



Goal Development and Marketing Evaluation: A Qualitative Examination of Goals in the Marketing of Intercollegiate Athletics

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Intercollegiate athletics is a multi-billion dollar segment of the sport industry. While no college sport brings in as much revenue and attracts more media attention than football, this sport also often provides benefits to each participating university by highlighting school spirit, evoking pride in the institution, and increasing donations. Previous scholars (e.g., Simmons et al., 2017) have examined intercollegiate athletics and sport marketing, primarily by examining the consumer perspective (e.g., motivations, constraints), but not necessarily investigating the organizational or practitioner perspective of the marketing exchange. This study sought to address this gap by examining the perceptions and actions of those (i.e., football sport marketing directors [N=14]) tasked with marketing the sport within one particular conference (i.e., Big Ten Conference). The emerging themes from the collected data reviewed two major themes: goal development and goals; marketing evaluation. Within the theme goal development and goals were the subthemes of information gathering, goal alignment, primary goals, and secondary goals. Within the theme marketing evaluation were the subthemes of standard evaluation methods, informal evaluation methods, and no evaluation method.

Keywords: intercollegiate athletics, college sports, football, marketing, marketing directors, goals, goal development

One of the most notable affiliations in college athletics and college football is the Big Ten Conference (Cooper, 2019; Strauss, 2013). The NCAA has granted five conferences (known as the Power 5) additional degrees of autonomy in college athletics and the Big Ten is one. The Big Ten includes 14 universities located in nine different states, the majority of which are in the midwest. During the 2018 fiscal year, all 13 Big Ten athletic departments reported revenues that ranked in the NCAA's top 40. The uninvited member is Northwestern University, which as a private institution does not have to disclose this information (USA Today, n. d.). One of the main drivers behind the leading revenues was the creation of the Big Ten Network (referred to as "BTN") in 2007. For perspective, in 2018, 170 out of 210 NCAA Division I athletic departments made less than \$54 million while each school in the Big Ten received a payment of \$54 million from their revenue share of the Big Ten Network alone (Berkowitz, 2019). Several Big Ten schools are among the leaders in the United States in terms of student enrollment size. According to the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (n. d.), in the academic year 2017-18, 11 of the 14 Big Ten universities ranked within the top 50 universities in the United States in student enrollment. With such large enrollments come the promise of large alumni bases (e.g., Penn State University Alumni Association is the largest dues-paying alumni association in the world [Penn State, 2016]) which athletic departments can leverage through effective and efficient strategic marketing. Such strategic marketing endeavors can yield donor support, fan loyalty and attendance, and additional consumer and stakeholder behaviors that will benefit the university, the athletic department, and the individual sports programs. Thus, it is prudent to investigate the perceptions and approaches of sport marketing practitioners related to how they utilize strategic marketing principles. In particular, this study investigated the degree to which sport marketing directors of football programs utilized the goal setting aspect of strategic marketing.

Goal Setting

Kotler and Murphy (1981) pieced together elements of effective marketing management and created a process for organizations to follow to partake in strategic marketing. The five steps in this model are analysis, goal formulation, strategy formulation, organization design, and systems design. Sutton (1987) integrated these five steps into sport with the creation of the sport marketing management process model. The particular focus of the current investigation pertains to marketing goals and thus the concept of goal setting, a theory of motivation that leads to a high level of performance, was explored. Goal setting can be done on the individual and the organizational level, based upon the organization's vision. According to the American Marketing Association (2017), marketing is "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, exchanging, offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." One of the recurring themes in the sport marketing management process model is the presence of goals. Organizations gather information in order to set goals. They devise strategies and plan techniques in efforts to reach their goals. They gather data and utilize analytics to evaluate if they were successful in reaching their goals. Because of this emphasis on goals, it is important to understand goal setting theory for this study. The role of theory in qualitative research is not necessarily to form a hypothesis that can be tested

quantitatively, but rather to provide the researcher with a lens with which to approach the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Goal setting theory (Locke, 1968) is a well-established theory of motivation that leads to a high level of performance and has been empirically tested by more than 400 published studies across multiple disciplines (Lunenborg, 2011). This theory states that the most effective results occur when goals are specific, quantifiable, challenging yet attainable, and when a target deadline is given, as compared to vague and unclear goals (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2019). For example, “I want to get in better shape” is a vague and unclear goal. However, “I want to lose 15 pounds by July 1” is an example of a detailed, quantifiable goal with an attached target date. Goals are a mental construct that represents commitment to reaching a desired end state (Locke & Latham, 2019). Goals may be set individually, imposed by others, or set collaboratively with others (Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenborg, 2011). Goal setting research has been conducted on the individual level (Locke & Latham, 2019), as well as the group level and organizational level (Kristof-Brown & Stevens, 2001; Lunenborg, 2011) in which goal setting is done with a shared vision.

Goal choice is strongly influenced by self-efficacy (Locke & Latham, 2002). Individuals, or organizations, with a high level of self-efficacy will set more challenging goals, while those with low self-efficacy will set fewer challenging goals. Commitment to a specific goal brings about a goal striving phase in which the individual or organization directs its attention toward discovering and applying actions that are perceived to lead to goal attainment (Locke & Latham, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2019; Shane & Delmar, 2004). One of the main challenges in goal setting is choosing the correct task behaviors and actions that will lead to achievement (Bay & Daniel, 2003). Several actions and tasks may occur simultaneously and develop into “subordinate goals” in order to achieve the over-arching original goal. The over-arching goal could be further broken down into subordinate goals and actions that are created and executed in service of attaining the overarching goal. For example, “I want to lose 15 pounds by July 1” may be further broken down into “Three times a week I will run four miles after work” or “I will only eat out at a fast food restaurant once per month” (Hochli, Bruger, & Messner, 2018). As the goal striving phase is ongoing, a feedback and adjustment period takes place (Howarth, D’Alessandro, Johnson, & White, 2017). When specific, targeted goals are chosen, it allows for self-monitoring to determine if the individual or organization is on pace to reach the desired goal or not (Howarth et al., 2017). Tracking goal progress via internal and external channels is a key moderator in successful goal achievement. After goal striving is complete, the individual enters a goal evaluation state in which final results are measured.

