increase in revenue. Therefore, social media sales should be a tool for organization. This is part of the reason why many organizations are starting to focus more on creating a social media presence and attempting to reach those consumers they normally wouldn't. In particular, Twitter is the platform of choice for many organizations. Twitter tends to be more public, with only 10-15% of Twitter users having private profiles, which makes it easier to connect with more people than any other form of social media (Sanderson & Browning, 2015). Overall, social media seems to have a huge influence on a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event, as well as creating many different benefits from an organization standpoint.

Another factor, one that's not only surprising but also perhaps the most influential of all of them, is word of mouth communication. "Word of mouth communication is defined as the verbal communication behavior related to a certain brand, product or service among individuals" (Long & Ching, 2010, p. 21). Word of mouth communication involves creating a buzz about an event, team or item (Peden, Upright & Hay, 2013). Word of mouth communication can either make or break a person's overall impression of an organization. If someone hears from others that something went wrong at an event, they are less likely to go to that organization or attend games for that team.

According to Asada and Ko, word of mouth influence plays an important role in the outcome of game satisfaction (2016). This means that if people leave the event very satisfied, they will tell their friends about the quality of the event they attended hosted by that particular organization and in turn those friends will want to attend events in the future. On the other hand, if a person leaves an event dissatisfied, they will tell everyone about the horrible experiences they had at the event. In turn, anyone who heard this from them may not be fully satisfied because what they heard from others may sway their opinion of an organization. They may go into the event with an already biased opinion. A study by Asada and Ko revealed that, "some possible outcomes of word of mouth influence include things such as reduced risk of performance, improved perception of a firm, and increased likelihood of purchase." (2016, p. 193). This goes back to the idea that the word of mouth influence from a consumer who left the event fully satisfied will likely lead to further positive implications for the organization. Along with this, Long and Ching found that word of mouth can be positive or negative. Negative word of mouth communication comes in the form of customer complaints, and positive word of mouth can be beneficial to customers in the long run (2010). Although word of mouth communication can go either way, all an organization can do is try to make the event as satisfying as possible for all those involved. Overall, the word of mouth influence is crucial in influencing a consumer in attending a sporting event.

One of the most motivational concepts when thinking about the decision-making process could be socialization. "Socialization is defined as a process in which people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their performance in specific situations or settings" (Thaicon, 2017, p.41). Socialization is a combination of both self-imposed and

externally-imposed rules, and the expectations of the others. The individual wants to conform to that certain group of individuals and will do whatever it takes to make that happen. According to Dhurup, people identify themselves in terms of their social group and learn from members to develop a positive social identity (2012). More often than not, a person is more likely to make a decision based on what their social group does. People establish their social identity based on the social group they pick. For sport organizations, this could be both beneficial and potentially harmful for event attendance. Socialization relates to the interpersonal aspect of sport. It represents a desire for sociability and the extent to which a person perceives attending a sporting event as an opportunity to interact with family and friends (Funk, Filo, Beaton & Pritchard, 2009). When looking at socialization this way, an organization could benefit because if an event is looked at as an opportunity for people to interact with others they are more likely to attend. Socialization seems to be an important fact that consumers consider before making a purchasing decision.

### **Event Factors**

Along with consumer influence, the event itself can also be an influential factor in consumer decision making. Different event metrics seem to have some effect over consumer decision making, including price of the event, geography and rivalry. One of the biggest influences seems to be the pricing for sporting events. The price of tickets to attend a sporting event is clearly of great importance (Soebbing & Watanabe, 2014). The price of tickets depends based on the type of sporting event a person is attending, but regardless fans sometimes have trouble attending an event because of the high cost of tickets, which often results in the fan deciding not to attend the event. For instance, tickets to an NFL

game can range anywhere from \$100 dollars for 300 level seats to \$500 dollars for field seats. On a little bit different scale, Rochester Red Wings tickets can range in price based on where a person wants to sit starting at around \$18 and going up from there for better seats or box seats (M. Cipro, personal communication, June, 2016). Regardless of the level of sport, organizations should offer multiple pricing options that would maximize attendance (Soebbing & Watanabe, 2014). The biggest complaint among fans seems to be the price of tickets for an event, and in some cases this factor might even drive a consumer away and cause them not to purchase that ticket or prevent them from purchasing.

