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Savannah Hockey Classic Attendance Motivation

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SAVANNAH HOCKEY CLASSIC ATTENDANCE MOTIVATION

Savannah Hockey Classic Attendance Motivation

The Savannah Hockey Classic was contested for the 21st time January 17-18, 2020 at the Savannah Civic Center in Savannah, Georgia featuring the Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Florida, Florida State University, and University of Georgia club hockey teams (“21st Annual,” 2020). Because of the event’s consistency, it has become a tradition in Southeast Georgia with 2020 average nightly attendance of 4,450. That average attendance figure would have ranked 12th among NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics hockey programs in the 2018-19 season (“Men’s Division I,” n.d.). This level of attendance is remarkable for an event featuring non-scholarship club hockey players in a portion of the country that is not commonly associated with ice hockey. Former Georgia Institute of Technology goaltender Caleb Rudnicki said that more than 5,500 fans typically attend the event’s second night of games versus around the 20 or 30 fans who saw most of his home games, or the 200 fans that might attend a rivalry home game (Dominitz, 2020). As Rudnicki’s statement indicates, the 21-year Savannah Hockey Classic is an outlier for club hockey. The phenomenal sustained attendance success enjoyed by this event led researchers to wonder what motivates so many Southerners to attend a club hockey tournament in Savannah each January. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the motivations that led fans to attend the 2020 Savannah Hockey Classic—a largely tourism-based annual club hockey event—and to assess differences based on sample groups.

Former Savannah Sports Council director John DeLoach and Chip Grayson—who became the Council’s chairman after two meetings—met at a Savannah hotel clubhouse in 1998 to plan for the first Savannah Hockey Classic on napkins (Fordyce, 2019). While the event would certainly draw citizens of Savannah to attend the games, DeLoach and Grayson invited the Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Florida, and University of Georgia men’s ice hockey club teams to compete in the initial 1999 event—all teams that would be travelling more than three hours to participate in the event. Therefore, the event’s attendance success would at least partially hinge on motivating people to travel to watch the games. The Florida State University club team joined the event in later years (Fordyce, 2019). These schools each have at least 30,000 students and lack a NCAA men’s intercollegiate ice hockey program—meaning that their club teams provided the best version of hockey on their respective campuses and had the potential to attract fans from their respective communities as well as alumni near and within Savannah. The consistency of hosting these same four programs—all four competitors in Division III of the American Collegiate Hockey Association—is just one of key to the event’s sustained success (Dominitz, 2020). The fact that the tournament features in-state rivals from both Georgia (i.e. University of Georgia and Georgia Institute of Technology) and Florida (i.e. University of Florida and Florida State University) allows the tournament to build on the power of rivalry. Previous research has found that fans are more likely to consume games between rivals than contests featuring non-rivals (Havard & Reams, 2018; Havard, Shapiro, & Ridinger, 2016) and that fans are more willing to pay a premium for rivalry games (Sanford & Scott, 2016). Another of the event’s strengths lies in the fact that five of the Savannah Hockey Classic’s initial 20 volunteers remained in place for more than 20 years (Fordyce, 2019).

A pair of articles have examined club hockey (Dees & Hall, 2010; Veltri, Miller, & Harris, 2009). Dees and Hall (2010) researched the Savannah Hockey Classic 10 years

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ago in a study that focused on the event's economic impact and its event personality. That study found that 56% of the tournament's survey respondents came from out-of-town, with 98% of those visitors staying in Savannah for at least one night. Among survey participants, 46% said that they were attending the event for the first time in 2010, with 98% of those people saying that they planned on attending the event again in 2011. Eighty-one of the 83 out-of-town survey respondents in that study indicated that they had stayed in a Savannah-area hotel for at least one night, providing a glimpse into the economic power an event of this type might carry. The Veltri et al. (2009) study examined the 2007 American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II National Championship—a tournament comprised of primarily non-varsity and club hockey teams. That event provided further evidence of just how successful the Savannah hockey event has been, as the ACHA Division II national championship averaged just 525 fans per session whereas the regular season tournament in Savannah has averaged 4,450 fans. The Veltri et al. (2009) study found that the ACHA event generated \$2 million in local revenue. The authors pointed out the ACHA study—which examined an event that was partially attended by players' parents and friends—supported the work of Scott and Turco (2007). Scott and Turco (2007) studied the Little League World Series and found that travel involving Watching Friends and Relatives (WFR) is an understudied revenue generating area of sport and travel. Scott and Turco (2007) found that fans with ties to sport participants spent three times as much money in the host community than others. The current study fills a gap in the literature by examining the attendance motivations of club hockey fans—a niche type of sport fan—at an annual event.

