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An Examination of Sport Event Experience: A Market Segmentation Analysis of FCS Attendees

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In sport spectatorship, past works have suggested football audiences to be particularly disparate with regards to attendance motives and attachments. As such, the purpose of this study was to investigate event experience perspectives among attendee segments at Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) games. Data were collected by self-administering surveys on-site during home games played at a public FCS Division I institution in the southeastern region of the United States. Distinguishable characteristics were explored between students, season ticket holders, and single-game purchasers by conducting Multi-group Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). SEM was used to test causal relationships among eight sportscape factors (i.e., facility design, facility maintenance, game/stadium atmosphere, crowd energy, staff, facility access, player performance, and self-service technology), and attendees' assessment of event quality and institutional brand equity. The model comparison between single game attendees, season ticket holders, and students rendered significant differences. It is evident that perceptions of event quality plays a more pronounced role in cultivating brand equity among those who do not possess partiality towards the institution and its football team (i.e., single-game attendees versus season ticket holders/students). Findings also indicated that the pervasive factor explaining event quality, regardless of spectator type, was the game's atmosphere.

Keywords: Attendance, Sport Attendance, FCS, Stadium Environment, Sportscape

In the college environment, football is an important sport to most intercollegiate athletic departments in terms of both their fan support and balance sheet (Brown, Rascher, Nagel, McEvoy, 2010; Fulks, 2016; Zagier, 2010). However, college football attendance figures have steadily fallen since 2011 (Dodd, 2018; Football Attendance, 2017; Khan Jr., 2018). Attendance declines may be due to a number of reasons, among those being cost, performance, fan generational differences, and heightened accessibility to alternative sport viewing mediums (Gainor, 2015; Smith, 2015). While there are attendance and financial sustainability concerns among all collegiate levels, Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) athletic attendance and finances are not as stable as the more prominent Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level (Brown et al., 2010; Fulks, 2016; Lopian, 2017; Zagier, 2010). This inequality places increased emphasis on lower level teams' abilities to sustain fan support, attendance, and the auxiliary revenue accompanying games (e.g., parking, concessions, merchandise, etc.), which are essential to athletic department finances (Wilner, 2016).

Existing research has made it clear to scholars studying sport spectating that a consumer's game experience, either positive or negative, is predicated upon much more than athletic performance (Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015). For instance, attendees' experience satisfaction has been impacted by an organization's service benefits (i.e., functional quality), outcomes of the service encounter (i.e., technical quality), and environmental features (i.e., aesthetics qualities) (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1982; Rust & Oliver, 1994). Note that studies have successfully validated this in collegiate football contexts (see Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Yoshida & James, 2011). However, the sampling methods employed have largely focused on top level FBS schools located in the southern regions of the United States. This limitation may prevent generalizations to lower divisional categories, such as FCS or Division II, which traditionally exhibit smaller attendance (Football Attendance, 2017). It may also confine findings to fans and stadium settings present in the regions under study.

Further, previous research has analyzed college football attendees collectively, while stadium experiences may vary tremendously across spectator groups (Lambrecht, Kaefer, & Ramenofsky, 2009; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2002). According to past works, FCS audiences have been suggested to be particularly disparate with regards to motives, points of attachment, and perceptions of the game experience (Robinson, Trail, Dick & Gillentine, 2005). A possible approach to increasing the effectiveness of marketing strategy, and event design, then, is through market segmentation. Thus, the first objective of this study was to assess how different attendee sectors (i.e., season ticket holders, single-game purchasers, and students) residing in a southern region perceive their spectating experience through Wakefield and Sloan's (1995) seminal stadium "sportscape" framework. Information gained from this research may highlight institutional strengths and deficiencies for these fan groups, which can be leveraged by athletic administrators to sustain and grow spectator support. Findings may also permit the comparison of findings to previous research which occurred in comparable regions of the United States.

Additionally, service quality is believed in general marketing fields to be a direct antecedent of a service's brand equity, as it illuminates differentiating qualities among alternative providers (Jahanzeb, Fatima, & Butt, 2013; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Brand equity can be operationalized as increased loyalty towards a brand through improved perceptions that come as a result of positive interactive experiences. In the sport context, game satisfaction for sport consumers has demonstrated an ability to cultivate long-term benefits for sport

organizations, such as brand equity (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005; Yoshida & James, 2010). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that brand equity for fans can be realized following an event that is memorable and of high quality. This study intends to test this path model while illuminating precursors to increased loyalty among FCS patron segments.

Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) Football

It is important to note the level differences of collegiate athletic departments in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), particularly at the Division I level and how this relates to football. At most institutions, football is the sport that has the most fans, but that also costs the most to support (Fulks, 2016). The top level of college football, the FBS, is where teams compete to play in bowl games or the newly introduced four-team College Football Playoff (CFP). At the second level of collegiate football, teams compete in the FCS, which culminates with a 24-team playoff. Of the two Division I ranks, the FBS receives more attention than its FCS Division I counterpart largely due to their economic disproportions (Knight, 2009; NCAA, n.d.; Nielsen, 2018; Pausen, 2018; Scarborough, 2012). These disparities emanate largely from attendance as FBS schools in 2017 drew an average crowd of 42,203 while FCS schools drew 8,223 (Football Attendance, 2017). Increased consumption and interest, then, invokes multiple other revenue-generating opportunities for FBS schools (i.e., media, television, sponsorship, licensing) that are not as readily available to FCS institutions, thus perpetuating the financial inequities between the two.

The finances may become even more compounded as the “pay for play games” that typically take place at the beginning of each season, where an FBS team plays an FCS team in exchange for a large sum of money, and likely a loss, may be becoming less frequent. These budget games assist to support the visibility and financial sustainability of FCS athletic departments (Faure & Cranor, 2010). However, in an effort to be selected by the CFP Committee for the four-team playoff, FBS teams are aware their non-conference strength of schedule is considered in the process, and have looked to schedule more FBS opponents, rather than FCS schools (Trotter, 2015; Wolken, 2017). This could greatly impact the already stressed resources of FCS athletic departments (Belzer & Parker, 2015; Fulks, 2016; O’Day, 2013).

While an FCS athletic department does not have any control over the actions of their FBS counterparts, they do have control over their own teams, facilities, and game day experience. Each these factors influence attendance, which ultimately shapes an athletic department’s interrelated revenue streams, such as donations, merchandising, sponsorship, concessions, and media (Fulks, 2016; Smith, 2015). Given the role these outcomes play in programs’ financial stability, greater examination is warranted to determine what factors prompt consumer satisfaction and university brand equity of FCS attendees. As such, the purpose of this study was to provide a more complete picture of consumers attending collegiate football games, particularly of the aspects surrounding the event experience of FCS games which are controllable by sport managers (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014). The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) To what degree does a stadium’s sportscape explain an attendee’s event satisfaction?

2) Is a stadium's sportscape perceived differently by fan segments (e.g., Season Ticket Holders, Single-game Purchasers, and Students), and which aspects are most impactful in explaining a segment's respective event satisfaction and institutional loyalty (i.e., brand equity)?

Literature Review

Sport Stadium Environments and Sportscapes

In the sport management literature, the topic of attendance has received much attention. The seminal works of Noll (1974) and Hansen and Gauthier (1989) considered factors that impact professional sport attendance, with team performance and winning being the most pervasive predictors. However, as sport consumption lines of research evolved into analyses aimed at aiding sport practitioners, more attention was paid to experiential factors extending beyond team-related performance variables. For instance, experiential elements pertaining to ways a facility may invoke attitudes, feelings, and emotions among fans have become focal research points to better gauge antecedents to fan enjoyment and loyalty (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1982; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Wakefield & Sloan, 1995). Further, Hill and Green (2000) emphasized that the sports facility should be an important element of the sport marketing mix, due to sport being highly dependent upon stadia for production, service, and sensory benefits to the consumer.

As past works have indicated, the sport fan can be influenced by stadium design, food service quality, and physical surroundings. Each of these features impact the perceptions of the experience, as well as the willingness of the sport consumer to attend games at the stadium (Bitner, 1992; Melnick, 1993). This led Wakefield and Sloan (1995) to investigate which stadium factors impacted attendance at five FBS Division I football games in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Variables in the study included: stadium parking, stadium cleanliness, perceived crowding in the stands (e.g., aisle widths, facility design concerning interior layout, space, seat arrangements, etc.), food service quality (i.e., variety of food offered, taste of food.), and control of fan behavior (i.e., monitoring and controlling of offensive and abusive fans). Results affirmed that stadium surroundings play an important role in determining spectators' current and future attendance. This became a seminal piece that inspired a breadth of future research reinforcing the sportscape's ability to affect re-patronage intentions in various sports.