Other event metrics that seemed to be significant included rivalry games and geography. Rivalry plays an important role to sport fans and has been used by organizations to promote and market their product to consumers (Harvard & Eddy & Ryan, 2016). Rivalry games always seem to be more attractive to consumers because they know that they will be getting great entertainment. On average, rivalry games can increase attendance up to two times the normal game attendance if not more, depending on the rival (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003). The idea of attending a rivalry game seems to be more attractive to fans which could be due to the fact that they know they are attending a huge game with lots of star players, as well as the idea that they will gain the ultimate level of event satisfaction. The level of satisfaction will also couple with the excitement and other emotions that a consumer might feel because of the atmosphere of the game. Fans tend to experience a heightened sense of satisfaction when their favorite team defeats the rival team in direct competition (Harvard, Eddy & Ryan, 2016). Rivalry games tend to drive in more attendance, which is why this is an important factor to look at when considering consumer attendance at a sporting event.

There are also some unique geographical factors that come into play when looking at a consumer's decision to attend. The number of seasons a team has been located in the area can have an influence on attendance (Soebbing & Watanabe, 2014). If consumers are familiar with an organization, they will be more likely to attend those games because that organization has been around for a while. For instance, when looking at the Rochester Red Wings, they have been in the area for a number of years, and are known as a family oriented organization (D. Mason, personal communication, December, 2016). For this reason, people are more likely to attend a Red Wings game because they are familiar with the organization, and they feel comfortable with them as well. Geography can have an effect on consumer attendance, but it doesn't seem that it is the most influential factor on consumer decision making

### **Consumer Decision Making Factors**

Besides the different influential factors, it is also beneficial to take a look at exactly when the purchase decision happens. Understanding where the purchase decision happens for consumers will ultimately help organizations understand where their focus should be. According to Dae, Yu & Edward, motivation to attend can induce emotion, behavior and cognitive response toward attending an event (2016). A lot of different components and motivations go into the overall decision making.

Consumer emotion can have a huge impact on motivation as well as on other responses. According to Dae, Yu and Edward, emotion has a powerful effect on thought, decision and action (2011). For consumers, it seems that the more emotion you can draw out of them, the more likely they are to make a decision to attend that teams event.

“Motivation represents an activated internal state that arouses, directs and leads to



behavior” (Funk, Filo, Beaton & Pritchard, 2009, p. 129). Motivation will ultimately lead to a purchasing decision, and some of this motivation stems from emotions that a person feels. Perhaps one of the most motivational emotions is excitement. This can be excitement about the event itself, about a star player, or about promotions, but whatever the case is excitement is key when analyzing purchasing decisions. An athlete’s performance on the court or field can be one important factor that triggers and evokes feelings of excitement that a fan aspires to experience (Lee & Kang, 2015). A lot of times, excitement stimulates the overall experience, which only adds to the reasons why a fan decides to purchase tickets to attend an event. According to Funk et. al, excitement represents the extent to which a sport event is perceived as providing stimulation due to the consumption experience (2009). This idea means that the event itself can both instill this excitement in a consumer, but can also have a negative influence on them. If a person is not fully satisfied with their experience at an event, this will also have an effect on their overall emotion toward the game, and potentially on their attendance in the future.

The idea of consumer emotion leads into more consumer factors that can affect the decision-making process, one of which is fan loyalty. Fan loyalty can be seen as fan motives and factors that influence a person’s decision to attend a sporting event and can also affect sporting consumption at all levels (Gargone, 2016). The more loyal a fan is to an organization or team, the more likely they will be to both attend an event and continue to attend these events. Fan loyalty and fan passion of the team are prime motivators of buying behavior and need to be recognized as important in a consumer decision (Wakefield, 2016). Passion for a sport, a team, or a player results in a fan becoming loyal to the team and ultimately these are the fans that an organization needs to hold on to. As Gargone

states, consumer loyalty has a greater impact on customer retention than any other factor (2016). The idea of fan loyalty seems to be a key influence when looking at decision making that gets consumers to games. If a fan is more loyal to an organization, then they will be more likely to attend that team's events. Sport organizations need to recognize fan motives for supporting their favorite teams because a better understanding of a fan's needs and wants will likely lead to an increase in fan base (Peden, Upright, Hey & Jordan, 2015). Fans, especially those who are loyal fans to a team or organization need to feel that the organization paying attention to them, if this happens the fan is more likely to continue to return. Organizations can do this by simply meeting a customer's needs and wants and recognizing the effects of team loyalty on fan motives (Gargone, 2016). Fan motives and loyalty can lead directly into a fan becoming more than just loyal to a team, but ultimately identifying themselves with that team or organization.