Literature Review

Personal Investment Theory (Braskamp, 1986) served as the theoretical basis for this study. The current study assessed the motivation of fans to attend the Savannah Hockey Classic. The researchers utilized the SPEED scale (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009) to assess fan motivation. Therefore, the following literature review focuses on the Personal Investment Theory (PI) and various sport, education, and travel motivation studies.

Personal Investment Theory

Maehr and Braskamp (1986) are credited as the creators of Personal Investment Theory (Braskamp, 1986; Kim, Magnusen, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Peetz, 2011). Braskamp (1986) explained PI is based on the concept that people make choices based on the meaning those choices have to their personal lives. PI is to be utilized to assess how people elect to utilize their time, talent, and energy (Maehr & McInerney, 2004). PI theory begins by identifying behaviors, and then examining the motives that led to those behaviors (Braskamp, 1986; Maehr & McInerney, 2004)—or as Peetz (2011) explains it examined the actions taken rather than consumers' psychological states. The theory identifies a person's perceived goals, sense of self, and personal incentives—or perceived alternatives (Maehr & McInerney, 2004)—as three components that help to determine an individual's motivation (Kim, Magnusen, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Peetz, 2011; Wann, Bayens, & Driver, 2004). PI emphasized that a person's social and cultural contexts impact their

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behavioral motives (McInerney, Maehr, & Dowson, 2004). Maehr and McInerney (2004) clarified that PI's sense of self component answers "who am I" questions, the perceived goals component answers "what can be achieved questions," and the perceived alternatives component answers "what was available and appropriate" questions.

PI has been used in a variety of contexts including several sport studies (Gray-Lee & Granzin, 1997; Kim, Magnusen, Kim, & Lee, 2019; Peetz, 2011; Wann, Bayens, & Driver, 2004), education studies (King & McInerney, 2014; Lindholm, 1997; McInerney, 2008), and physical therapy and rehabilitation studies (Duda, Smart, & Tappe, 1989; Duda & Tappe, 1988; Jeansonne, Hoenig, & Hollander, 2008). In terms of the sport PI journal articles, PI theory was used in a study that tested a total of 15 constructs—related to the assessment of personal investment in physical activity (Gray-Lee & Granzin, 1997). In that study, Gray-Lee and Granzin (1997) determined 12 of their 15 PI-based constructs helped to explain personal investment in physical activity. In their meta-analytical review of factors that impact sport attendance, Kim et al. (2019) stated that team identification—when employed as a sense of self component—likely influences consumers' deeds including attendance. They also suggested the social benefits of team identification motivates behavior—something that was echoed in a Wann et al. (2004) study which found that both ticket scarcity and team identification motivated interest in game attendance. Kim et al. (2019) also suggested that taking part in the activity of attendance, being associated with a successful team, enjoying time with others, watching specific opponents or star players, and other personal incentives can also influence sport event attendance. Many of the Kim et al. (2019) PI-based motives overlap well with those found in the SPEED scale (Funk et al., 2009). Peetz (2011) utilized PI in a case study focused on a college basketball student rewards program. Peetz (2011) echoed the assertion that attendance is the behavior that serves as the reflection of an event's attractiveness based on consumers' internal motives. This aligns well with Maehr and McInerney's (2004) position that behavior reflects individuals' motives. With these studies noted, no prior PI study has focused on a sport tourism related event's attendance motivation, event-based sport attendance motivation, hockey attendance motivation or club sport attendance motivation.

Additionally, PI theory has been used in several education studies (King & McInerney, 2014; Lindholm, 1997; McInerney, 2008). McInerney (2008) used it to assess differences in educational achievement among culture, finding that Asian and Anglo students outperformed Aboriginal and Lebanese students which the researcher attributed to higher attendance by the former groups—accounting for what McInerney deemed a stronger self-concept and social motivational influence. King and McInerney (2014) echoed the influence culture had on student motivation noted in previous studies (McInerney, et al., 2004; McInerney, 2008). Again, social motivational influences on motivation are emphasized along with the positive and negative effects of peer pressure (King & McInerney, 2014). Lindholm (1997)—in a study of secondary school physical education instructor motivation—mirrored previous research by citing PI as effective in terms of first examining behavior then assessing the motivations that led to that behavior (Braskamp, 1986).