Stadia settings in professional soccer (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008), hockey (Casper, Kanters, & James, 2009), golf (Lambrecht et al, 2009), as well as basketball and baseball (Tomlinson, Buttle, & Moores, 1995) have all been examined in an attempt to identify the sportscape factors most impactful on attendees' game experience. Understandably, disparate research contexts have revealed distinctive characteristics among the respective venues with fans generally citing facility aesthetics, cleanliness, seating comfort, customer service, layout accessibility, and atmosphere as the most salient. Although these studies present a general synopsis of factors, nuances associated with sport stadia, level of play, and fan motivation discourage broad stroke generalizations.

Disparities have even been witnessed in premier college football. Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), for instance, determined that a stadium's aesthetic appeal was most pertinent to football spectators, while Yoshida and James (2011) noted that game atmosphere, crowd experience, in-game entertainment, and facility access were among the most significant experiential qualities.

Lee and Bang (2011) explored the motivational and constraint differences between students at Division I and Division III institutions, and revealed that Division I students reported significantly greater responses on most motivational dimensions (i.e., aesthetics, eustress, escape, family, physical skill, and entertainment) than their lower tiered counterparts. A more recent examination of student attendance constraints by Simmons, Popp, McEvoy, and Howell (2017) at multiple college football levels indicated food and beverage costs were significant barriers for the majority of the study's sample; although it became more prominent for those making plans to attend the game on an immediate basis versus those making an advance decision. As such, it is pivotal to acknowledge the role these elements play in fostering customer satisfaction. However, recognizing the heterogeneous nature of college football consumption should also not be overlooked, as well as the strategies to respond to these difference. Thus, the focus of this research was to highlight FCS spectators in an attempt to expand upon an under-researched area of the sport management literature.

Segmentation of Attendees

To further aid in efforts intended to improve consumer satisfaction, sport administrators have found it useful to segment sport consumers (Casper et al., 2009; Dwyer & Drayer, 2010; Funk & James, 2001; Ogles & Masters, 2003). Previous works have highlighted several attendee segments, including season-ticket holders (McDonald, 2010), students and other attendees (Palanjian, Cooper, Weight, & Mihalik, 2014), and gender (Trail, Robinson, & Kim, 2008) among others. The extensive use of segmentation affirms the importance of strategically identifying distinctive characteristics among fans, and then using such data to tailor marketing communication and event management tactics to accentuate homogenous profiles (McDonald, Leckie, Karg, Zubcevic-Basic, & Lock, 2015). However, the criteria by which research establishes homogeneity is rarely congruous, with methods ranging from a priori selections (e.g., demographics, geographics, ticket-holder type, etc.) to psychographic (e.g., behavioral, motivational, attitudes, etc.) strategies. Multiple authors (see Dibb, Simkin, Pride, & Ferrell, 2001; Kotler, Brown, & Makens, 2006; Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, & Beaumont, 2010) note that there is no one best way to segment a market, but rather the decision on what variables to utilize should be based upon the planned objectives of the sport marketers. Greenwell, Fink, and Pastore (2002) add that consumer segments should be identified by delineating variables that best characterize groups with different perceptions of the elements of the purchase experience.

In the current college sport landscape, FCS level resources are limited in terms of staff, salaries, and the like for sport sales, marketing, and promotional endeavors (Belzer & Parker, 2015; Fulks, 2016; O'Day, 2013). As such, a segmentation approach is useful, but could be restricted in the amount of detail that would be feasible in fan groupings and market research with their stressed financial resources. Further, given the recurrent emphasis from sport management scholars and sport administrators on attracting and retaining those segments which show the greatest current and future attendance potential (Mullin et al., 2014; Smith, 2015), this study chose to segment respondents according to their current ticket commitment level (i.e., student attendee, single-game purchaser, and season ticket holder) in relation to facility and event quality. This is consistent with Laesser and Crouch's (2006) weight placed upon segmentation as a means to focus efforts on catering to those who, comparatively, generate higher returns to an organization. Casper et al. (2009) grouped National Hockey League (NHL) spectators by ticket-holder type (i.e., single game, mini-plan, and season ticket holder), as based

upon attendance constraints which included facility cleanliness and facility accessibility, of which there were significant differences according to ticket-type. Robinson et al. (2005) suggested when describing college football fans, that there are prominent differences in attendees when segmented by characteristics of their fandom and level of sport (i.e., Division I, I-AA, II, and III). Research conclusions indicated that attendees desired very different affects from a football experience (Robinson et al., 2005; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003). Ultimately, understanding FCS spectators' game experience will not only bolster season ticket holder perceptions, but may also underscore ways to increase attendance of the lesser attached attendee segments. This study aimed to expand this area with a focus on these FCS consumers.

