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Abstract

Although ticket sales and revenue have remained relatively constant in collegiate athletics over the past decade, attendance has steadily declined. Given the range of entertainment options available, student attendance at collegiate athletic events has, specifically, declined. Athletic administrators are often revenue oriented, and decreasing attendance has effects that span campus communities and cultures. As Greek-letter organizations are nearly ubiquitous within the higher education setting, fraternity and sorority members serve a unique opportunity area for engagement with fan attendance initiatives and future alumni giving. Accordingly, this study examined the motivations for attending collegiate athletic events as a member of a Greek-letter organization and the intention to attend collegiate athletic events as an alumnus of a Greek-letter organization. Findings illustrate that students and alumni that are affiliated with Greek-letter organizations have greater motivation to attend collegiate athletic events as students and greater intention to attend collegiate athletic events as alumni.

Keywords: *sport consumption behavior, sport attendance, Greek-letter organizations, alumni engagement*

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The pervasiveness of entertainment options available to college students has influenced student attendance at live sporting events (Simmons et al., 2018; Trail et al., 2008). With a greater number of external factors influencing the decision to attend live sporting events, student attendance at collegiate athletics events has steadily decreased over the past decade (Abeza et al., 2018; Eddy et al., 2016). The contrast between student attendance and ticket sales, however, is distinct. In part due to the cultural prevalence of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football in the United States, revenue generated from college football ticket sales has remained relatively consistent (Brook, 2022) amid decreasing rates of student attendance.

Accordingly, prominent college football stakeholders have voiced their displeasure with student attendance and the perception of student support (Crawford, 2019; Truax, 2022). In 2018, The University of Alabama head football coach Nick Saban cataloged such discontent:

I can honestly say I was a little disappointed there weren't more students at the last game... there's got to be a spirit that makes it special to play here because it's what makes it special to be here. And if that's not here, then does it continue to be special to be here or not? (Potter, 2018, paras. 4–7)

Given pageantry and tradition are determinant factors in a prospective recruit's enrollment decision (Letawsky et al., 2003) and the direct relationship between recruiting and success (i.e., winning) in FBS football (Caro, 2012; Corr et al., 2022), such a poignant statement is strategically indicative of the social exchange between game attendance and success in football.

As stakeholders grapple with decreasing student attendance at live sporting events, the size and stature of Greek-letter organizations (i.e., fraternities and sororities) may postulate a viable option to bolster student attendance (Lareau & Titlebaum, 2020). Attendance at athletic events has been found to assist in student assimilation once enrolled in the college setting (Kulp et al., 2021), and Greek-letter organizations often utilize university sponsored athletic events to cultivate community among members' inter- and intra-Greek affiliation (Brecciaroli et al., 2005). In 2018, then University of Florida head football coach Dan Mullen sought to augment student attendance at football games through appeal to Greek-letter organizations. Mullen visited and spoke to more than 25 fraternities and sororities, echoing similar sentiments to the social exchange between attendance and success in college football:

If we have an unbelievable gameday environment, the players on the field play a little bit harder... you get louder and crazier, players play harder, recruits like it even more, we get even better players. And then the cycle keeps going until we're the most dominant program in college football... [fraternities and sororities] are such a critical, critical part of us making that happen. (Florida Gators Football, 2018)

Although such social exchange posited by college football coaches—not surprisingly—emphasizes student attendance in terms of success in football (e.g., winning games, recruiting success), the formative influence of students' college sport experience within the development of campus culture (Gumprecht, 2003) is of significant value to athletic administrators.