The way a fan identifies with a team can play an important role in a consumer's decision to purchase and attend an event. "Team identification can be defined as the spectator's perceived connectedness to a team and the experience of the team's feelings and achievements as their own" (Dhurup, 2012, p.745). In other words, the more a fan identifies with a team, the more they feel a team's performance personally. For instance, if a team is winning and doing well in the season, a fan who identifies themselves with that team will feel as if they are winning too. On the reverse, if a team loses a game, a fan might feel like they have lost too, and are almost upset because of that loss. Team identification can have a huge impact on consumers overall. Team identification has positive impacts on attitude formation, purchase intent and a fans willingness to attend a sporting event (Lee &

Kang, 2015). It seems that the more attached a fan is to a team, the more likely they are to attend the team's events.

Along with this, a huge sense of satisfaction may be associated with team identification (Lee & Kang, 2015). There are many different elements of an event that add up to a fan's overall event satisfaction, but team identification emerged as one of the leading factors in this consumer satisfaction. Identification with a team showed strong positive relationships with satisfaction and future attendance (Dhurup, 2012). Event satisfaction and team identification tend to go hand in hand, and have a huge influence on a fan's purchasing decision, as well as future purchasing decisions. The more satisfied a fan feels with their overall experience while at an event will only increase their commitment to the team and organization, as well as instilling their loyalty and team identification. According to Wann, Royalty and Rochelle, high levels of satisfaction and entertainment were detected regardless of a person's level of team identification (2002). In other words, when looking at team identification, the different levels of fandom do not play a role because regardless of a person's level of fandom they were still experiencing satisfaction well at the event. Team identification seems to be among the most influential factors of a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event.

The overall experience a fan receives at an event can be defined as event satisfaction, which can either be a positive or negative experience. Event satisfaction is important when considering a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event. "Event performance related satisfaction had a positive impact on both team identification and revisit intent" (Lee & Kang, 2015, p. 226). The more a fan enjoys the overall event and is satisfied with their experience, the more likely they are to return to another game or even

begin to follow the team. It has been found that people who have a positive image of an event are more likely to revisit that event (Wicker, Hallmann & Zhang, 2012). Leaving an event with feelings of satisfaction can be one of the most beneficial to both an organization as well as the individual themselves. There is a certain level of consumption related to fulfillment, meaning that a fan's consumption experience is what leads to their overall feeling toward the event itself, or the organization (Dhurup, 2012). In other words, the more a fan consumes a team or an event, the more satisfied they are likely to be with that experience. Core event satisfaction is a smaller part of the overall event satisfaction and involves the actual event and performance itself. According to Lee and Kang, a sport fan's core event satisfaction has a significant influence on the fan's team identification and intention to attend more games in the future (2015).

Another part of the overall event satisfaction is the peripheral event satisfaction. This can be defined as the promotional and entertainment activities that are provided to consumers at a sporting event. "Peripheral event satisfaction was found to have a direct effect on a consumer revisit intention (Lee & Kang, 2015, p. 228). This means that promotional factors have a lot to do with the overall event experience for a fan. For example, some fans decided to attend events strictly because of a certain promotion such as bobble head night or for certain promotional nights such as star wars night. In this case a fan might leave the game feeling satisfied or not based on the way that promotional or entertainment factor made them feel. Significant levels of satisfaction have been found in consumers attending a variety of sporting events which have affected a consumer's revisit intent (Wicker, Hallmann & Xhang, 2012). The overall event can have a huge influence on fan attendance, because if a fan is not satisfied with an organization or any aspect of the

event itself, they are not likely going to attend another game for that sporting event or team.

### **Purpose**

Previous studies on this topic have been very specific and closely associated to only one factor of influence. These have looked into one specific factor of interest when assessing the consumer decision making process, but they have not compared different factors to conclude if one is more significant than others (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003). It is known that promotional factors, social factors, consumer factors and event factors all play a role in consumer decision making, however it is not yet known if any one factor plays a greater role in this process than others do. According to McDonald & Rascher, numerous studies have found a variety of variables that influence attendance at sporting events, but they have not determined the most significant of the factors (2000). In the current project, certain factors are going to be tested and ultimately compared together in order to determine those that appear to be of the most significance. The purpose of this research is to determine which factor has the greatest influence on the consumer decision making process when determining whether to attend a sporting event. Subsequently, the research questions are as follows:

1. Do promotional factors have an influence on consumers?
2. Do certain social factors have an influence on a consumer's decision to attend?
3. Is there a significant difference of participant characteristics and decision making factors?
4. In what ways do consumer decision making factors influence attendance?
5. What event factors are significant to consumers?