Methods

Data Collection

Data were collected by self-administering surveys on-site during home games played over a season at public FCS Division I institution in the southeastern region of the United States. Student enrollment for the institution is slightly above 11,000 and average home football attendance has hovered around 9,000 since 2012, which is only slightly above the national FCS average (Football Attendance, 2017). A stratified purposeful sampling approach was employed during each home game played over the entire season (i.e., 6 games) by placing researchers in numerous locations throughout the stadium, thereby soliciting responses from a variety of stadium locales and ensuring that respondents reflected attendees paying high, medium, and low price points for tickets. Among the 600 surveys distributed, 69 were removed due to incompleteness, which resulted in a sample size of 531, and an 89% usability rate. The study's sample fell largely within a five percent range of the national demographic profile statistics of college football attendees, providing evidence of external validity (Nielsen Scarborough, 2016). Attendees were then segmented according to "ticket type" based upon a self-identifying question within the survey instrument (i.e., single-game attendee, student attendee, or season ticket holder). Spectator segments' respective demographics are located in Table 1.

Table 1. *Fan Demographics by Segment.*

	Single-Game Purchaser	Season Ticket Purchaser	Student Attendee	National College Football Data
Age	<i>M</i> – 36.2	<i>M</i> – 46.4	<i>M</i> – 20.8	<i>M</i> - 52
Sex	Male: 55% Female: 45%	Male: 57% Female: 43%	Male: 51% Female: 49%	Male: 60% Female: 40%
Ethnicity	White: 82% Black: 14% Asian: 2% Hispanic: 2%	White: 89% Black: 5% Asian: 1% Hispanic: 1% Other: 2%	White: 47% Black: 39% Asian: 2% Hispanic: 7% Other: 4%	White: 80% Black: 13% Hispanic: 10% Asian: 3%
Education	Some HS: 3% HS Degree: 9% BS or BA: 28% Graduate: 23%	Some HS: 1% HS Degree: 4% BS or BA: 43% Graduate: 18%	Some HS: 2% HS Degree: 10% Some College: 72% BS or BA: 15% Graduate: 2%	HS Grad/Some College: 61% BS or BA: 33%
Household Income	< \$50k: 15% \$50k – 100k: 25% \$100k – \$150k: 7% >\$150k: 16%	< \$50k: 11% \$50k – 100k: 25% \$100k – \$150k: 25% >\$150k: 34%	< \$50k: 11% \$50k – 100k: 25% \$100k – \$150k: 25% >\$150k: 34%	\$50k – \$100k: 34% >\$100k 26%
<i>N</i>	236	148	133	

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was comprised of four sections: demographic information, sportscape elements, brand equity, and event quality. Demographic data elicited information pertaining to respondents' age, sex, household income, and attendee category (i.e., season ticket holder, single game attendee, or student). The stadium sportscape section of the survey instrument consisted of eight variables (3 items per variable) adapted from previously validated studies (see Athanasopoulou, Skourtis, Zafeiropoulou, Siomkos, & Assioras, 2012; Hightower, Brady, & Baker, 2002; Yoshida & James, 2011; Yoshida, James, & Cronin, 2013). The variables within this framework included facility design, facility maintenance, game/stadium atmosphere (i.e., special events, stadium environment, excitement), crowd energy, staff, facility access, player performance, and self-service technology (i.e., online resources). Event Quality, as well as Brand Equity scales contained two items per variable and were adapted from Yoshida and colleagues (2013). The relationship between perceived service quality and equity of a service brand has been explored in multiple service product contexts, such as banking (Jahanzeb et al., 2013), mobile technology services (He & Li, 2011), and areas of consulting (Jensen & Klastrup, 2008). Items reflecting Event Quality focused on the overall assessment of the event delivered by the experience. The Brand Equity items revolved around team loyalty and image towards the team. All items, excluding the demographic questions, were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Data Analysis