A college campus culture is an intangible byproduct formed from the aggregation of an institutional mission(s) and the compilation of students comprising enrollment (Museus & Jayakumar, 2011). Campus culture is articulated by institutions and institutional members in the form of objectives and principles

guiding operational priorities (X. Shen & Tian, 2012). Given the pervasiveness of athletics consumption (i.e., viewership, fandom) in the United States, many NCAA member institutions inherently integrate athletics as a fundamental component of campus culture (Gumprecht, 2003). Within this institutional setting, NCAA athletic competitions become symbolic representations of *togetherness*, uniting various institutional affiliates (e.g., students, fans, alumni; Kirwan & Turner, 2010). Such perception of unity and value sharing (e.g., sport fandom) are significant factors motivating both student attendance at athletic events and alumni engagement (i.e., monetary donations; Fleming, 2019; Specter, 2012). Conspicuously, affiliation in Greek-letter organizations and college sport experience are prominent factors in the formation of campus culture and community (Diaz Vidal & Pittz, 2019; Warner et al., 2011). In addition, fraternity and sorority members are predisposed as groups most likely to contribute significant donations as alumni (Asel et al., 2009; DeBard & Sacks, 2010, 2011; Diaz Vidal & Pittz, 2019). Given the eminent role of Greek-letter organizations in numerous factors pertaining to alumni giving, the engagement of fraternity and sorority members may be of consequential importance to various stakeholders in collegiate athletics.

Accordingly, the present study sought to examine intentions and motivations to attend collegiate athletics events among Greek-letter organizations. As social exchange theory (SET) posits individual parties gauge action(s) based on the cost and return relative to a given social setting (e.g., see Blau, 1986; Cook et al., 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Homans & Merton, 1961 for a complete review), fraternity and sorority members' attendance at collegiate athletics events must be stimulated by distinct intrinsic and extrinsic social benefits (i.e., return[s]). As such, athletics administrators and pertinent stakeholders need to understand the intentions and motivations of Greek-letter organization members in regard to attendance at collegiate athletics events. Correspondingly, utilizing the motivation scale for sport consumption (MSSC; Trail & James, 2001), the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ₁*: What is the primary motivation(s) for attendance of collegiate athletics events among Greek-letter organization student members as opposed to non-Greek-letter members?
- RQ₂*: Which factor(s) contributes most significantly to intention to attend collegiate athletics events among future Greek-letter organization alumni?

Methodological Approach

Sampling and Participants

This study utilized purposeful sampling to survey university students at member institutions in an NCAA FBS Group of 5 athletic conference. Athletic conference administrators distributed email communication to member institutions inviting participants to partake in the study. Accordingly, this study consisted of 3,226 participants ages 18 to 64 ($M = 22.92$, $SD = 7.29$) with an academic grade level distribution of 24.2% freshman, 16.0% sophomores, 20.0% juniors, 19.3% seniors, and 20.5% graduate students. The sample included 1,858 female participants, 1,288 male participants, and 61 nonbinary participants (19 participants did not indicate their gender). Every nonbinary participant also identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, which included 504 total participants. Further, the self-identified racial classifications of the participants included 59.9% White, 12.6% Hispanic or Latino, 10.0% Asian, and 10.0% Black

or African American. Participants who identified as Native American or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and mixed race made up 7.5% of the survey participants. Further, 321 (9.9%) participants were members of a Greek-letter organization.

Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption Scale

The questionnaire began by asking for descriptive information (e.g., age, race, gender, sporting event attendance, Greek-letter affiliation). Intention to attend future athletic events was measured with one ordinal item that ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7): “After I graduate, I am likely to attend sporting events at my institution.” Student motives for athletic event attendance were measured using the MSSC (Trail & James, 2001). The MSSC utilized a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). The scale included 27 total items with nine individual factors: Achievement, Knowledge, Aesthetics, Drama, Escape, Family, Physical Attraction, Physical Skills, and Social (see Table 1 for definitions).