Lastly, PI has been applied to physical therapy and rehabilitation studies. In their study of intercollegiate athletics student-athletes adhering to rehab plans, Duda et al. (1989) said that part of the PI sense of self component includes one's association with

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specific reference groups which aligns well with the items that comprise the SPEED scale's esteem component (Funk, et al., 2009). Duda and Tappe (1988) stated that the interaction of a person's characteristics with those of the current situation lead to the resultant behavior.

Sport and Travel Motivation Literature

Motivation has been studied in many contexts, but the literature examining college fan motivation (Bernthal & Graham, 2003; Snipes & Ingram, 2007; Woo, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009), hockey fan motivation (Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008; Zhang, Lam, Connaughton, Bennett, Pease, Pham, Killion, Ocker, & Duley, 2004; Zhang, Pease, Lam, Bellerive, Pham, Williamson, & Wall, 2001), and travel and tourism fan motivation (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003; Kirkup & Sutherland, 2017; Smith & Stewart, 2007) aligned best with the current study. The SPEED scale (Funk, et al., 2009) needed to be examined due to its parsimonious method of assessing sport attendance motives that balance practitioner and academic considerations.

In their study of student travel motives, Kim, Oh, and Jogaratnam (2007) stated motivation is the driving force behind behavior and a search for satisfactory outcomes. In their study of sport tourism motives, Kirkup and Sutherland (2017) stated motivation is comprised of internal factors that inspire and drive behavior. They suggested that a marketing professional who understands consumer motivation is better positioned to satisfy customer wants and needs. Woo, Kwon, Trail, and Anderson (2009) stated there are points of attachment that led people to watch sport events including a connection with a coach, community, player, sport, team, or university—and that these points of attachment connect with powerful psychological motives like vicarious achievement and spectator motives to drive consumer attendance. In a study of Taiwanese baseball attendance motivation, Chien and Ross (2012) determined identification with a team to be one of the strongest attendance motives. In a study of minor league hockey sociomotivational attendance factors, the researchers indicated the six major theory areas tied to sociomotivational attendance are: (a) achievement-seeking theories, (b) catharsis and aggression theories, (c) community image theories, (d) entertainment theories, (e) salubrious-effects theories, and (f) stress and stimulation theories (Zhang et al., 2001). Wann et al. (2008) provide eight motives for sport consumption including: (a) aesthetics, (b) economic, (c) entertainment, (d) escape, (e) eustress, (f) family, (g) group affiliation, and (h) self-esteem. Several of these concepts are accounted for in the SPEED scale.

The SPEED Scale

The SPEED scale (Funk, et al., 2009) provides a parsimonious and effective measure of sport motivation. Based on their examination of the sport attendance motivation literature, the researchers created a scale that captures attendance motivation in just 10 items covering five constructs. Those five constructs are socialization, performance, excitement, esteem, and diversion.

PI and the SPEED scale (Funk et al., 2009) overlap to address the three components of PI. It could be asserted that the sense of self component is accounted for in the esteem items found in the SPEED scale (Funk et al., 2009). Braskamp (1986) said sense of self accounts for things like internal beliefs, identity, meaning, purpose, and relationships—and esteem can certainly be accounted for within Braskamp's description.

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The socialization and diversion items in the SPEED scale (Funk, et al., 2009) align well with the perceived goals component in PI that addresses what can be achieved in terms of a consumer's interactivity and distraction motives. Braskamp (1986) stated that perceived goals relate to what the individual finds attractive or unattractive in the moment. There are certainly times when people find socialization attractive or unattractive and times when they find diversion attractive or unattractive. Finally, the perceived alternatives component addresses what a person considers to be available and most appropriate (Maehr & McInerney, 2004). This matches well with the SPEED scale's performance and excitement items—as those items explain what type of performance is available, what type of excitement is provided, and assess how appropriate the measures are to the consumer (Funk et al., 2009). This should not be surprising because PI and the SPEED scale were constructed to address motivation.

Research Questions

Managers of sporting events often categorize spectators into various groups based on various factors relating to demographic, economic, and geographic classifications. Working with the Savannah Sports Council, spectators were categorized according to age, gender, household income, and county of residence. Additional items asked consumers about prior Savannah Hockey Classic attendance, people with whom the spectators attended, and allegiance to one of the participating clubs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the motivations that led fans to attend the 2020 Savannah Hockey Classic—a largely tourism-based annual club hockey event-- and to assess differences based on sample groups. This led to the following research question:

Research Question: What differences in attendance motivation exist between various sample groups?