Initial data analysis consisted of examining the frequencies and descriptive characteristics of the data (e.g., skewness and kurtosis) to ensure normality prior to running structural equation modeling (SEM). According to Byrne (1998), skewness values exceeding ± 2 and kurtosis values exceeding ± 3 are to be considered non-normal. Descriptive statistics from respondents indicated a skewness value range of -0.233 to -1.030, and kurtosis values between -0.025 and 2.34. Thus, the normality check was satisfied. Following this procedure, each latent construct was subject to a reliability examination to ensure the internal consistency of the scale items. With the exception of crowd energy ($\alpha=.67$), all factors revealed Chronbach's alpha values at, or above, Nunnally's (1978) .70 standard. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the variables under study are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive and Correlation statistics associated with variables under study*

Variable	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Facility Design	.79	3.9377	0.72064	1									
2. Facility Maintenance	.70	4.0811	0.60621	.675**	1								
3. Staff	.78	4.1327	0.63982	.543**	.684**	1							
4. Facility Access	.70	4.1174	0.61749	.579**	.691**	.667**	1						
5. Crowd Energy	.67	4.1189	0.62933	.466**	.514**	.520**	.502**	1					
6. Player Performance	.79	3.9377	0.68016	.502**	.445**	.453**	.391**	.535**	1				
7. Game Atmosphere	.71	3.8877	0.66795	.624**	.571**	.578**	.541**	.660**	.608**	1			
8. Service Technology	.84	3.7582	0.71813	.431**	.384**	.406**	.462**	.350**	.418**	.439**	1		
9. Event Quality	.72	3.8151	0.77762	.464**	.445**	.424**	.450**	.445**	.409**	.602**	.333**	1	
10. Brand Equity	.74	4.4302	0.72286	.370**	.341**	.376**	.329**	.353**	.532**	.367**	.368**	.399**	1

Data were then analyzed using SEM procedures in AMOS 25 to test the causal relationships among the eight sportscape factors, event quality and brand equity. The SEM is developed to evaluate how well a proposed conceptual model that contains observed multiple indicators and hypothetical constructs explains or fits the collected data (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). To ensure model fit, Kline's (2016) recommendations for reporting fit statistics were followed. This included illustrating the normed chi-square (χ^2) index, root mean square error adjusted (RMSEA), normed fit index (NFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Upon confirming adequate model fit, multi-group SEM tested for segment differences (i.e., season ticket holders, single game purchasers, and students) in the theoretical paths linking the eight sportscape factors to event quality, and event quality to brand equity. In attempt to minimize extraneous influence, the model included three control variables of game temperature, game competitiveness, and opponent ranking. Game temperature was recorded from a local weather report at the time of kickoff. Game competitiveness was coded dichotomously (i.e., yes or no) based upon whether or not the game differential at half-time was equal to or less than seven. Opponent ranking was based upon the competitor's end of year ranking among FCS programs.

Results

As a first step in demonstrating the hypothesized causal relationships outlined above, the structural equation model's fit indices and explained variance estimates were evaluated. Concerning the model's ability to fit the data well, the NFI was .96 and the CFI was .97, which falls within Hu and Bentler's (1999) threshold for "excellent" model fit. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was 4.55, and the model's RMSEA value of .08 meets Turner and Reisinger's (2001) recommendation of the error measure lying between .05 and .08. Secondly, after controlling for Game Temperature, Opponent Ranking, and a Competitive Opponent, the model's explained variance ($R^2 = .41$) in Event Quality, revealed a large effect ($R^2 > .25$), according to Cohen (1988). Event Quality, in turn, delineated a significant and medium effect ($R^2 = .16$) on an institution's brand equity. Collectively, these criteria provided ample evidence of the model's validity, and justified further statistical exploration.

Research Question 1

Illustrating model fit then prompted an examination of the model's main effects. Among the eight constructs, Game Atmosphere had the greatest effect on spectators' perceptions of the event's quality ($\beta = .43$), while Facility Access ($\beta = .12$) also demonstrated a positive and significant impact. The relationship between Event Quality and an institution's Brand Equity was also deemed to have a significant causal relationship ($\beta = .40$). These results justified transitioning to the study's primary research question which aimed to discover the moderating effect of spectator type on the study's hypothesized model.