Goal setting theory shares parallels with the sport marketing management process model. When conducting strategic marketing, organizations set goals, they strive towards these goals by formulating strategies and planning various tactics in efforts to reach their goals, all while conducting self-analysis during and then after as part of an evaluation process. Without understanding an organization’s goals or marketing objectives, it is difficult to evaluate if the organization’s marketing has been effective. This evaluation of efficacy then forms a feedback loop which plays a role in informing the decision of setting the next goal or determining the next objective. This study will investigate strategic marketing in the Big Ten, via the lens of the theoretical framework described in this above section

College Athletic Departments

The marketing efforts of college athletic departments have been examined by scholars over the last few decades. For some college athletic departments, marketing efforts may be carried out without the benefit and structure of a marketing plan (Sutton, 1987). This may put the athletic department at a disadvantage because the development of a marketing plan plays a key role in the marketing process because it requires the practitioner to examine their past, present, and future marketing efforts (Irwin, Zwick, & Sutton, 1999; Sutton, 1987). In conducting an exploratory study on athletic directors at NCAA Division I & II institutions, Stevens, Loudon, and McConkey (1995) found that 58% of respondents reported their athletic departments did not prepare an annual written marketing plan. In terms of coordinating marketing efforts with other university groups (such as the sports information department, ticketing office, or alumni association), only 28% of respondents rated their coordination efforts as “good” or “excellent”. 32% of respondents conduct routine fan surveys and 57% record data on student attendance at home games. When asked why more sophisticated marketing measures are not utilized by the athletic department, the two most commonly cited reasons were “costs too much money” (67.4%) and “too few personnel” (64.6%).

In examining resource allocation within athletic departments, athletic directors perceive college football programs as being the sport program with the greatest financial need due to its high program costs and its ability to generate revenue for the department (Mahony, Hums, & Reimer; 2005). Lehnus and Miller (1996) surveyed NCAA Division I university presidents, athletic directors, and marketing directors about the role and function of the university athletic marketing program. Findings showed a lack of financial resources and a small staff as the top two perceived challenges facing university athletics marketers. Barr, McDonald, and Sutton (2000) took a wide look at compensation levels of sport marketing directors across many different disciplines (i.e., major league offices, major league teams, minor league teams, college athletics, sport marketing agencies, arena/venues, and broadcast/media). They found the sport marketing industry segment with the highest annual income was broadcast/media and the sport marketing industry segment with the lowest annual income was college athletics. College athletics marketing directors were found to be less likely to receive a bonus or commission than their counterparts in other segments of the industry. Because of these reasons, it would be prudent for college athletic administrators to be aware of job satisfaction levels of their organizations’ sport marketing professionals in order to keep morale and marketing performance high (e.g., by identifying issues related to pay, staff size, etc. administrators can implement strategies to improve morale and overall performance).

College athletics marketing directors have many sports to market and objectives to meet, yet possess limited resources (Greenwell, Mahoney, & Andrew, 2007). The overall findings from this area of research echo what Balderson (1982) and Mullin et al. (2014) have described as a sport marketing myopia. This term was used to describe an environment in which marketing directors fail to utilize sophisticated marketing efforts due to nearsightedness brought upon by lack of monetary resources, over-worked employees, under-staffed departments, and excessive staff turnover (Anderson, 1982; Kotler, 1972; McDonald, 1989;). College athletics tends to display more marketing myopia than other sport leagues (Hansen & Gauthier, 1992; Sutton, 1987). Organizations need to put in place sophisticated, strategic marketing efforts in order to yield efficient results (Kahn & Myers, 2005; Shane & Delmar, 2004).

Research has shown that various factors affect attendance at sporting events. Some of these factors may be things outside of the control of the sport organization (e.g., weather, quality of opponent, time of the game); however, some factors (e.g., the presence of a game day giveaway item, a ticketing special offer) are within their control. Different types of consumers (fans vs. spectators) have different motivations that drive their consumer behavior (Trail et al., 2003). Thus, they react differently to different marketing techniques, and may need to be segmented and marketed to differently. Marketing techniques employed by practitioners tend to evolve at a rapid pace, and sometimes a disconnect exists between the practitioners and the consumers as described by Dick and Turner (2007). While marketers strive for their marketing efforts to be successful, a marketing success may be hard to define without knowing key contextual information, such as what the established marketing goals were and understanding the ways in which ways the marketing efforts will be measured and evaluated. This study aimed to fill in a gap in the literature by exploring the first-hand insights collected from sport marketing professionals (i.e., sport marketing directors of the football programs within Big Ten athletic departments) pertaining to the directors' marketing goals and their overall approach to marketing evaluations (or lack thereof).

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was selected for this exploratory study. College athletics and college football have both commanded a significant amount of attention from both sport consumers and scholars. However, there is not a significant amount of published research focusing on the marketing of college football from the perspective of the organization, specifically the sport marketing director. This study sought to contribute to the literature and help fill in this gap by analyzing the marketing of college football directly from the perspectives of the marketing directors. A phenomenological approach was used as the phenomenon in question was the act of marketing college football in the Big Ten Conference (Big Ten). Data for this study were collected via one-on-one interviews with individuals who share a common, lived experience—the football marketing directors of each of the 14 schools comprising the Big Ten.

The sport marketing director overseeing college football marketing at all 14 schools in the Big Ten accepted the invitation and chose to participate in the study, constituting a full population of participants given the parameters of this study (N=14). Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant. An expert panel was created and used to validate the content of the interview questions and to further refine the instrument prior to the beginning of the study. For this current investigation, the expert panel consisted of six individuals.

The first four interviews that were completed for this study were conducted in-person. The day after the fourth in-person interview took place, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic (NBC News, 2020). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the remaining 10 interviews for this study were conducted via the video conferencing platform Zoom throughout the month of April, 2020. Each of these participants conducted their interview in the Zoom video conference mode to allow for face-to-face, or more accurately screen-to-screen, communication. These interviews were both video recorded and audio recorded using the recording functions available through the Zoom platform.

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase began with reading the transcribed interviews to find meaning in the text and identify the general ideas that are present in the data. The transcribed interview data was manually coded after careful line-by-line readings of the text. This first stage of coding was an open coding process and consisted of applying a code to every relevant concept or piece of information (Jones, 2015). This action was repeated multiple times. After this initial coding phase was completed there were 77 codes used to describe the data contained in the interview transcripts. The researcher continued to consolidate codes until larger patterns and themes emerged from the data. In this setting, the word theme is used to label groups of related codes (Jones).

In efforts to apply data triangulation, at the conclusion of each interview, each participant was asked to share any marketing materials and marketing resources that the participant was comfortable sharing. Twelve of the 14 directors elected to share items such as marketing plans, advertisement graphics, game scripts, and other similar documents. Each supplementary document was coded for analysis. Additionally, other relevant public information (e.g., social media posts, information available on the organization's website) was examined as needed to verify key findings. Also, a second coder reliability check was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once the data were transcribed and coded by the primary researcher, a sample of the data, passages of text quotes, and the list of various codes were selected by the researcher and given to the second coder to assign codes to each passage based upon their own interpretation and analysis of the codes and the data. Three of the 14 interview transcripts were selected for double-coding for this reliability check, accounting for approximately 21% of the overall data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Furthermore, two individuals were recruited to serve as peer debriefers. Each peer debriefer was given material from the study to acquaint themselves with the background and scope of the research, such as interview transcripts and a working draft of this manuscript. After the peer debriefers reviewed the materials and formed their own beliefs, they were sent preliminary findings as well provided feedback. Lastly, member checking was conducted to further validate the results of the study. Each participant was sent their own full interview transcript and a description of preliminary findings including emergent themes and second order categories, allowing the participants to review the materials, check for accuracy, and provide any additional feedback.