Table 1

Definitions of the Nine Factors in the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption Motives

Motives	Definition
Achievement	A personal connection to team success
Knowledge	An understanding of team statistics and records
Aesthetics	An appreciation for the beauty of the game
Drama	An appreciation for the excitement of the game
Escape	An ability to escape obligations and mundane routine
Family	The level to which participants like to consume sporting events with friends and family
Physical Attraction	A general attractiveness to players
Physical Skills	An appreciation of skill and performance
Social	The appeal to consume sport for social interaction

The internal consistency reliability rating, measured using Cronbach’s alpha, included $\alpha = 0.87$ for the overall scale and ranged between $\alpha = 0.68$ to $\alpha = 0.89$ for each subscale (Trail & James, 2001). Similar to Trail et al. (2003)—and at the request of conference administration—the present study removed the subscale pertaining to physical attraction.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using statistical analytics software (SAS) version 9.4. The first research question was addressed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The dependent variables included all eight motives on the MSSC: (1) achievement, (2) knowledge, (3) aesthetic, (4) drama, (5) escape, (6) family, (7) physical skills, and (8) social. As the assumption of equality of variance-co-

variance matrices was not satisfied, we reported Pillai's Trace statistic, which is more robust when the assumption of equality of variance-covariance matrices is violated.

As the outcome variable was ordinal, the second research question was addressed using ordinal logistic regression analysis. The ordinal logistic regression analysis estimated the logit of the degree to which participants agree to attend future athletic events as a function of overall MSSC score, affiliation with Greek-letter organizations, whether they currently attend sporting events, frequency of attendance of sporting events, age, and MCSS motives (e.g., achievement, knowledge, escape, physical skills, social). Odds ratios were also computed for each independent variable including the 95% confidence interval of the odds ratios.

Results

Motivations for Attendance

The descriptive statistics of the eight MSSC motives are presented in Table 2. Among the eight motives, physical skills had the highest average ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.11$), and knowledge had the lowest average ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.84$). The results of the MANOVA suggest that participants' true mean vector scores on the eight MSSC motives significantly differ based on Greek-letter organization affiliation ($V = 0.015$, $F(8,3217) = 6.25$, $p < 0.001$). Univariate ANOVA tests were carried out as a follow-up to the significant MANOVA (see Table 3).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption Motives

Motives	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Achievement	5.57	1.29
Knowledge	3.74	1.84
Aesthetics	5.42	1.39
Drama	5.45	1.16
Escape	5.41	1.39
Family	4.50	1.41
Physical Skills	5.90	1.11
Social	5.36	1.38

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation

Table 3*Univariate ANOVA for Dependent Variables*

Motives	Greek-letter affiliation				<i>F</i> -value	<i>P</i> -value	η_p^2 (%)
	Yes		No				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Achievement	5.76	1.18	5.55	1.30	7.24	0.007	0.22
Knowledge	3.98	1.84	3.71	1.84	6.15	0.013	0.19
Aesthetic	5.51	1.32	5.41	1.39	1.51	0.219	0.04
Drama	5.48	1.15	5.44	1.16	0.25	0.616	0.01
Escape	5.58	1.30	5.39	1.40	5.39	0.020	0.17
Family	4.58	1.27	4.49	1.42	1.20	0.274	0.04
Physical skills	6.03	0.97	5.88	1.12	4.95	0.026	0.15
Social	5.83	1.10	5.31	1.40	41.59	<.001	1.27

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; η_p^2 (%) = partial eta-square

The average scores for participants affiliated with Greek-letter organizations were higher across all eight MSSC motives compared to participants who were not affiliated (see Table 3). A significant difference existed in the average achievement scores on the MSSC for participants who are affiliated with Greek-letter organizations ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.18$) and participants who are not affiliated ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1,3225)=7.24$, $p=0.007$, $\eta_p^2=0.22\%$). There were also significant differences based on Greek-letter organization affiliation for knowledge ($F(1,3225)=6.15$, $p=0.013$, $\eta_p^2=0.19\%$), escape ($F(1,3225)=5.39$, $p=0.020$, $\eta_p^2=0.17\%$), physical skills ($F(1,3225)=4.95$, $p=0.026$, $\eta_p^2=0.19=0.15\%$), and social ($F(1,3225)=41.59$, $p<0.001$, $\eta_p^2=1.27\%$),)