## **Method**

### **Sample Selection**

The sample for this study consisted of St. John Fisher College undergraduate students. The justification behind this was that this would allow for a younger population of people to be represented, because this is the population of upcoming consumers (Warren, 2016). All undergraduate students were considered for this survey, freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Regardless of the method used, it is important that the survey sample size is as large as possible in order to provide sufficient evidence in order to draw conclusions (Phillips, 2015). However, there were some set parameters when interest in the survey was initially being gathered. As previously stated, people from all class years were represented in this survey, which allowed for a lot of different age ranges to be taken into consideration. In this case, getting a broad age range was important because different ages may have different reasoning behind their attendance. For instance, those who are 21 might be more influenced to attend a game because of the drink factor whereas someone under the age of 21 might attend a game for other reasons such as the socialization factor. This age group is more likely to be influenced by different factors when considering their attendance at a sporting event. Another parameter consisted of setting a time on when a person last attend a sporting event, in the case of this research participants must have attended a college or professional sporting event in 2016. By setting some sort of time on game attendance, this allowed for the weeding out of some people who wouldn't have been helpful with their survey answers. Overall, for this research, it was initially found that about 300 participants would be more than sufficient. After the research collection process,

it was determined that more than 300 would provide better information and allow for more complete analysis to be done. The studies found about cross section survey usage seemed to range between 100-300 participants in their surveys (De Bruijne& Wijnant, 2014).

### **Variable Operationalization**

The researcher collected data regarding factors influencing consumer decisions to attend sporting events. A variety of variables were used in order to collect data. This was done to ensure that sufficient evidence was gathered, in the hope that some factors would stand out more than others. The independent variables consisted of all of the factors that fit into four categories, promotional factors, social factors, consumer decision making factors and event factors. The dependent variable is the actual consumer decision. The promotional factors included on field promotions, value added promotions and price promotions. Promotions can be defined as a diverse collection of tools and tactics to stimulate consumer response (McDonald & Rascher, 2000). These were used to see which type of promotion is most attractive and influential to consumers, and these were measured using ordinal scale questions in which participants selected which type of promotion they preferred. The social factors included social media, word of mouth, and socialization. Social media and word of mouth were used in attempt to conclude how participants hear about sporting events, and were measured using a drag and drop method in which participants placed different platforms of how they hear about sporting events into correct categories. Socialization was defined as the way a person identifies with their social group, and if that had an effect on their attendance patters. Consumer decision making factors included consumer emotion, fan loyalty, fan identity and event satisfaction.

Consumer emotion was defined as the SPEED factors, and involved how a consumer felt well at an event. This variable can be defined as the overall emotions that played a role in motivating a consumer to attend a sporting event (Funk, Filo, Beaton & Pritchard, 2009). Fan loyalty was defined as a fans commitment to a team, and was measured using the fandom model in which participants selected their level of fandom. Fan identification was defined as the way a fan associated themselves with a team. Fan loyalty and fan identification were defined as fan motives and factors that influence a person's decision to attend a sporting event (Gargone, 2016). The event factors consisted of price, rivalry and geography. Price was defined as the price of tickets. "Price of tickets to attend a sporting event is clearly of great importance" (Soebbing & Watanabe, 2014). The rivalry factor was defined as a rivalry game, and if this rivalry game was of influence on a consumer decision to attend a sporting event. Geography was defined as a home game or an away game. These factors were all measured using an ordinal scale in which participants indicated which was most important to them using a scale that ranged from not at all important to very important. All of these independent factors helped to show which factors held the most influence on consumer decision making to attend a sporting event.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

A cross sectional survey was used in order to measure the variables of interest. A cross sectional survey involves taking a sample from different people and comparing results for relationships (Jones & Gratton, 2015). In the case of this research, a cross sectional survey was the most appropriate in order to reach the maximum amount of people, to ensure a good sample of answers to work with. The survey consisted of 11 questions that focused on the independent variables mentioned above in order to gain