Results

The 14 participants provided in-depth responses to the various questions that guided this study. An analysis of their responses revealed two major themes (i.e., goal development and goals and marketing evaluation) along with subthemes within each major theme (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the themes and related examples).

Goal Development and Goals

The findings in the data within the emergent theme of goal development and goals consist of four subthemes: information gathering, goal alignment, primary goals, and secondary goals. The first stage of Sutton's (1987) sport marketing management process model shows an analysis phase taking place where marketers gather information allowing them to make informed

Table 1
Themes and Subthemes with Participant Examples

Themes with Subthemes	Example or Quote
Goal Development and Goals	
Information Gathering	“We survey our season ticket holders at the conclusion of each season, both general public and students. We have designed the surveys to kind of be such that we can spot trends. We ask similar questions year after year so we’re able to spot trends and analyze the data over multiple years to figure out if there are emerging issues and challenges we need to pay more attention. It helps us know if we are making improvements in certain areas based on previous years.” (Marketing Director #6)
Goal Alignment	“We want to create a great environment for our student-athletes. We want to bring in revenue to support our student-athletes... our athletic department goals are student-athlete focused. So, it’s a little different when you look at it from an external lens, but I think our external goals align pretty well with what the administration wants.” (Marketing Director #10)
Primary Goals	Marketing Director #4 said that football ticket sales revenue is “arguably the most important thing to the entire athletic department” at their institution.
Secondary Goals	“One of our goals is to continue to maintain and enhance an environment that helps the football team win. We are really big on that phrase-- helps the football team win. Everything we do game atmosphere, fan experience wise... if it doesn’t help the team win, then why are we even in the business of doing it?” (Marketing Director #4)
Marketing Evaluation	
Standard Evaluation Methods	“We do post-game reports on everything that we do and whether or not there were any mistakes or how it was executed and who executed it... basically just a summary.” (Marketing Director #5)
Informal Evaluation Methods	“I think there is a game day atmosphere component to it that you can’t really measure, but I mean we’ve all experienced it when you walk out of a building and say, ‘Wow, that was an amazing environment.’ That’s a success for us, right? Whatever that looks like.” (Marketing Director #8)
No Evaluation Method	“No, other than our game reports that we put together that analyze ourselves. We don’t have any outside group or any other really formal evaluation tool that we use.” (Marketing Director #5)

decisions for formulating their marketing goals (second stage). According to this model, marketing managers should analyze their organization internally and their environment externally as they gather information. During this analysis phase marketing directors described gathering information via both informal research methods and formal research methods.

Information Gathering. The informal research methods reported by marketers are analyzing the current status of the football program, analyzing their schedule of home football games, and analyzing the demographic make-up for their fan base. Marketing Director #9 described this by stating that they ask questions such as, “Where's your program at? Are you going to have a good year or a bad year? How was your recruiting class?” Marketing Director #13 said, “... depending on like who's coming back, maybe you have a team that might not be predicted to do well.” Marketing Director #9 further explained that they take different approaches based upon the status of their football team by stating, “We anticipate a successful year. We feel we've got some great personalities. You know, NFL draft players, national caliber athletes, that we can really kind of lean on. A grittiness, a toughness, a real football brand.” This marketing director compared this approach to one from a few years earlier when the team was not as successful on the field. This director said about that year, “It wasn't necessarily about success on the field. It was about success as a program and maturity and doing the right things in the community, academically, maybe because we weren't going to be as successful on the field.”

The schedule of home games for the season is another frequently mentioned factor to analyze. Marketing Director #4 said, “Yes, you have to analyze your schedule. It tells you the path of what your season will look like.” Opponents that are viewed as being strong teams may be seen as exciting games to attend and that are worth checking out because of their star power. These successful teams with a strong following may attract their own fans who purchase tickets to see their team play on the road. Marketing Director #4 explained this at their school:

Opponents matter. It's no secret for us, I wish I didn't have to say this, but it's just reality that when the team struggled and we were losing a lot, we still had [Opponent A] coming into town. [Opponent B] coming into town. [Opponent C] coming in town. There's still demand for those tickets, revenue wise. Now unfortunately, the demand was coming from either the fans of those teams or just general college football fans who were like, “Ooooh, I'd like to watch [opponent]” or “I'd love to see [opponent].” Those are usually our highest priced games.

Marketing directors described using institutional information, such as their university's sales history, in an attempt to forecast the level of ticket sales and set a ticketing goal. Marketing Director #10 indicated that this informal analysis is the only sort of research that they specifically focus on by saying, “I don't think we dive too, too much into research for these plans other than just working with our different units to get historical data. Like I said, revenues, attendance numbers, scan rates, that kind of stuff.” According to Marketing Directors #12 & #13, this type of institutional analysis will determine the goals set forth by the marketing director, and subsequently the strategies utilized. Marketing Director #6 described the research taking place during their analysis phase as, “Nothing formal. Nothing super scientific.”

Marketing Director #7 described information gathering in the form of a benchmarking review where they compare their efforts and results to those of their college football peers. This director said, “We will try to look at what other schools do, you know, from how they package

things or how they do so we'll look at that.” Marketing Director #9 described a similar peer review process: “I think we’re constantly benchmarking ourselves among our Big Ten peers and then nationally so I think that's something that is always ongoing with really basic, you know, ticket sales, attendance numbers just to benchmark where we're at.” This marketing director also elaborated that social media is helpful for this:

I'm the first to admit, I follow a lot of Big Ten counterparts on Twitter. You know, keep an eye on what everyone's doing. I think that's a huge piece of it so I think we have to come up with internal ideas about us and our brand, but I think also we look at what's working everywhere else. Being really honest, a fan of [university name] is probably not following [other Big Ten universities] or whoever, so if we go ahead and take something that is successful somewhere else, put a twist on it that's going to work for us and reinvent it, it's received as brand new. So, I think that we're not immune to that.

Formal research methods, such as surveying fans via questionnaires and also more qualitative approaches, such as hosting focus groups or organizing fan advisory councils to gather information. These formal methods tend to focus on the game day event marketing duty area. Marketers report gathering information about fans' preferences for in-stadium music, opinion of the marching band, the perceived quality of concessions, cleanliness of restrooms, and things of that nature. Less common is marketers utilizing research methods to analyze aspects of the other two marketing focus areas, such as ticket sales/attendance and branding (i.e., consumer behavior patterns, factors affecting purchasing decisions, brand recall, etc.).

