

# Purchase Motivations of Premium Seating Buyers Within College Athletics

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## **Abstract**

*Increasingly college athletics administrators at NCAA Division I institutions are selling premium seating within their football stadia in order to generate greater revenues to meet increasing department expenses. Selling premium seating requires sellers and marketers who understand specific buyer interests and motivations. However, little research exists examining such motivations based on data collected from actual consumers, particularly in a collegiate athletics setting. Utilizing an instrument to measure premium seating buyer motivation developed by Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010), data was collected from premium seating buyers (both club seats and suites) at an NCAA Division I Power 5 institution. While suite buyers and club seat buyers in the study shared very similar motivations, results suggested collegiate premium buyers are not highly motivated by business-related factors, despite prior research suggesting the contrary. Also, slight differences were found in premium seating purchase motivations between alumni and non-alumni of the institution of interest.*

## **Introduction**

College sport administrators at large NCAA Division I institutions are under increasing pressure to produce more revenue in an effort to keep up with escalating costs and spending. One result of this pressure is the growing number of collegiate athletic departments who are following in the footsteps of major league teams and adding or increasing premium seating inventory in their football stadiums in an effort to generate more revenue from their fan bases (Muret, 2016; Newcomb, 2013). Premium seating options at today's major sports venues include both private suites and club seat areas. Suite ownership allows buyers to obtain a private hospitality space within the venue which typically includes food and beverage options as well as hospitality staff services and amenities such as private restrooms and televisions, a "high end living room of sorts within the stadium or arena" (Pierce, Popp, & McEvoy, 2017, p. 65). Club seating, meanwhile, typically consists of large sections of individual seats with superior views of the sport event and shared hospitality options with other club seat owners (Lawrence, Contorno, & Steffek, 2013). Club seats may include amenities such as personal wait service, private entrances, higher end food and beverage options, and parking privileges. Sport ticket sales experts have suggested club seats are primarily marketed towards smaller and growing businesses which may not have the budget to afford a full suite presently, but could be a prospective suite buyer in the future (Irwin, Sutton, & McCarthy, 2008; Pierce et al., 2017).

In order for sport organizations such as major college athletics departments to sell premium seating, it is critical to understand buyer motivations (Titlebaum, Lawrence, Moberg, & Ramos, 2013; Titlebaum, DeMange, & Davis, 2012; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010) and demographic profiles of the most likely buyers (Lawrence et al., 2013). This knowledge allows sport marketers to target their most desirable audience, create better sales strategies, and improve the premium

seating experience, thus increasing revenue and encouraging retention (Blair, Titlebaum, Brown, & Dick, 2016; Lachowetz, McDonald, Sutton, & Hedrick, 2003). In an effort to extend this literature, the purpose of the current study was to gain a better understanding of the purchase motivations of premium seat holders at collegiate sporting events. Most prior work in this area has: (a) focused on premium buyers in professional sport settings, (b) typically examined perceived motivations as observed by sellers (rather than measuring buyer motivations directly), and (c) frequently only considered suite buyers rather than those who purchase club seats. This study is unique in that it specifically investigates the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What factors motivate college football premium seat buyers to purchase inventory and are there significant differences in motivations between those purchasing club seats compared to those purchasing suites?

**RQ2:** How do motivations for premium seating purchases as perceived by sellers compare to actual purchase motivations of buyers?

**RQ3:** Do motivations to purchase premium seating at college sporting events differ when the buyer is an alumnus of the university?