Data Collection

The Savannah Hockey Classic is held over two nights in January. Prior to both nights, surveys were placed at equal intervals throughout the seating bowl of the Savannah Civic Center. Spectators who completed the survey and returned it to a booth in the concourse were provided a coupon for a free soft drink at a local convenience store chain. The public address announcer read multiple messages encouraging study participation. Additionally, spectators in the fan fest section of the facility were solicited by the researchers using a convenience sampling method. As with the surveys in the seating bowl, spectators were offered a drink coupon in exchange for their participation. Following the event, surveys were sent via email to spectators who had purchased tickets online. No enticements were offered to email participants. The survey design and data collection protocols followed institutional review board guidelines.

An item was added to detect participants who completed multiple surveys, either at the event, or at the event and then online. A total of 194 surveys were collected during the two nights of the event. An additional 261 surveys were collected after the tournament via email. Duplicate and incomplete surveys were removed, providing a usable sample n of 407. A response rate could not be calculated due to the nature of the distribution.

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Participants

Participants had to be 18 years of age or older to complete the survey. As Table 1 illustrates, age was quite evenly distributed. Most respondents were male ($n = 226$, 55.5%; *Female* = 168, 41.3%). However, there were several participants who did not answer the gender identification question ($n = 13$, 3.2%).

Table 1 Age of respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-24	31	7.6	7.6	7.6
25-34	103	25.3	25.3	32.9
35-44	97	23.8	23.8	56.8
45-54	80	19.7	19.7	76.4
55+	96	23.6	23.6	100.00
Total	407	100.00	100.00	

Most respondents lived outside of Chatham County where the event was held ($n = 232$, 57.0%, *Chatham County Resident* = 175, 43%), and had attended the event during a prior year ($n = 267$, 65.6%, *First Time* = 140, 34.4%). Household income (Table 2) was skewed toward the middle and upper socioeconomic classes.

Table 2 Household income

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
< 30,000	25	6.1	6.6	6.9
30K - 49,999	43	10.6	11.4	18
50K - 74,999	70	17.2	18.5	36.5
75K - 99,999	86	21.1	22.8	59.3
100K - 124,999	54	13.3	14.3	73.5
125K +	100	24.6	26.5	100.0
Total	378	92.9	100.0	
No Response	29	7.1		
Total	407	100.0		

Very few spectators were related to a player ($n = 17$, 4.2%) or coach ($n = 6$, 1.5%). Similarly, very few respondents were at the event because they were a friend of a player ($n = 16$, 3.9%) or coach ($n = 9$, 2.2%). Only 24.1% ($n = 98$) of respondents were current or former students at one of the participating institutions, but most respondents indicated a rooting interest in one of the teams ($n = 230$, 56.5%, *No Rooting Interest* = 171, 42.0%). Most respondents attended the event with family ($n = 312$, 76.7%) and/or friends ($n = 242$, 59.5%).

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Results

The SPEED scale contains ten items. Two items per each construct. Although the SPEED scale is widely used to measure fan motivation, Cronbach's α scores were calculated to ensure reliability. Table 3 contains the reliability scores, means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the five SPEED Scale constructs. Scores above the mid-point (3) on the five-point scale indicate positive motivation to attend. The mean scores for all constructs were greater than three.

Table 3 Mean, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's α , and Correlation Matrix

	M	SD	α	SOC	PER	EXC	EST	DIV
SOC	3.72	1.21	0.95	1.000				
PER	4.33	1.05	0.94	.331**	1.000			
EXC	4.49	0.98	0.95	.327**	.849**	1.000		
EST	3.86	1.15	0.91	.335**	.498**	.506**	1.000	
DIV	4.08	1.04	0.88	.416**	.530**	.584**	.572**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level

Separate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted using SPSS Statistics to determine if motivation levels were significantly different for groups based on age range or household income. As illustrated in Tables 4 and 5, neither age nor household income were related to differences in motivation to attend the event.