Marketing directors stated surveying fans at differing frequencies. Eight of the practitioners reported conducting surveys after every home game in attempt to get the instant reaction from fans, while three marketers reported conducting postseason surveys with ticket purchasers. The remaining three directors reported conducting surveys in unspecified time intervals, sometimes going years between surveys. Marketing Director #1 said they survey after every single game “to essentially ask our season ticket holders what they need, what they want, as opposed to us just guessing.” Marketing Director #4 gave a similar assessment for the type of survey they utilize:

We asked about all aspects of the fan experience like getting in and out of the stadium. It was ‘Are the ticket takers friendly? Are the concessions up to par? What parking issues do you have? How is the traffic coming to the stadium? How’s the traffic leaving the stadium?’

Marketing Director #3 said that they value these surveys because of their desire to “get more involved with data and see what we can improve upon.” Marketing Director #6 said:

We survey our season ticket holders at the conclusion of each season, both general public and students. We have designed the surveys to kind of be such that we can spot trends. We ask similar questions year after years so we’re able to spot trends and analyze the data over multiple years to figure out if there are emerging issues and challenges we need to pay more attention. It helps us know if we are making improvements in certain areas based on previous years.

The results of these surveys may lead to changes made by the department in efforts to improve the overall fan experience at their home games. Marketing Director #6 gave an example of this by stating, “Our students indicated in the past that they would prefer more recorded music to be interjected in game day. And we've attempted to do that.” Marketing Director #5 described their concessions unit receiving valuable feedback and making adjustments by learning that, “They may not have enough locations or have enough points-of-sale. They are able to increase and help their cause and help their bottom line.”

Eight of the marketing directors reported conducting focus groups or creating a fan advisory council type of group to receive more insights and feedback. Marketing Director #2 stated that the focus of the fan group is to examine the “overall fan experience”. Marketing Director #6 described this specific fan council group at their institution by stating:

We do have a, we call it a fan advisory committee, that meets quarterly. That's basically a 20-30 person focus group that really represents all sports, but we do spend a fair amount of time talking about football in that. We're able to get some anecdotal information from that group as well.

Marketing Director #12 reported conducting student-based focus groups one year, but indicated that this was not a regularly scheduled occurrence. This marketing director also explained that in the past they have hired a sport marketing professor to serve as a consultant to analyze the athletic department's overall marketing efforts. This director described this by saying:

We partnered with a faculty member in our Sports Marketing and Management department on campus. So, an academic, from academia. And he's been helpful because he does a lot of consulting with a lot of, I think, professional teams and college teams and just sports organizations in general, and so it's just nice to have a third party come in and kind of give you an assessment of different things.

Both Marketing Director #11 and Marketing Director #8 also reported forming partnerships with faculty members on campus who then assign sport marketing projects to their students with results being shared with the athletic department. Marketing Director #8 explained this arrangement at their university by saying, “We usually do that, like, maybe once a year or once every 18 months depending upon the availability of students, but that's how we have navigated that research part.” In terms of their formal research methods, such as focus groups and surveys, six of the marketing directors reported using someone outside of their organization (e.g., a third-party consultant agency or a campus faculty researcher) to create and conduct these research projects.

The practitioners gather information utilizing formal and informal means in order to conduct a level of analysis to attempt to set appropriate goals for their different job duties. For example, based upon a variety of factors marketers are able to forecast if they can expect stronger or weaker ticket sales for the upcoming football season, identify areas needing improvement in their game day marketing, and determine the brand messaging for the upcoming season, all of which influences goal development and formulation in these areas.

Goal Alignment. The marketing department is just one department that makes up the larger organization of the athletic department. Marketers believe it is important for the marketing goals of the marketing department to align within the larger goals of the athletic department. Marketing directors reported attempting to develop their marketing goals within the framework of organizational goals that exist within the athletic department. Marketing Director #13 said, “It takes a lot of strategy in regards to what are your goals for the year.”

The revenue generated from ticket sales for home football games is very important for the athletic department. Marketing Director #1 said, “The backbone for our marketing goals is always the sales and revenue.” Ten marketing directors reported that ticket sales revenue goals are either set for them by senior administration or created by marketers alongside those individuals to ensure direct alignment between this revenue goal and the athletic department. Marketing Director #9 reported that their “business administration has a big impact on goals.” Marketing Director #1 said that they work “in conjunction with our Deputy AD, upper administration, and our business office to essentially project based upon previous results.” Marketing Director #10 said, “We have a revenue goal that is out there, that is set by administration.” Marketing Director #7 said:

Our CFO, our AD, and our Deputy AD largely make decisions so they ask for recommendations of where we think we can get to from a revenue standpoint. And so it be myself and ticket office and our business intelligence area and really our sales team really come together to come up with what we think and then submit those and then they kind of decide, the leadership, the top leadership, will kind of decide if those are good enough or not, and then if they're not then they come back to us and then we got to reformulate our plan for how to get there.

It's worth noting that marketing directors work in a business-type of environment within an organization that is, by definition, not a business, but rather a non-profit organization that is part of a higher education institution. Generating profits for stakeholders may not always be the top organizational goal in the same way that it would be for a business in the private sector. For example, some athletic department goals may also be structured to emphasis student-athlete academic success, and to achieve athletic competitive success by winning championships. Marketing Director #6 said it's been a challenge to find this marketing goal alignment and it is “one area we're trying to get better at.” Marketing Director #12 stated that trying to find this alignment has been difficult because their leadership has focused its goals on coaching and student-athlete matters. This individual stated:

We do have five priorities or whatever it is that our AD has long pontificated about and they are good. A lot of them are really, really good. Our mission statement, if you will. Does marketing fit clearly into those? I'm not sure it does a lot of the time. I think a lot of those goals or those mission statements are directed more at student-athletes and coaches and things of that nature. And so, it's tough sometimes when our objectives or our goals don't necessarily fit directly in with whatever he's outline... It's just a different world. I'm worried about getting fans in seats and having a good experience. And they're worried about graduation rates and abiding by NCAA standards and rules and things. Not that we're skirting the rules here at all in marketing. We're following whatever issues we

have to follow, but again I just feel like my world is different in a lot of ways from that of coaches and the teams themselves.

Seven of the marketing directors stated organizational goals that emphasize serving student-athletes at their institution. By either helping to generate revenue or help deliver large crowds and great atmospheres at the sporting events, these marketing directors felt that they are able to play a role in serving that larger, organizational goal. Marketing Director #7 reasoned that by generating revenue for the athletic department, it allows the organization to achieve its larger goals. This individual said, "Overall, our goal is to provide the best opportunity for our student-athletes, right? So, you know, you need resources to do that." Marketing Director #10 said that despite these differences in the focus organizational goals that exist, by looking at it through this prism, they have been able to find alignment:

We want to create a great environment for our student-athletes. We want to bring in revenue to support our student-athletes... our athletic department goals are student-athlete focused. So, it's a little different when you look at it from an external lens, but I think our external goals align pretty well with what the administration wants.