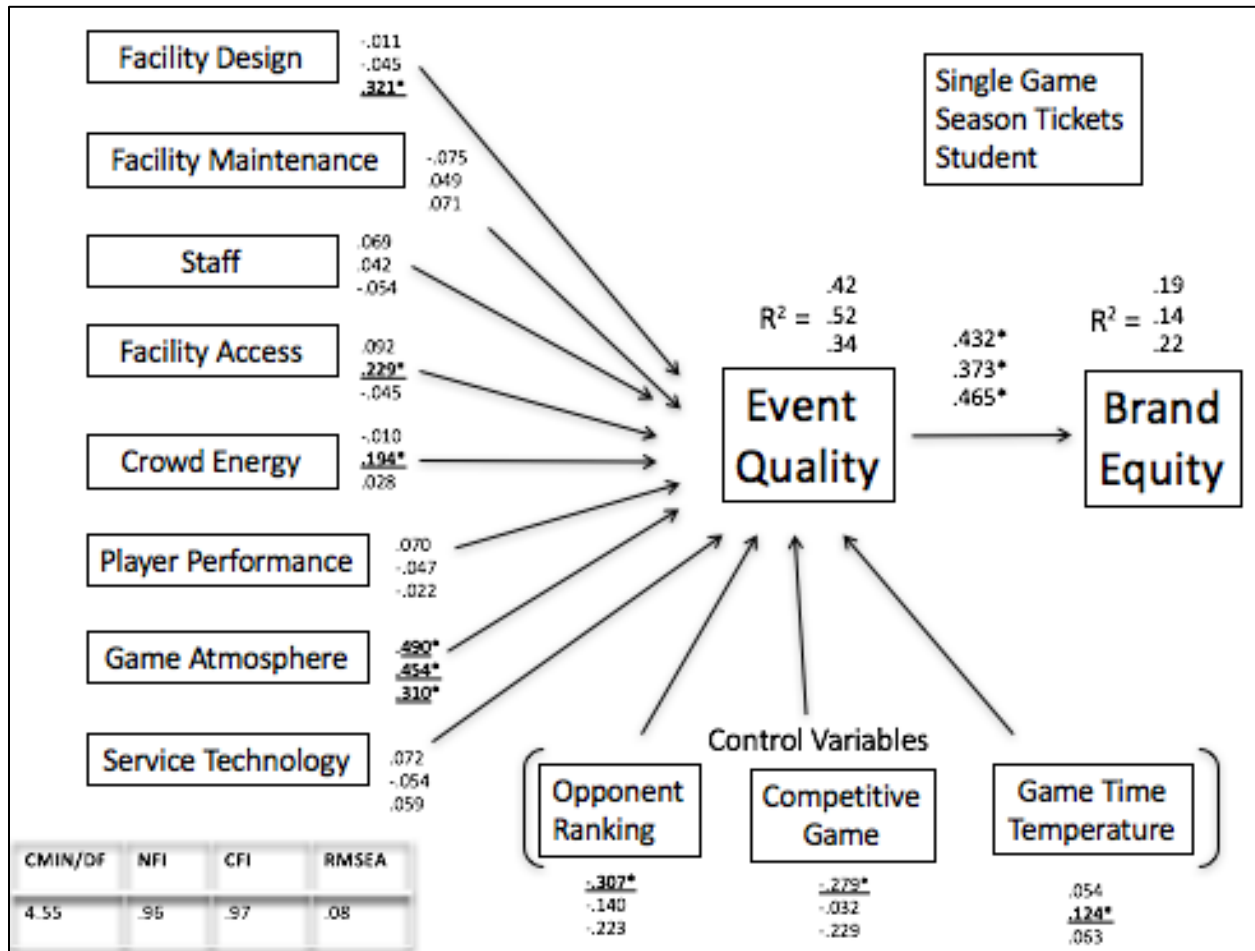
Research Question 2

The model comparison between attendance groups rendered a statistically significant chi-square test, $\chi^2 (24, N = 531) = 39.412, p = .024$, indicating that segments possessed significant differences. Figure 1 illustrates the significant path estimates between the sportscape aspects and assessment of the event's quality for each of the three segments. This supported model comparisons between two groups at a time, which illustrated significant differences between Season Ticket Holders and Students $\chi^2 (12, N = 369) = 25.892, p = .011$, while only revealing moderate significant differences between Single-game Purchasers and Season Ticket Holders, $\chi^2 (12, N = 384) = 19.632, p = .074$. No significant differences were found between Single-game Purchasers and Students.