Table 4: One-way ANOVAs by Age

Variable	18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55+		F(4, 402)	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SOC	4.06	1.04	3.93	1.10	3.51	1.39	3.64	1.16	3.66	1.18	2.335	.055
PER	4.39	1.03	4.29	1.02	4.39	0.95	4.39	1.05	4.25	1.21	0.323	.862
EXC	4.66	0.80	4.48	0.97	4.54	0.91	4.58	0.88	4.31	1.18	1.295	.271
EST	3.98	1.27	4.12	1.05	3.72	1.14	3.79	1.21	3.74	1.15	2.120	.078
DIV	4.18	1.00	4.13	1.05	4.07	1.02	4.14	0.99	3.95	1.11	0.531	.713

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if motivational differences existed within groups based on gender, county of residence, prior attendance, rooting interest, attendance with family, and attendance with friends (Table 6). There were several significant differences within groups. Social interaction motivations were significantly higher for county residents, past attendees, spectators attending with family, and spectators attending with friends. Motivations related to athlete performance were only significantly higher for those who had attended the event in the past. Excitement based motivations were greater for those who had attended the event in the past, as well as for those who identified as a fan of one of the teams. Esteem and Diversion were only significant for spectators with a rooting interest in one of the teams.

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Table 5 One-way ANOVAs by Income

Var.	< \$30K		\$30K - 49,999		\$50K - 74,999		\$75K - 99,999		\$100K - 124,999		\$125K +		F(5, 372)	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SOC	4.1	0.99	3.83	1.32	3.61	1.19	3.81	1.18	3.77	1.08	3.51	1.25	1.427	0.213
PER	4.18	1.04	4.37	1.15	4.39	1.07	4.44	0.98	4.23	1.2	4.25	1.05	0.533	0.752
EXC	4.58	0.9	4.43	1.21	4.47	1.08	4.58	0.87	4.44	1.02	4.43	0.95	0.294	0.916
EST	3.84	1.23	4.14	1.09	3.76	1.27	4.08	1.03	3.85	1.19	3.67	1.11	1.83	0.106
DIV	3.92	1.11	4.15	1.27	4.11	1.03	4.22	0.96	4.03	1.15	3.97	0.94	0.751	0.586

Table 6 Independent Samples t-tests

	SOC		PER		EXC		EST		DIV	
	M	t	M	t	M	t	M	t	M	t
Gender										
Female	3.69	-0.526	4.32	-0.001	4.51	0.603	3.89	0.615	4.11	0.465
Male	3.76		4.32		4.44		3.81		4.06	
County Resident										
Yes	3.92	2.874**	4.33	0.016	4.50	0.262	3.83	-0.495	4.13	0.840
No	3.57		4.33		4.47		3.89		4.05	
First Time Attending										
Yes	3.48	-2.92**	4.12	2.976**	4.29	2.883**	3.74	-1.594	4.04	-0.603
No	3.84		4.44		4.59		3.93		4.10	
Rooting Interest										
Yes	3.74	0.401	4.42	1.785	4.59	2.277*	4.15	5.866***	4.19	2.183*
No	3.69		4.23		4.37		3.49		3.96	
Attend W/ Fam										
Yes	3.64	-2.509**	4.35	0.572	4.52	1.064	3.87	0.090	4.11	0.606
No	3.99		4.28		4.40		3.86		4.04	
Attend W/ Friends										
Yes	4.04	6.741***	4.30	-0.951	4.45	-1.113	3.92	1.143	4.09	0.004
No	3.26		4.40		4.56		3.79		4.09	

*p is significant at the .05 level

**p is significant at the .01 level

*** p is significant at the .001 level

Discussion

This study of Southern club hockey fan motivation yielded results that fill a gap in the literature, focusing on significant attendance motivation differences based on a variety of specified groups. As McInerny et al. (2004) noted, social and cultural contexts

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impact behavioral motivations, so it is unsurprising to find differences among groups. PI research focuses on how people are motivated to use their time, talent, and energy. However, PI research has not previously examined differences in attendance motivation related to a sport tourism related event, a sport tournament/single-event, hockey or club sport.

In this study, social interaction motivations were significantly higher for county residents, spectators attending with family, spectators attending with friends, and past Savannah Hockey Classic attendees. Kim et al. (2019) had previously utilized PI theory to find enjoying time with others was an attendance motivation. It makes sense that local people who have easier access to a local event would find it to be a more relaxing and social event than those who travel from a greater distance and require more planning to make their trip. Those attending with friends and family are clearly entering the event with a social mindset—which is why they came with others. Because the Savannah Hockey Classic involves multiple games per day over the course of two days, even a single-day commitment to the tournament with two games and a between game intermission requires about a five-hour time commitment. Thus, the higher social motivation component for those attending with family or friends makes sense. The event provides ample opportunity to catch up on social matters in addition to viewing a sport event within a large community context that allows for people watching and other social distractions.