Marketing Director #4 explained a struggle in setting attendance goals, indicating perhaps a disconnect in the analysis phase and goal alignment within the organization. This person said:

A lot of times we are just picking out of a hat with our attendance goal because we truly don't know. We can say that we want to shoot for the stars because it'll make the AD happy when he gets the marketing plan, but is it realistic? So, I think we've always tried to maintain a balance between setting big goals, because big goals keep you driven and active, but you also don't want to undercut ourselves and just like do a lay-up goal that we know we're going to hit to look good. Goal setting is tough. I don't know that there is a magic answer to it.

Three marketing directors reported that they don't explicitly set marketing goals. For instance, Marketing Director #11 said, "Now the challenge sometimes is, 'Did we set the goal prior to the season', right?" Another director (#5) noted that, "We don't have any really hard number goals that we establish each year, if that makes sense." Marketing #12 added, "I can't sit here and tell you that I've got a list of ten goals for football for season 2020."

Primary Goals. Ten marketing directors reported a primary goal of reaching a pre-specified ticket sales number or revenue figure and/or attendance number at home football games. Marketing Director #4 said that football ticket sales revenue is "arguably the most important thing to the entire athletic department" at their institution. As mentioned earlier, these football ticket sales revenue goals are either set, or heavily influenced by, the senior leadership of the organization. Because of the quantitative nature of ticket sales and fan attendance, these goals tend to be "very objective" in the words of Marketing Director #6. This practitioner further explained, "Sell 'X' number of season tickets. Sell 'X' number of student tickets. You know, generate 'X' number of dollars in revenue." Three marketing directors indicated that they will break down this larger goal into smaller subordinate goals. For example, they have a revenue goal that is overarching for the season, they will set subordinate goals of how many new season

tickets they aim to sell, how many existing season ticket holders they aim to renew, and so on. Marketing Director #7 said, “We kind of do the math of where we need to be.” Marketing Director #10 said the goal in this area at their institution is more of an attendance goal and that is to maintain their position as having the second highest average attendance per home game in the country, with the reasoning being that the number one school in attendance has a larger stadium than them so it is impossible for their school to climb in attendance rankings to that number one spot.

Marketing directors reported creating goals for game day event marketing that skew on the subjective side. Marketing Director #14 said that for these goals they “don’t necessarily have a number” involved in their goals, but rather a desire to create a “remarkable experience” for all fans in attendance at each home game. This belief was shared by several of the other practitioners. Marketing Director #1 described it as a desire to always want to “improve our fan experience” and explained that these goals are “slightly less quantitative” than the marketing goals in the areas of ticket sales and attendance. Marketing Director #13 said they aim to create a “fun and unique environment” at home football games and to “provide the best customer service experience possible.” Marketing Director #3 described it as trying to “make sure our fans are having a great time.” Marketing Director #6 explained that, due to the subjective nature, of this topic, setting these goals can be a challenge. This individual said:

I think, of that work, at times, can be more challenging because so much of that work is highly subjective. It is very difficult to establish specific and widely understood goals and objectives. It's hard to assess those things after the fact. Again, because they're very subjective. The ticket work, for example, that's hard work and challenging too, but it's also very black-and-white. You can set a revenue goal. You can set a ticket sales goal. You can set up an attendance or, butts-in-seats goal, if you will. That's very easy to understand, whereas a goal like “create a better atmosphere” that's a more difficult thing for you to set goals to and then furthermore measure and analyze if you're successful.

In the primary job duty area of branding, marketers reported wanting to enhance and expand the brand, to position their program as fun and exciting in order to connect with fans, and wanting to adhere to brand principles. Marketing Director #6 described their goals as “expanding” the brand to reach more people. Marketing Director #13 reported brand engagement goals in terms of creating content to connect with fans and enhance the brand. This director stated that they don’t quantify this goal with a number (i.e., wanting a pre-specified number of videos released on social media) and quality content is more important than quantity. Marketing Director #11 said their branding goal is to make sure that all of their other marketing goals and efforts themselves are “on-brand” for their athletic department, meaning that they are staying true to themselves while attempting to reach other ticket sales and attendance goals or game day event marketing goals. This marketing director said “adhering to the brand” is really important.

Secondary Goals. While the primary goals uncovered in the data tend to address areas most closely linked to their marketing job duties, secondary goals also exist for the marketing directors. These secondary goals tend to be more informal and not explicitly stated in a marketing plan or quantified in a marketing report. These secondary goals are seemingly influenced by larger athletic department-wide goals, organizational culture, and by important stakeholders within the organization. The secondary goals prevalent in the data show marketing

directors citing a desire to use their position and their areas of oversight to try and help their football team win by helping to create a homefield advantage during football games and by assisting with recruiting efforts. The other secondary goal cited is to help provide a great experience to the student-athletes at their institution.

Seven directors reported striving to provide a home field advantage for their football team. These marketing directors felt that one of their primary goals, increasing attendance and ticket sales at home football games, is important not only because it impacts the bottom line of the organization but because they believe a full stadium of excited fans contributes to the atmosphere in the stadium, such as crowd noise, which could make the environment more imposing and intimidating for the visiting team. Marketing Director #3 said, "We are trying to create an environment that gets our crowd hyped, that gets our players hyped." Marketing directors perceive that a stadium full of loud fans, may help make the stadium a tougher place to play for the visiting team. Marketing Director #12 said they aim "to try and help our football team win football games and make our home stadium and that home game environment more hostile or more difficult for the visiting team." Marketing Director #3 explained they try to create an "experience that's going to help our coaches win. You know, provide the home court or home field advantage to help them really win and succeed." Marketing Director #4 echoed this by saying:

One of our goals is to continue to maintain and enhance an environment that helps the football team win. We are really big on that phrase-- helps the football team win. Everything we do game atmosphere, fan experience wise... if it doesn't help the team win, then why are we even in the business of doing it?

Marketing directors highlighted specific instances of trying to provide an advantage for the home team. For instance, Marketing Director #4 stated that they may choose to display a specific scoreboard prompt, such as a noisemeter, on the videoboard to try and solicit crowd noise at opportune times of the game. Marketing Director #10 reported that they work with video production staff to dictate which instant replays are displayed on the video boards so they can ensure they show replays beneficial to the home team, while replays beneficial to the opposing team are not shown as frequently.

Recruiting is an important part of college football because attracting the most talented players gives the team a better shot at being more successful on the field, which can lead to additional benefits (e.g., student applications, media attention, revenue streams for the university, stakeholder interest). Eight marketing directors reported identifying informal goals to help in the recruiting efforts. For instance, Marketing Director #3 said, "I think we're challenged to look through the recruiting lens. You know, like how is it going to help us recruit, how does this help us with 18-to-22-year-old kids? We are trying to really focus on it." As mentioned before, marketers perceive having a full stadium as being beneficial to providing a homefield advantage, but they also perceive it as being beneficial to recruiting. Marketing Director #3 said, "When they have recruits in the stands, we want to make sure that they are blown away by our fans." Marketers also perceive that having a strong brand image football program makes the university more desirable for potential recruits. Marketing Director #6 said they are trying to position their football "as best as it can be" in eyes of recruits. Because of this emphasis in the organization, brand messaging is sometimes considered with recruiting in mind during the marketing process. Marketing Director #8 said, "What we make for digital and social is always with an eye for

marketing and recruiting and trying to make our program look and feel cool.” Marketing Director #1 said:

What recruits he gets to come to [university name] plays a significant role in how competitive we are which plays a significant role in how much revenue we generate so if we can support or if we can find ways to support his recruiting efforts within our own marketing messaging, we should.