Intention to Attend

The ordinal logistic regression results indicate that overall MSSC, Greek-letter organization affiliation, attending sporting events, age, achievement, and knowledge were all significantly associated with intention to attend athletic events as alumni (see Table 4). The odds ratio associated with overall MSSC was 3.21 ($\beta_{MSSC}=1.17$, $p<0.001$, $OR=3.21$, $CI\ 95\%[2.34,4.40]$) indicating that for every one unit increase in overall MSSC score, the odds of intending to attend collegiate athletic events as an alumni are 3.21 times greater, holding other variables constant. Also, the odds of a student who is affiliated with a Greek-letter organization attending future collegiate athletic events are 1.31 times those of a student who is not affiliated with a Greek-letter organization ($\beta_{Greek}=0.27$, $p=0.033$, $OR=1.31$, $CI\ 95\% [1.02,1.67]$), upon accounting for other variables.

Table 4*Ordinal Logistic Regression for Variables Predicting Attendance of Sporting Events as Alumni*

Predictors	Estimate	SE	Wald	P-value	OR	95% Wald CL	
						Lower	Upper
Overall MSSC	1.17	0.16	52.36	<.001	3.21	2.34	4.40
Greek-Letter Affiliation							
Yes	0.27	0.13	4.57	0.033	1.31	1.02	1.67
Attend Sporting Events							
Yes	0.29	0.12	6.47	0.011	1.34	1.07	1.68
Frequency of Sporting Events							
1	0.28	0.12	5.06	0.024	1.32	1.04	1.67
2–4	0.24	0.11	4.48	0.034	1.27	1.02	1.59
5–9	0.30	0.14	4.63	0.032	1.35	1.03	1.79
10+	0.56	0.14	16.05	<.001	1.74	1.33	2.29
Age	0.03	0.01	36.80	<.001	1.03	1.02	1.04
Achievement	0.20	0.05	18.38	<.001	1.22	1.11	1.33
Knowledge	0.15	0.04	16.99	<.001	1.16	1.08	1.25
Escape	0.09	0.05	2.81	0.094	1.09	0.99	1.20
Physical Skills	-0.06	0.06	1.02	0.314	0.94	0.84	1.06
Social	0.08	0.04	3.80	0.051	1.09	1.00	1.18

Note. OR = odds ratio; SE = standard error; CL = confidence limit; MSSC = motivation scale for sport consumption

Compared to participants who do not attend any sporting events, the odds of attending future events are 1.34 higher among participants who attend collegiate athletic events ($\beta_{Event}=0.29, p=0.011, OR=1.34$). Age and frequency of attending collegiate athletic events were also significantly associated with attending future collegiate athletic events. Achievement and knowledge were the only MSSC motives that were significantly associated with attending collegiate athletic events as alumni. For every additional unit increase in achievement measured with the MSSC scale, the odds of intending to attend collegiate athletic events as alumni are 1.22 times greater ($\beta_{Achievement}=0.20, p<0.001, OR=1.22, CI\ 95\%[1.11, 1.33]$). Similarly, an additional increase in knowledge is associated with higher odds of intention to attend future collegiate athletic events as an alumnus ($\beta_{Knowledge}=0.15, p<0.001, OR=1.16, CI\ 95\%[1.08, 1.25]$).

Implications and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine Greek-letter organization members' motivations and intentions regarding spectatorship of collegiate athletic events. The odds ratio associated with overall MSSC (3.21) indicates the odds of intending to attend collegiate athletic events as an alumni affiliated with a

Greek-letter organization were 3.21 times greater than those who are not affiliated with a Greek-letter organization. In addition, the odds of a student who is affiliated with a Greek-letter organization attending future collegiate athletic events were 1.3 times those of students not affiliated with Greek-letter organizations. Accordingly, and given the relationship between Greek-letter organization affiliation and alumni giving (Asel et al., 2009; DeBard & Sacks, 2010, 2011; Diaz Vidal & Pittz, 2019), engagement with Greek-letter organizations is imperative for athletic administrators and stakeholders seeking to bolster student attendance at athletic events and cultivate a willingly financially benevolent alumni base.