more information on factors that stood out the most as having an influence on consumer decision making. According to Phillips, starting with questions that are easy to answer or non-confrontational and placing the most relevant questions first are recommended (2015). The first item on the survey was an ethical treatment statement, in which participants had to select if they would or would not participate in the survey (See Appendix A). This was very necessary because all participation in this survey was strictly voluntary and no one was required to participate. The first couple of questions after the participant agreed to the survey focused on participant attendance, if they had attended a college or professional sporting event in 2016 (fitting the parameters) and the frequency of their attendance. The fourth question was based on understanding how consumers hear about sporting events, and had them place different platforms into 3 categories, ranging from "I use this platform most often" to "I never use this platform". The next couple of questions focused on different factors of influence, which included emotion and event factors. These questions were asked using an ordinal scale method that required participants to pick the importance of each factor. The end of the survey, questions 9-11 consisted of demographic questions, including participants class year, if they were 21 years of age or older, as well as their level of fandom. The sequence of questions went from finding out if the participant had attended a sporting event in 2016, the frequency of their attendance and what level they attended and then moved into questions about the different independent factors that could have an influence on their decision to attend a sporting event. The questions asked on the survey consisted of mostly multiple choice questions, including yes or no questions, and questions that asked participants to indicate the importance of factors by filling in the bubbles ranging from Very important to not at all

important. The use of multiple choice questions will allow for the best most honest answers (Phillips, 2015). The researcher felt that the use of a survey for this research allowed for the most data to be collected on the subject, from the widest variety of people.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process began with forming ideas for questions that would be asked on the survey. These questions were articulated in a way that they all related back to the research questions in order for the survey to be as effective as possible. After the questions that were going to be asked on the survey were thought out and solidified, they were put into Qualtrics. Within Qualtrics, the questions were edited in ways that made them most practical and easier for participants to understand. Many of the questions were formatted differently than others because the researcher felt that the formatting of the questions was important.

After the survey was completed, it was first pilot tested on a few students in the class to ensure that the purpose of the survey was clear. The pilot test helped to gauge an approximate time for completion of the survey as well. According to Phillips, surveys should be fairly short, on average taking between 5-7 minutes for participants to take (2015). This survey took participants less than five minutes to complete. . Upon recommendations from those who pilot tested the survey, small revisions were made in order to ensure the survey questions would ultimately answer the overall research questions. These revisions included restructuring questions and question placement.

After making the appropriate revisions, the surveys were then sent out to all undergraduate students at St. John Fisher College by email, with the link to the survey included in the email (See Appendix B). The initial email was sent out to students on

February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017. About two weeks after the initial email was sent out containing the link, a follow up email was sent out on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 (See Appendix C) encouraging students once again to take the survey if they had yet to do so. About a week later, the survey was closed, and responses were no longer recorded.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

After the survey was closed, the data was downloaded as a .CSV file, and exported into Microsoft Excel. During the downloading process, the researcher chose to download the data as numeric values. Downloading the data this way made it easier for the researcher when the data had to be transferred over to IBM SPSS Statistics. Microsoft Excel allowed the researcher to recode the data more easily. After the data was all in Microsoft Excel, the researcher removed any unnecessary info that did not apply to the research (Jones, p. 248). In the case of this research, the unnecessary data included anyone who answered “no” to the ethical treatment statement. It also included anyone who answered “no” to attending a college or professional sporting event during 2016. In addition to these, the researcher decided what other responses to remove from the data based on if a participant had failed to answer a number of questions on the survey.

Prior to transferring data from Microsoft Excel into IBM SPSS Statistics, variable titles were labeled, corresponding to the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet labels. At this time, scales were also set for the different variables. After everything was labeled appropriately and SPSS was set up how the researcher wanted it to be, the data was transferred from Microsoft Excel into IBM SPSS Statistics. SPSS was very important when analyzing what factors had greater influence on consumer decision. The researcher used SPSS to find frequencies of various variables as well as run different tests. The tests run included

correlation tests, ANOVA tests and T-tests, as well as mean and mode Mean and mode were run to assess the frequency of attendance among other things.

### **Results**

Overall, the responses from participants uncovered an understanding of the factors that have the greatest influence on the consumer decision to attend a sporting event. Many common factors were revealed as more important than others when tests were run and variables were compared. The main themes included the SPEED factor and its significance at all levels of sport as well as a consistently significant platform where consumers receive their information from. Responses from participants revealed what specific factors sport organizations should be focusing on in order to increase consumer attendance at their sporting events.

Respondents to this survey included all academic years. These included 73 freshmen, 56 sophomores, 76 juniors and 93 seniors (N=total number). Some participants in the survey chose not to respond to this question, therefore this is not all of the participants that participated in the survey. Taking a look at the frequency of attendance at different levels of sport (See Table 1), participants had higher levels of attendance at the college level (n=285) over minor league games (n=207) and professional games (n=220) at all levels of frequency of attendance. One hundred eighty-four respondents said they attended a college game less than 5 times, 65 said they attended a college game 6-10 times, and 36 attended more than 10 times, which are all significantly higher responses than those at the other levels.