Marketing Director #13 described a similar philosophy when discussing the importance of successful football recruiting and said, “If we can get that that strong football team on the field, then we're going to win the games and everything is just going to be a wheel of success.”

Marketing Director #3 reported paying close attention to recruiting in their job duty of game day event marketing, specifically with event presentation. For example, Marketing Director #3 reported that their college football program has some well-known celebrity fans that will occasionally attend their home games. The marketing and video crew will try to capture these celebrities on the videoboard for everyone in attendance to see so the football program can positively associate itself with those celebrity figures. This marketing director explained, that “it goes back to recruiting” and anything “that can put us in the best light, not only in our venue, but some of those moments go on social media as well.” Additionally, this marketing director explained they insert certain elements into their game script in efforts to brand the football program as prestigious and desirable for potential recruits in attendance. For example, Marketing Director #3 said they will show videos during timeouts that will feature all of their Heisman Trophy winners or make a point of highlighting another sellout crowd at their home game to remind potential recruits of their football program’s successes.

The third secondary goal reported by five of the marketing directors is wanting to provide a positive experience for their student-athletes. This fits in with larger organizational goals that are important to the athletic department. Marketing Director #7 stated that a large athletic department goal is to, “provide the best opportunity for our student-athletes” and marketing directors can help serve that by generating revenue in their primary job duties to allow the athletic department to fund student-athlete oriented objectives. Marketing Director #10 shared a similar belief by saying, “We want to create a great environment for our student-athletes. We want to bring in revenue to support our student-athletes.” Marketing Director #13 called this student-athlete component the “ultimate goal” of their athletic department. This marketer elaborated:

I mean, you want to provide the best opportunity for your student-athletes. You want them to be able to win and be able to perform at the highest level, and if they have a stadium or arena full of people, they're going to perform better. So, like that’s the ultimate goal, to give them that and get them excited to compete at the highest level.

Marketing Evaluation

The findings within the emergent theme of marketing evaluation consist of three subthemes: standard evaluation methods, informal evaluation methods, and no evaluation method.

Standard Evaluation Methods. Marketing directors reported the presence of using standard evaluation methods in assessing their marketing efforts. Some of these methods are comparing results to pre-stated goals, measuring other metrics, recapping with staff and athletic department personnel, preparing postgame or postseason reports, and soliciting and analyzing feedback via research methods, such as surveys and focus groups.

In terms of evaluating ticket sales and attendance-based marketing efforts, because that job duty tends to be more quantitative in nature, marketing directors cited the ability to measure effectiveness by comparing results to target numbers. Ten marketers reported creating an attendance goal or ticket sales revenue goal earlier in the marketing process, likely in conjunction with upper administration, as a target for the season. After the season, the practitioners can compare the results with the target and see if the goal was reached or not. Marketing Director #1 reported this first standard method as comparing their ticket sales and attendance numbers against their projection. Marketing Director #4 said this is “pretty self-explanatory- you hit your goal or you don’t hit your goal.”

Marketing Director #8 reported using this post hoc goal comparison technique in the area of game day event marketing as well, by trying to quantify certain components of the event presentation and then measuring the execution afterwards. This individual gave the example of a pre-stated goal of trying to eliminate a large number of on-field presentations that take place during football games. After the season, they then compared if they were successful in doing so.

Marketing directors reported analyzing metrics to evaluate effectiveness of marketing efforts in the areas of digital advertising. Marketing Director #12 said, “We do meet with our advertising agency, and I do want to see what the return on the ad spend looked like. You know, what was our transactional data. What was that? Was that good or bad?” Marketing Director #9 mentioned analyzing conversion rates from their digital advertisements. Marketing Director #2 explained they compare the results of the digital advertisements to both “industry-wide” standards and previous years’ results at their institution. Marketing Director #14 explained their advertising evaluation by stating:

When you look at like money spent versus what it, you know, what it yielded and how many people bought a ticket because of “x” reason. Sometimes it’s tough. You’re not going to get any of that with TV. You’re not going to any of that with radio, but on the digital side look at how much money we spent. How much our reach was. How many tickets it led to, like all that kind of stuff.

Another standard evaluation technique described by marketing directors is to prepare postgame or postseason reports and to recap and debrief with their staff and internal stakeholders. This type of evaluation tended to be focused primarily on the game day event marketing job duty. Marketing Director #1 considers this self-evaluation to be beneficial for the marketing department. Marketing Director #6 stated that it is important to get the feedback of others to see what worked well and what did not. Marketing Director #4 considers this to be an important part of their evaluation efforts:

You have to have recaps and evaluate because how else, it’s no different than when the football coach, what would happen if the football coach didn’t watch game film? Can you imagine that? So, we have to watch our own game film and evaluate what we did. Circle the things that worked. Cross out the things that didn’t work and continue to evolve.

Marketing Director #8 detailed holding a meeting every Monday to recap and evaluate the game day event marketing for that previous weekend's home game. In goal setting theory evaluation can be on-going as part of a feedback loop. By conducting these standard evaluation methods as the season is ongoing, the marketers have the ability to adapt and make adjustments to their efforts, if necessary. This marketing professional said, "On Mondays, it's kind of like, 'Hey, what did we do well? What did we not do well? What worked? What didn't work?'" Marketing Director #12 described creating a football recap form after each home game and also holding a meeting to go over it with pertinent staff.

Marketing Director #5 reported completing a postgame report after every home game to detail the game day event marketing efforts, "We do post-game reports on everything that we do and whether or not they were any mistakes or how it was executed and who executed it... basically just a summary." Marketing Director #6 described preparing a postseason report at the conclusion of each football season to recap all of the marketing efforts. This individual described:

It's basically a financial analysis of where we were, where we wanted to be, what our goals were, where we ended up. Same with attendance. And then overall, there's like, you know, what works, what was okay, what didn't work. And we break that down by different areas whether that's, you know, the event side of things, the in-game, sales or whatever.

Marketing Directors reported utilizing surveys and focus groups as research methods in efforts to both evaluate their marketing efforts and to provide analysis of their current product and to get into the mind of the consumers. According to the sport marketing management process (Sutton, 1987), evaluation is the final phase of the strategic marketing management process. Because of the cyclical nature of college football sport marketing, as one year ends the efforts for the next year begin. With analysis being the first stage in this process there is a close link between the evaluation and analysis stages. The majority of surveys and focus groups are developed to examine the game day event marketing elements, such as fan experience and event presentation. Little formal research methods are used to evaluate other areas of marketing duties, such as consumer behavior in efforts to try and sell more attendance or increase attendance, or to analyze brand awareness or brand associations.