The findings of this study also indicate Greek-letter members' increased motivations for sport consumption across each metric on the MSSC. Consistent with previous literature illustrating Greek-letter membership and athletic attendance as means to assimilate into the university setting (Brecciaroli et al., 2005; Kulp et al., 2021), social interaction was significantly greater among Greek-letter members' motivations to attend athletic events. Although many traditional students (i.e., non-Greek-letter members) indicate that attending athletic events is not an integral component of campus culture and community (Berg, 2018), the findings from this study indicate that members of Greek-letter organizations value the opportunities for social interaction and achievement provided by attendance at athletic events to a significantly greater extent than traditional students. Given the importance of student attendance to the collegiate athletics enterprise (Darlow, 2018), Greek-letter members pose a potential student population to engage to bolster student attendance. Whereas the short-term benefits of increased student attendance are noteworthy, the long-term opportunity to engage Greek-letter alumni is pertinent for athletic administrators to consider as well.

Lareau and Titlebaum (2020) proposed athletic department institutional members target specific campus groups to increase student attendance and engagement with athletic events; we posit that athletic department institutional members should consider targeting Greek-letter organizations specifically. Similar to efforts by Dan Mullen at the University of Florida (Florida Gators Football, 2018), the promotion of athletic events utilizing prominent institutional members (e.g., coaches, athletes, athletic administrators) has potential value to engage traditional student and Greek-letter populations (Lareau & Titlebaum, 2020). As Greek-letter members indicate that social interaction is a significant factor motivating athletic event attendance, the creation of athletic department programming and events that provide opportunities for Hellenic organizations to interact with one another (e.g., tailgates, socials) may be valuable to engage Greek-letter members. In the Southeastern Conference (SEC) alone, for example, there is an average of 43 Hellenic organizations among the 14-member institutions. In 2016, each organization averaged between 84–150 student members (Wuensch, 2016). Such representation is indicative of the role of Greek-letter within the college campus setting and signifies a potentially valuable population of students for athletic department institutional members to engage while enrolled as a student and upon graduation.

Identifying ways to increase student attendance and alumni giving will become even more important for university and athletic administrators as higher education enrollment and federal and state funding continue to decline (Mitchell et al., 2019; National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). In addition, although ticket sales have remained relatively constant (Brook, 2022), student attendance at collegiate athletics events has steadily decreased. Given the emphasis placed on fan-induced stadium environments in collegiate athletics with specific regard to success in football (e.g., winning games, successful recruiting;

Crawford, 2019; Florida Gators Football, 2018; Potter, 2018; Truax, 2022), Greek-letter organizations pose a vital resource inherently ingrained within individual campus communities and the fabric of higher education in the United States. Strategically focused marketing to motivate other pertinent student-formed groups to further develop and promote distinct campus culture may have positive outcomes with regard to attendance among current students and alumni affiliates. Furthermore, cultivating a meaningful social exchange between athletic stakeholders (i.e., administrators, coaches) and shareholders (i.e., students, alumni, fans) is integral to both attendance initiatives and present or future alumni giving (H. Shen & Sha, 2020).

Limitations and Future Research

Results in this study are limited to students enrolled in universities competing within one Division I athletic conference in the southern region of the United States. Potential response bias is also a limitation in this study due to the method of survey data collection and the self-reporting of participants. At the request of the conference administration and athletic directors, the physical attraction subscale was removed from the MSSC. As such, motivations associated with physical attraction should be examined in future research. Additionally, future research in college sport consumption motives should address what leads students in Greek-letter organizations to be more likely to attend collegiate athletics events as alumni compared to those not affiliated with Greek-letter organizations. Furthermore, research in effective alumni engagement could benefit institutions who rely on annual giving for athletic department subvention.

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