Regarding promotional questions, price promotions (n=12.245) and value added promotions (n=19.63) were the most preferred at all levels of sport analyzed. On field

promotions did not appear to be significant at any level. When looking at the frequency of platforms used by respondents (See Table 2), social media appeared the most prevalent as 183 respondents ranked this as their most often used platform, Word of mouth was a close second to social media (n=181), followed by internet (n=175). The factors of age (21 or older) and levels of fandom were both looked at based on their p values and the researcher concluded that the age factor had no significance on levels of fandom.

Through the use of correlation, the researcher was able to determine if one factor had an effect on another. Correlation was used when assessing consumer decision for attending sporting events (see Table 3). The table looked at a consumer's reason for attending (SPEED factors) as well as the decision influence, and compared the means of each factor to find the most significant. Excitement appeared to be the most important of the SPEED factors ( $\mu=1.17$ ). Geography was the most important decision influence for consumers ( $\mu=1.66$ ). A chi-square test was used to determine the differences in frequency of attendance based on the SPEED factors (See Table 4). Performance ( $p=14.099$ ) was significant at the .01 level. Esteem ( $p= 11.644$ ) was also significant at the .01 level. Correlation was also used when determining the differences in frequency of attendance based on decision factors (See Table 5). Correlation was important to use here because it allowed the researcher to dive deeper into and actually determine if the decision factors effected attendance, and in what ways. When looking at the types of promotions preferred related to attendance a chi-squared test was used to determine the most significant promotion at each level (See Table 6). A chi-squared test was appropriate to use for this test because it showed the p values for each level, and allowed the researcher to determine which were significant and which were not. At the minor league level, price promotions

appeared the most significant with a value of 9.393. At the college level, value added promotions appeared the most significant with a value of 10.10. When looking at the differences in level of fandom and consumer behavior, there were many significant factors worth noting (See Table 7). At the professional level, fandom was very significant (at the .01 level) with a value of 42.160. This means that fandom is very relevant throughout the consumption of professional sport. The overall performance of the game, and its link to fandom ( $n=52.545$ ), and esteem ( $n=53.363$ ) both appeared to be significant at the .01 level.

Through the use of correlation, the researcher was able to estimate the relationships among variables. The frequency of attendance compared to SPEED factors were measured to see if there was any significant relationship here. There was a slight significance at the professional level ( $p=.35$ ), the minor level ( $p=.295$ ), as well as the college level ( $p=.004$ ), with the level of significance at the college level being the most prevalent. A T-test was also used to measure the age factor in relationship to the attendance patterns at various level (in this case, a lower mean means a more important factor). The researcher found that the mean at the college level was 1.12, at the minor level 1.36, and at the major level 1.30. This means that the 21 or older factor appeared to be the most significant at the college level, which came as a surprise.

### **Discussion**

The information that was presented to the researcher from the participants showed that specific factors such as excitement and the use of social media appear to have the most influence on consumers across all levels of sport. However, some factors seemed to be specific to levels of sport such as price promotions. The information gathered from this

research showed that there are certain factors that influence consumer attendance over others when deciding to attend a sporting event.

The first research question included determining promotional factors of influence on consumers. The research determined that price promotions were significant at the minor league level of sport, which is what previous studies have shown as well. Shapiro, Drayer & Dwyer found the more price promotions an organization offers, the more attendance they have at games (2016). It was also found throughout this research that value added promotions appeared to be the most significant for fans attending at the college level. This was somewhat unexpected, as previous research supported the idea that younger generations would rather have price promotions over other types of promotions (Boyd & Krehbiel, 2003). On field promotions did not appear significant at all. This was interesting because previous research believed that on field promotions were attractive to fans because it was a way to get them more engaged in the game. This research made it clear that there are specific promotions that organizations should focus on depending on the level of sport they are in.

The second research question in this research focused on determining if certain social factors had an influence on consumer decision making. It was initially thought, and supported by previous research that socialization would be the most significant SPEED factor when thinking about the reasons consumers attend events, but this was not true. The research showed that excitement was actually the most important to this age range of consumers. Through the data analysis it appeared that excitement had a mean value of 1.17, and socialization had a mean value of 1.66, considerable higher than that of excitement, and also appeared statistically significant. Another social factor that appeared

significant was the way in which people hear about sporting events. Previous research believed that social media would be the most significant way in which consumers hear about sporting events, and this assertion was supported by the research. Social media did appear to be the one chosen most often when consumers hear about sporting events.