Informal Evaluation Methods. Marketing directors reported that due to the subjective nature of fan experience, it is a challenge to evaluate. For example, Marketing Director #2 said, "I'd love to look around and say, 'It looks like people are having 50% more fun than they had the last game.' But, it's just hard to rate that." Marketing Director #4 called this area "not tangible" and gave an example by rhetorically asking, "How do you measure atmosphere?" Postgame and postseason surveys are able to gauge this to a degree, but those surveys and focus groups are attempting to quantify the unquantifiable. Marketing Director #11 said trying to evaluate this, even with instruments such as surveys, is imperfect calling it "an art and a science" and explaining "we try to quantify whatever we can." Marketing Director #6 said:

We're getting more into some of this more subjective stuff, and like trying to create memorable moments. Trying to create more stronger bonds with our fans. Those are

things that we're trying to do, spend more time on, and do a better job of. How do we know if it's successful? Honestly, that's been a challenge for us to measure.

Marketers reported using some evaluation methods that are conducted more informally and in abstract ways. Because marketing directors perceive game day event marketing elements as being subjective, they reported judging game day event marketing duties on their own intuition and expertise. Marketing Director #8 described this belief by saying:

I think there is a game day atmosphere component to it that you can't really measure, but I mean we've all experienced it when you walk out of a building and say, "Wow, that was an amazing environment." That's a success for us, right? Whatever that looks like.

Marketing Director #5 described a similar sentiment and said:

You can tell, whether or not, by just being there. Whether it was a positive event or negative. Whether things went well or didn't go well. It's right there in front of your eyes, you know? You have 75,000 people watching it. So, you can hear the fan feedback.

Marketers pay attention to some anecdotal feedback to help evaluate their game day experiences. Marketing Director #5 said that they will look at fan feedback from different mediums, such as social media and email message. Marketing Director #4 also stated using anecdotal evidence:

What's the buzz? What are people saying? If you do a great promotion or run some cool ad, like, are people talking about it? That's why it's important to track that stuff. To be on top of social media. To be on top of message boards. To be on top of just when you're walking the concourse at a game, what are they talking about? Are they complaining about the music or are they talking about how great the band was, whatever it may be. So, the buzz is the best way. If there is positive buzz, I feel like we are doing our part.

Additionally, marketing directors reported how pleased, or displeased, stakeholders are within the athletic department such as the athletic directors, senior administrators, and football coaches, as being another informal way to evaluate their marketing efforts. Marketing Director #2 said, "I don't sit down with the head coach and get evaluated, but he certainly, let's say, I can tell when he's happy and not happy." Marketing Director #9 said one way they define a marketing success is "survival". Marketing Director #5 described judging their efforts "through feedback from the coaching staff, through our athletic director, through our executive associate athletic director for external relations who oversees our unit." This individual explained they can evaluate if things were done well when one of those internal stakeholders says something to the effect of, "Great job, you guys really pulled off a great one." Marketing Director #5 also explained on a busy football gameday he judges how it went by "...whether or not my phone rings, to be honest with you." In the area of trying to attract large crowd attendance for home football games, this marketing director reported that at times he is more concerned how it looks visually and is concerned with the optics of having a lot of empty seats. They stated:

We hope for weather in certain circumstances because nothing fills the stands better than puffy coat day. So, we actually like a good puffy coat day because one fan takes up two to three seats in those empty sections. They don't look so empty.

No Evaluation Method. Marketing directors reported a variety of different evaluation methods with some being more formalized than others. Many individuals reported not exactly conducting any sort of formal evaluation and only relying on informal, anecdotal evaluation. Because of various challenges (e.g., perceived subjectivity, difficulty in implementation, time constraints), some directors revealed that they do not use evaluation methods for some of their duties. Marketing Director #5 when asked if they utilize any evaluation techniques, said, “No, other than our game reports that we put together that analyzes ourselves. We don't have any outside group or any other really formal evaluation tool that we use.” Many directors explained that this area is highly subjective and difficult to measure. Marketing Director #4 called this area “not tangible” and gave an example by rhetorically asking, “How do you measure atmosphere?” Marketing Director #9, when discussing evaluation, lamented the lack of a reliable instrument to evaluate these criteria by saying:

I wish the answer would be, ‘Yeah, we do a ton of it. We are extremely detailed.’ It's a struggle. It's something that I haven't been able to figure out the right model to build that. I would like to... I wish I had a better scorecard. That, I've always kicked around for many years, but haven't been able to formulate something meaningful for us to use yet.

The data suggests a disconnect in terms of evaluation phase and information gathering analysis for some marketers. In describing their marketing evaluation methods, the marketing directors reported evaluating the game day event marketing job focus, and not as much as the other job duties. For example, when marketers described their surveys and focus groups, they reported these instruments and tools mainly examined the event presentation and fan experience parts of a gameday. Research methods are not heavily used to better understand consumer behavior in efforts to sell more tickets or increase attendance.

The aim of this study was to uncover the marketing process utilized by marketing directors to market college football in the Big Ten Conference. An interview guide was created with questions aimed to do this. After analyzing the data, the researcher identified two emergent themes in the data to satisfy the research questions posed in this study. Marketing areas of oversight described the specific job duties of the college football marketing director. Perceived challenges described the obstacles that sport marketing directors encounter in their position. Organizational elements describe the effects that culture, structure, and collaboration have on their efforts. Goal development and goals describe what the primary and secondary marketing goals are and how they are developed by the marketing director and/or by the organization. Marketing evaluation describes the metrics and methods marketers use (or in some cases, not use) to evaluate their marketing efforts and judge successes.

Discussion

Marketing directors described their goal setting phase being based upon a myriad of factors such as the findings during their previous analysis phase, their organizational positioning, culture, and structure. As detailed in the results, one of the two emergent themes present was a

focus on goal development and goals. For practitioners in the field, it is important to understand how marketing departments identify, develop, and implement detailed goals that become the benchmark in which directors evaluate their efforts. Marketing directors are able to point to clear metrics and specifically defined goals in the areas of increasing ticket sales and attendance. These directors reported feeling much more comfortable in the goal setting and subsequent evaluation efforts in this area, than in other areas of oversight such as game day event marketing and branding, which may not contain clear methods of evaluation. Goal setting theory states that the best results are found when goals are clearly defined (Locke, 1968; Locke & Latham, 2019). Effective goal development is strengthened by a consistent information gathering process, which represents one of the subthemes identified in the study. This allows practitioners to stay up-to-date on both past and present successes that will help guide the direction of future goals. For example, by appropriately aggregating information, marketing directors can implement necessary changes that will improve the overall fan experience and ensure higher levels of enjoyment and return intentions. Based upon these goals, marketing directors formulate their strategy to put into place a plan of action that they feel will work in accomplishing these stated goals. This strategy formulation and subsequent execution in the goal striving phase is important as marketing directors rely on their experience and expertise to try and make the best-informed decisions possible.