Excitement-based motivations were found to be greater for those who identified with one of the teams. This builds upon Chien and Ross' (2012) PI study findings that identification with a team is a strong attendance motivator as well as the Kim et al. (2019) PI study declaration that team identification likely influences the deeds of consumers—with attendance among those deeds. Wann et al. (2004) also named team identification as an attendance motivator in a PI-based study. Those who enter the event with the anticipation of supporting their team and opposing other teams due to existing fandom and social identity with a team/university are walking into the event with hope and expectations. Because none of the teams are dominant (each of the four teams had won the Savannah Hockey Classic at least once in the five years prior to the 2020 event), fans of any of the four universities had the right to be excited about the possibility their team could win the event. One of the strengths of sport broadly is the fact it is unpredictable in nature which lends itself a certain level of excitement in an even broader sense.

In addition to the previously noted significant finding for social motivation for attendance, athlete performance and excitement-based motivations were found to be significantly higher for those who attended the Savannah Hockey Classic in the past. In terms of athlete performance motivation, Kim et al. (2019) stated watching specific opponents or star players can also influence sport event attendance in a prior PI study. In terms of excitement-based motivation, Peetz (2011) found an event's attractiveness fuels consumer attendance motivation in a PI-based study. However, because no prior PI-based article related to repeat attendees of a specific sport event, the fact that there were differences in athletic performance and excitement-based motivations based on repeat event consumption or new event consumption is significant. With that said, there are multiple reasons why this is completely logical. First, it is unlikely people would continue to attend the same annual hockey event if they did not consider the athleticism

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and excitement to have met or exceeded their expectations in the past. Second, even in the absence of a tie to one of the competing universities, repeat attendance based on athletic performance and excitement-based motivations could be tied to passion for the sport domain of hockey. A hockey fan would likely be excited to see hockey—particularly given a competitive tournament was being presented featuring four “name” teams in a region of the country that is not known for presenting regular “name” hockey events. Third, the continued attendance success of the event leads the Savannah Hockey Classic to have an important event feel which may enhance consumer belief that the athleticism and excitement must be at a high level which motivates repeat performance. Therefore, there are multiple lenses through which athlete performance and excitement-based motivations may be explained.

Significant differences in the diversion and esteem constructs were found for attendees who identified a team rooting interest. Previous research has found that fans are more likely to consume games between rivals than contests featuring non-rivals (Havard & Reams, 2018; Havard et al., 2016). This may explain the boost in attendance on night two of the Savannah Hockey Classic when the intra-state teams face one another. It may also explain some of the success of the event in general which sees the same four teams compete against one another on an annual basis. Savannah is nearly equidistant from the four participating schools, but it is also a far drive from each. The Savannah Hockey Classic gives both local residents—who may be alumni or casual fans of a participating school—as well as touring sport fans from the four university team communities an opportunity to see a rivalry game in person and experience the feeling of accomplishment that spectators enjoy when their team is victorious (Funk et al., 2009). As previously noted, this study comes 10 years after Dees and Hall (2010) examined the same event in a study that focused on the event’s economic impact as well as its event personality and consumer profile. In particular, the consumer demographic characteristics were similar between the two years, despite the decade difference. Most respondents were still male (62% in 2010, 55.5% in 2020) and affluent (63% compared to 82%). The percentage of attendees who traveled from outside Chatham County (57%) was nearly unchanged from 2010 (56%) indicating the event is still a major driver of tourism for the Savannah metropolitan area.

This study additionally builds on the work of Dees and Hall (2010) by providing more information for organizers to assist with sponsor and spectator recruitment by supplementing the perceived event personality with information about consumer motivations. Their study showed that respondents perceive the event to be exciting, wholesome, and successful, which aligns with our current findings that spectators were motivated to attend for socialization (with their friends and families), performance, excitement and diversion reasons. Knowing why consumers attend is important to ensure that the event continues to meet their needs through its brand personality. Sport event organizers can use this information to better tailor their marketing and event design. By knowing what people are looking for when they attend the event, they can better provide elements that meet those needs. For example, providing opportunities to socialize at the event, such as through a fanfest, would be very important to most attendees.

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