Taking a look at the third research question involving participant characteristics including age and academic year, the researcher wanted to determine if age or academic year had any effect on consumer attendance. The researcher originally thought that the age factor of consumers would appear to be a significant factor in their attendance, however this was proven false by the research. Research found that there was no significant difference between age (being younger than 21 or older) and attendance patterns at games. There was also found to be no significance between age and other factors such as levels of fandom or fan loyalty. Academic year also did not play a factor in consumer decision making when attending sporting events. The researcher originally thought that academic year might have played a factor because the research was done on a college campus, where not everyone is allowed to have a car, but this was also unsupported by the research.

The fourth research question wanted to determine influential consumer decision making factors. The researcher defined this as fan identity, fan loyalty and emotion. Consumer emotion was captured in the research by asking respondents about star player performances and esteem. . This goes against what previous studies found. Previous studies looked a lot into the effects of emotion and how emotion motivates fans to attend games. The current research disagrees, and makes it clear that other factors are more important than emotion. Fan identity was looked at in the research by gathering fandom levels from participants. Fandom levels appeared to be most significant at the .01 level in



professional sports organizations. Consumers showed a stronger sense of fandom when attending at this level. The research makes it clear that professional sport organizations should place emphasis on the idea of fandom and work to emphasize these fandom levels whenever possible to gain consumer attendance.

The final research questions aimed to discover event factors that appeared to be significant to consumers. Previous research supported the idea that the price of tickets would be the most significant at all levels of sport. Pricing at games can either make or break a consumer's decision to attend (Soebbing & Watanabe, 2014). However, this research found that geography was the most important decision influence for consumers. Geography had a significantly lower mean than the other factors of influence indicating it was a greater influence. It was also found that the more fans attend games at certain levels, the more geography plays a part in their decision to attend the game. Whether the game is home or away plays a huge role in consumer decision to attend sporting events. This would be something good for sport organizations to know, although they can't do anything about away games, it lets them know that focusing their sights on other factors such as star player performance is a wasted effort on their part.

### **Conclusions**

The current study explored different factors that affect consumer decision making when attending a sporting event. Certain factors stood out more than others upon completion of the research such as geography and excitement as the most important over what was previously thought. There was also evidence in factors that are not as significant to consumer decision making, which is also important to note. The results found throughout this research can be taken into consideration in the future for sport

organizations to utilize. Having more solidified knowledge of the factors that do, and do not effect consumers will be useful for organizations because they will know where to focus their sights.

There were some limitations throughout this research that could have played a role in the overall results. A somewhat small population of St. John Fisher College undergraduates was used as the research subjects in this research. Along with this, only about 430 responses were recoded from a total of over 1,200 emails that were sent out to students. Having a small population used for the research doesn't allow for a wide range of answers and data to be collected. If the research could have been done with a larger population of research subjects, the data would probably be much different and provide a lot more insight into specifics. Another limitation was the survey instrument itself, and the fact that participants were not required to answer every question. This allowed for a lot of empty answers when the researcher was going through the data, and made for less overall data that could be used for analysis.

Some recommendations for future research on factors that influence consumer decision making would be to try to get a wider range of people to use as research subjects. Though a college setting provided the researcher easy access, and did allow for effective analysis to be done, it was not as effective as it could be. Gathering more data from a wider range of people would allow for more detailed accounts of specific factors consumers preferred over others. Another recommendation would be to dive deeper into the specifics of factors. Though this research touches the surface on many different factors, it does not go far in depth into any single factor as much as it could.

We're back to that beautiful sunny day in mid-July. You have been hearing about this your local baseball home game all around town. You open your phone and happen to come across a tweet from that baseball team about the beautiful weather they expect for tonight's game. When you open your Instagram, the first thing that pops up is a picture that the baseball team has posted of the fresh cut field. You also know that the game is a huge rivalry game, and expected to be one of the best of the season. In the end, you end up deciding to attend the 7:05 game on this mid-July night.

There are a lot of factors that can influence a consumer to attend a sporting event. This research aimed to determine which factors appeared the most significant to college level consumers. Overall, those looking to fill their stadiums should target collegiate athletes by using social media, capitalizing on proximity to a stadium, and highlighting a rival opponent when they come to town.