At various times during the cyclical process of marketing their college football program, evaluation takes place where marketing directors assess the efficacy of their actions and re-adjust goals, plans, efforts as necessary to hit their goals or fulfill their job. For example, some schools are more concerned with generating revenue via ticket sales than others and thus their marketing goals and subsequent strategy are centered around trying to accomplish those things. Other schools do not have to devote as many resources in this area, so they are able to focus more resources in the area of branding or game day event marketing (e.g., such advantages by some schools may lead to greater marketing endeavor disparities). Several marketing directors judge their marketing successes, or lack thereof, based upon accomplishing their desired goals and reaching their desired outcomes so understanding what these are, especially because of some natural differentiation between organizations, is important. As marketing departments develop their goals, they are often categorized as primary goals or secondary goals, two additional subthemes within goal development and goals. Primary goals represent the outcomes that are identified as most important in the efforts of marketing directors and are a key part of any marketing plan. In analyzing the data, the results found these goals to most often align with traditional marketing job duties, such as ticket sales revenue, attendance, brand awareness, and fan experience. From a secondary goal perspective, these outcomes were more informal and not specifically included in a marketing plan, including establishing a home field advantage, the department's impact on recruiting, and enhancing the student-athlete experience. As practitioners aim to implement the findings from this study into their own efforts, recognizing the importance of both primary and secondary goals will allow marketing departments to identify what outcomes are viewed as most essential, while also understanding the role that supplementary actions can play in positively impacting various areas of the organization.

In terms of the major theme of marketing evaluation, the study found that many marketing directors used standard evaluation methods. These involve comparing pre-determined goals and other metrics to post game reports and feedback. Marketing directors can use such methods to evaluate ticket sales and other efforts that involve attendance, as these numbers are easily comparable and measure the marketing efforts by the department. As revealed in the

results of this study, one of the subthemes of the marketing evaluation theme is that there were informal evaluation methods use by some marketing directors. This is a key finding because even though some things are not quantifiable, they can still be considered as contributing to the effectiveness of marketing, such as the subjectivity of stakeholder's attitudes towards the athletic department.

No evaluation method, the last subtheme of marketing evaluations, was also found to be prevalent in the current study. This subtheme shows that some of the marketing directors have no evaluation methods in place for areas such as goals and resources. This finding supports the work of Martin et al. (2011) who identified a lack of evaluation tools used by college sport marketing professionals. As revealed in the current study, marketing directors in the Big Ten reported struggling in this area as well. The exact reason for this is hard to pinpoint and is based upon a number of potential factors. The organization's culture may not emphasize this as an important step in the sport marketing process. Perhaps, the practitioners are too busy working on the next step of the process to fully evaluate past efforts. Perhaps the marketing goals and objectives were originally not specifically laid out in a detailed manner and communicated, and therefore, evaluation becomes difficult.

Similar to a chief executive officer, athletic directors are the lead person in charge of overseeing and running athletic departments (Wood et al., 2018). Conversely, Baumer and Zimbalist (2019, p. 2) note that college athletics is a unit within a web of a non profit institution which may result it to be run differently from a traditional business that involves maximizing profits and minimizing expenses. Rather than being viewed as profit maximizers, these college sport leaders operate more as "win maximizers" (Baumer & Zimbalist, p. 2) where they try to cultivate environments and supply resources aimed at maximizing winning for its coaches and teams. Athletic directors may still be evaluated by campus administration based upon financial metrics, such as adhering to a budget and hitting targeted financial figures, however they may also be evaluated based on other factors such as team success or academic metrics, such as student-athlete academic honors based upon the organizational culture of the university at large. Marketing directors cited the existence of these secondary type of goals, such as trying to help the team win and trying to provide an excellent experience for the student athletics. While, marketing professionals in professional sport, or the corporate world in general, may not be as concerned with these matters. This type of environment, in which profits are not necessarily the primary function of the organization, may explain why the business sophistication of the external units of the athletic department is not fully maximized.

Because of their impact on various aspects (e.g., ticket sales revenue, fan experience) of the athletic department, the marketing goals discussed in this study should be followed by practitioners striving to become more efficient and effective in their marketing endeavors. For example, a number of marketing directors discussed the importance of the ticket sales revenue that football brings in for the athletic department and how this revenue helps fund numerous other initiatives within the athletic department. These revenue goals and sales targets are usually forecasted by senior administrators in the organization and assigned to marketing directors to try and reach. However, in discussing the implementation and execution of their marketing efforts as a whole, many of these same marketing directors cited spending a significant amount of financial resources on special effects for their gameday event marketing such as pyrotechnics or a pre-game fan fest area. This may indicate that something might be missing in goal alignment in the marketing realm because some of the biggest expenses of the entire marketing budget are not items that contribute directly to fulfilling this revenue goal. Goal alignment, which is another

emergent subtheme within the results, demonstrates the intentional efforts of marketing directors to develop outcomes that fall within the framework of the athletic department's organizational goals. Practitioners working to establish effective goals can use the findings of this study as a guidepost in how to align their individual department's goals within the larger landscape of the organization. Consistency in these efforts is crucial to ensure cohesive goals are in place to maximize results. This study can be used as a comparison tool for marketing at sport organizations to measure their process, efforts, and effectiveness.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study presents limitations, namely to the generalizability of its findings. This study only examined college football marketing in the Big Ten conference. Due to the participant population, the findings cannot be generalized to the marketing of other conferences within college football, nor can they be generalized to various leagues within professional sport. The data were collected via interviews with participants who shared their own personal perceptions, which includes recollection; therefore, may contain latently incorrect information or self-bias. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic 10 of the 14 interviews had to be conducted virtually meaning an inconsistency in the interview procedures.

Conclusion

Sport marketing directors and others in management should consider evaluating the thoroughness of their evaluation methods and see what improvements can be made to increase efficiency. Many directors cited not conducting fully comprehensive evaluation efforts for all areas of their job duties. Some formalized research methods are being used by the directors, but such analyses typically focus on assessing fan experience and event presentation rather than evaluating marketing endeavors. Sport marketing directors may benefit by looking to the corporate world for a better understanding of the consumer behavior side of the job and implement appropriate evaluation techniques utilized by those professionals. In addition to connecting to the corporate world, sport marketing directors are encouraged if possible to connect with the athletic departments' social media managers (who are often housed in other units within athletics) to implement similar goal setting strategies. Sport marketing directors may also benefit by looking to the live events category of the entertainment industry and better acquaint themselves with evaluation techniques or instruments that may exist in that space, as it was commonly reported by marketers that this area tends to be subjective and challenging to create an evaluation instrument.

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