Among the exogenous variables, only Game Atmosphere produced significant path coefficients for all three segments. However, no significant differences were observed among the three groups in its effect on Event Quality. In contrast, the effect of Event Quality on Brand Equity was significantly different between Season Ticket Holders and the other two segments with Single-game Purchasers ($p = .010$) and Students ($p = .018$) indicating that Event Quality has a stronger effect on their loyalty and affective image. The significant results do indicate that the game quality had a greater impact on spectators' enduring perceptions of the institution, whereas season ticket holders' feelings toward the institution were not as impacted by a positive or negative game experience.

Lastly, the Multi-Group SEM procedure illuminated distinctive preferences among the segments in terms of what antecedents best cultivate Event Quality. For instance, Single-game

Purchasers revealed that in addition to Game Atmosphere, Opponent Ranking and a Competitive Game have a significant impact on their perceptions of the Event’s Quality. Dissimilarly, Season Ticket Holders indicated that Atmosphere, Crowd Energy and Facility Access were influential in their gauging of the Event’s Quality. For Students, only Facility Design, coupled with Atmosphere, played an instrumental role in shaping their opinions of the Event’s Quality.



Note: * denotes significance at $p < .05$

Figure 1. Multi-group SEM results

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate event experience perspectives among attendance segments of FCS football games. Findings indicated overarching, as well as distinctive factors among the spectator categories which positively impact event evaluations. Further, the results emphasize the degree to which event management and execution practices influence FCS institutional brand equity. The following discussion intends to expound upon these research contributions, suggest how these results may inform athletic department marketing and operational tactics, and explore future research opportunities.

The pervasive factor explaining event quality, regardless of fan type, was the game's atmosphere. This is consistent with a long list of studies empirically demonstrating the positive effects of stimuli triggered by fans' surroundings (see Friederici, 1998; Holt, 1995; Yoshida et al., 2013). However, the challenge with this finding, as noted by Urich and Benkenstein (2012), is that atmosphere represents a very abstract phenomenon. Some have said it reflects environmental cues (Babin & Attaway, 2000), sparked by landscapes or accompanying entertainment. Others, however, have attributed atmosphere to social stimuli, produced by human emotions and feelings (Berekoven, 1995). As a result of this, atmosphere tends to uniquely take shape according to the sport context, underscoring the importance of practitioners taking into account the different sources and groups who co-create atmospherics and how they interact differently with diverse segments.

To start, the emphasis placed on game atmosphere among all segments in the study lends credence to the creation of special events afforded to FCS-level institutions based upon their stadium size and intimate spectator environments. To this end, sport managers at the FCS level should capitalize on the access and interactive experiences they can provide to attendees to differentiate themselves from the NFL and larger FBS programs. One FCS example would be to cultivate experiences like Portland State (Eggers, 2016), where their head football coach interacts with fans after home victories at the local bar and grill, and picks up the tab up to \$500. By making an event experience their own, FCS programs may construct game experiences which foster *their own* cultural traditions and history.

Other examples intended to further develop involvement and atmospherics among students, include those by Pennsylvania University (Penn) and James Madison University (JMU). At the end of the third quarter, Penn students throw toasted bread in the air from the stands (Pedulla, 2015) as a tribute to the line "Here's a toast to dear old Penn," from the song, "Drink a Highball." Interestingly, the ritual of throwing toast would prompt engineering students to design a machine to gather toast that landed on the track to alleviate the burden on the maintenance staff. Further, money is raised for food banks to help offset the food loss. At JMU, multiple efforts are made to increase student engagement at games. One tradition involves students hurling streamers in the air after a scoring effort (Allen, 2018). Another involves the freshman class running across the field from end zone to end zone to kick off the beginning of every season (Muller, 2017). Other FCS schools, such as Northern Arizona, Northern Colorado, and Western Carolina have also adopted this tradition to generate greater engagement from incoming student attendees and build game atmosphere prior to kickoff for others present. Social tactics, like the ones mentioned above, may not be feasible with larger volume crowds, or in other sports such as basketball or soccer, due to safety and logistical challenges associated with stadia designs.