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## Appendix A

This survey aims to answer the following research question: Which factor has the greatest influence on the consumer decision making process when determining whether to attend a sporting event?

This survey contains 11 questions that will take approximately 5 minutes to answer. There is minimal risk for participation in this survey and there are no direct benefits of participation. However, it is hoped that through your participation the factors that affect the consumer decision making process can be better understood.

All data collected from this survey will be kept confidential. If you choose to participate in the survey please answer all questions to the best of your ability. Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the survey at any time or refuse to participate entirely.

Will you participate in this survey?

## Appendix B

Dear Participant:

My name is Sarah Gensler and I am an undergraduate, Sport Management major here at St. John Fisher College. For my senior thesis project I am examining which factors have the greatest influence on the consumer decision making process when determining whether to attend a sporting event. As a member of my target demographic, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the linked survey.

The linked survey will require approximately 5 minutes to complete. There is no compensation for responding nor is there any known risk. All responses will be reported collectively, your answers will not be linked to you specifically.

When responding to the questions, please answer to the best of your ability. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may cease to participate at any time.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to assist me in my research. The data collected will provide useful information regarding determining which factors have the greatest influence on a consumer decision to attend a sporting event. If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me or my supervising professor at the email listed below.

[https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_cu2bvmLM3qkz9fn](https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cu2bvmLM3qkz9fn)

Sincerely,

Sarah Gensler  
smg09710@sjfc.edu

Emily Dane-Staples  
edane-staples@sjfc.ed



## Appendix C

Dear Participant:

An email was recently sent out inviting you to participate in a study that is seeking responses regarding factors that influence a consumer's decision to attend a sporting event. You are part of a specific target population of consumers who is likely to attend a live sporting event. The survey is short containing 11 questions and should only take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

If you have already taken the survey thank you for your completion. If not, please click the link below to complete the brief survey. Your response is important to understanding the consumer decision making process.

If you are having trouble accessing the survey or if you require additional information or have questions, please contact me or my supervising professor at the email listed below.

[https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_cu2bvmLM3qkz9fn](https://sjfc.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cu2bvmLM3qkz9fn)

Sincerely,

Sarah Gensler

[smg09710@sjfc.edu](mailto:smg09710@sjfc.edu)

Emily Dane-Staples

[edane-staples@sjfc.edu](mailto:edane-staples@sjfc.edu)

Table 1

## Attendance Patterns

	Frequency of Attendance		
	Less than 5 times	6-10 times	More than 10 times
College	184	65	36
Minor	180	17	10
Major	195	16	9

Table 2

Where consumers Get Their Information From

	Most Often	Sometimes	Never
Social Media	183	78	14
Word of Mouth	181	89	3
TV	56	146	53
Internet	175	89	10
Radio	13	94	145
Paper	2	45	213
Other	7	3	21

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Note: Column number is total number of respondents

Table 3

## Factors of Influence

Reasons for Attendance (3 item)	$\mu$
Socialization	1.66
Performance	1.36
Excitement	1.17
Esteem	1.68
Diversion	2.03
Decision Influence (5 item)	$\mu$
Rivalry Game	2.05
Opponent	2.43
Price of tickets	1.75
Geography	1.66
Star Player Performance	3.17

Note: Table values indicate ranked/ scale of importance. The lower to mean value, the more important the factor.

Table 4

Differences in frequency of attendance based on SPEED factors

	College	Minor	Professional
Socialization	6.251	7.462	4.141
Performance	14.099**	3.398	3.939
Excitement	4.350	2.318	1.723
Esteem	4.353	6.332	11.644*
Diversion	4.872	5.729	2.169

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Note: Table values are  $\chi^2$  values of difference

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 5

Differences in Frequency of Attendance Based on Decision Factors

	College	Minor	Professional
Rivalry	12.932	4.236	7.311
Opponent	3.197	5.272	12.471
Price	9.142	11.058	7.310
Geography	13.207	25.493	17.908
Star Player Performance	9.991	5.706	4.443

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Note: Table values are  $\chi^2$  values of difference

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6

## Types of Promotions Preferred Related to Attendance

	College	Minor	Professional
Price Promotions	1.52	9.395	1.330
Value Added Promotions	10.10	5.78	3.75

Table 7

Differences in Level of Fandom and Consumer Behaviors

Attendance Patters	$x^2$
College	12.034
Minor	11.060
Professional	42.160**
SPEED Factors	$x^2$
Socialization	8.870
Performance	52.545**
Excitement	17.492*
Esteem	53.363**
Diversion	4.367

---

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$