The importance of people-oriented atmosphere cited by all segments, and specifically crowd energy from season ticket holders, illuminates the need for event operators to cultivate special events and a stadium setting that emphasizes social interaction. Social platforms provide increased opportunity for fans seeking collective identity, or as Dunning (1999) describes, "we-feelings and a sense of belonging" (p. 6). Moments where fans can "bask in reflected glory" (Cialdini et al., 1976) heighten the purchase experience and affirm one's social existence. These social engagements can certainly be engineered through the creation of in-game fan activities like the ones referenced at JMU and Penn. It can also be produced through pre-game and post-game social engagements with current, as well as former players and coaches, as witnessed at Portland State. A continuation of sport marketers building these opportunities into the game

experience creates social cues (e.g., game chants, songs, etc.) that may amplify attendees' emotional status, nostalgia, and increased likelihood of program loyalty (e.g., repeat attendance, brand equity).

In addition to the atmospherics surrounding the game, other variables relating to the stadium venue were discovered to be impactful and distinguishing among fan segments. Like game atmosphere, benefits inherent to FCS game environments offer opportunities for FCS administrators to more prudently and strategically utilize their resources to maximize the experience for relevant and substantial segments. For instance, season ticket holders valued facility access, which reflected the ease by which patrons were able to enter/exit the stadium, and access concessions, restrooms, and other amenities in a timely fashion. Research in consumer behavior suggests that customers' perception of value often emanates from the level of financial sacrifice made (Zeithaml, 1988). Consequently, it is likely that increased spending exhibited by season ticket purchasers will adjust their service expectations. Thus, stadium operators should examine opportunities to mitigate time spent in lines for preferred attendees by creating entrance points, as well as concessionaire options, made only available to particular spectator segments. An example of this may be the inclusion of mobile applications that allow designated attendees the ability to pre-order concessions or merchandise items from their seat location. Efforts such as these will continue to make this segment feel valued through being granted special access and perks that can only be provided at the FCS level. Incorporating such offerings builds greater value, both from a utilitarian and hedonic perspective, as it permits attendees unique amenities, with minimal wait time and heightened status.

Lastly, results indicated that students cited Facility Design as a factor that affected their perception of the event's quality. Facility Design reflected how the stadium's decorative themes, architecture, and aesthetic appeal enhanced the event experience. This suggests students were influenced more, over the other groups, by the visual appeal of the stadium and its surroundings. Intuitively, this makes sense as most students would compare the football stadium to their prior experiences. Because the recentness of high school would likely be a component of this assessment, students would expect more from the college stadium as they transition as a fan to the new school. Other students have noted the facility newness and niceness as attributes that impact their attendance, albeit to varying degrees (Ferreira & Armstrong, 2004; Lee & Bang, 2011; Palanjian et al., 2014). However, while students prefer a nice stadium, this is just a factor that is considered in their assessment of the experience, and in that mix, others are likely more important (i.e., Game Atmosphere).

Overall, it was evident that event quality can have a significant influence on attendees' brand equity. However, it was especially instrumental among those who do NOT possess partiality towards the institution and its football team. For instance, spectators who are not season ticket holders were more impacted by the quality of event-related facets when assessing the institution's brand equity (Single Game Attendees, $R^2 = .43$). As such, sport administrators should be aware of these event elements when designing marketing strategies where the objective is to grow and sustain commitment and loyalty from lesser-committed fans.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study had several areas to consider in terms of limitation, and areas for future research, that should be noted. The current work is limited in that it may not have included all of the event experience elements from a stadium game day that impacts event experience, given

some of the unexplained variance. Also, there may be certain elements that are exclusive to the FCS level, and future research should work to explore those areas. Similarly, game atmosphere was a significant result of this work, and impactful of the FCS level, and hopefully this study can aid future work to investigate how to better differentiate the layers and components of this area. It may be possible for research to more accurately parcel the components that make up specific aspects of the game day atmosphere (e.g., pre-game, in-game, post-game, etc.) that constitutes the event experience. Further, the study's responses were captured at a single, Southeastern FCS institution, albeit across an entire season,. The geographic location may serve as a limitation for the study and should be taken into consideration when assessing the study's generalizability. Future research could consider multiple venues across the country, and consider several seasons.

While there are some limitations of this work, it contributes to the research on the experience of the sport spectator, specifically from the FCS level through a market segmentation approach, and can aid future investigations on this level of sport. The results can also aid practitioners that manage sport at the FCS level, which at times lack the finances and visibility of upper level athletic departments. These results may be especially relevant at this time as football attendance is declining, to assist with being able to increase support from several attendance segments, and enhance overall event experience for all spectators.

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