## **Literature Review**

The construction of luxury suites in public facilities and sport venues dates back to ancient Greece, with the purpose of providing premium seating for royalty and upper-class citizens (Lawrence, Kahler, & Contorno, 2009). In modern sport history, premium seating has become a significant revenue stream for sport organizations and venue operators, particularly through the professional sport stadia construction boom of the 1990's and early 2000's (Lee & Chun, 2008; Titlebaum, DeMange, & Davis, 2012). Premium seating options within venues have evolved from large-capacity suites to smaller loge seating or individual club seats (Rhoda, Wrigley, & Habermas, 2010). There has also been an increase in the types of venues utilizing premium seating, particularly within college athletics (Mayer & Morse, 2017; Muret, 2016; Newcombe, 2013; Seifried & Tutka, 2016). An increase in suite and club seating inventory has also catalyzed a more competitive marketplace and a greater need for sellers to understand buyer tendencies and motivations (Blair et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2013; Titlebaum et al., 2013).

## **Motivations of Sport Spectators**

Early research on spectator consumption centered on sport demand (McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Noll, 1974). Many of these early studies examined the effect of economic and sport product factors (ticket prices, scheduling of games, television and other entertainment options), promotions (special events, star players and team standings), residual preferences (game schedules, new arenas, accessibility and weather), and the association between socio-demographic factors (geography and population) on attendance of sporting events (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Noll, 1974; Zhang, Pease, Hui & Michaud, 1995; Zhang Smith, Pease & Jambor, 1997). Such research helps sport marketers determine how factors affect attendance, although many of the factors predicting attendance are often beyond the control of sport administrators (e.g., game times set by television broadcast schedules, weather) or do not relate to the core product (e.g., promotional giveaways, concerts, firework shows) (James & Ross, 2004).

More recent research has examined the intrapersonal motives of sport consumers to help explain sport consumption (Kim & Trail, 2010; Kim, Greenwell, Andrew, Lee, & Mahony, 2008; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). In fact, several noted sport

consumer behavior scientists have developed scales to attempt to measure spectator motivations, such as the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann, 1995), the Fan Attendance Motivations Scale (Kahle, Kambara, & Rose, 1996), the Motivations of Sport Consumers Scale (Milne & McDonald, 1999), the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (Trail & James, 2001), the Sport Interest Inventory (Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, & Hirakawa, 2001), and the Socialization, Performance, Excitement, Esteem and Diversion (SPEED) Scale (Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2009). Each of these efforts have sought to improve both validity and reliability of the measures assessed, while also reducing the number of items required to improve survey completion rates by consumers.

While the evolution of these scales have allowed researchers to more accurately identify key internal motivations of sports fans, there are limits to how sport marketers might utilize consumer assessments in practice. For example, some of the internal motives assessed by the scales mentioned above include factors such as (a) escape from stress, (b) socialization, (c) enhanced self-esteem, (d) vicarious achievement, and (e) aesthetic or physical skill appreciation. Sport marketers may shape messaging to reflect these attributes to target audiences or position their product to accentuate certain attributes, but understanding consumer motivational factors does not necessarily allow marketers to identify more likely prospective ticket buyers. Instead, sport marketers have turned toward data analytics and customer relationship management software to more effectively target prospects based on predictive modelling and key demographic information (Pierce et al., 2017).

### ***Motivations of Premium Seat Buyers***

Prior research suggests motivations of premium seat buyers differ from general sport spectators. While most work examining sport spectator motivations have revealed several intrapersonal factors, recent premium seat buyer motivation studies focus on business-related motives. For example, Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) examined 11 variables related to perceived purchase motivations for corporate suite holders among the 'Big Four' leagues (NBA, NFL, MLB, NHL) and found the two most highly rated variables were "entertaining new business clients" and "entertaining existing business clients". Titlebaum et al. (2012) conducted further research which compared the perceived motivations of luxury suite owners within professional sports and those in collegiate athletics. In this second study, "entertaining new business clients" and "entertaining existing business clients" were still the two highest rated perceived motivations of Southeastern Conference (SEC) college football premium seating buyers. Interestingly, of all motivations examined, only "community support" was found to be a significantly different factor as perceived by suite sellers at the professional and collegiate levels, with those working in SEC athletics departments rating it as more important. Titlebaum et al. suggest this may be because university athletics are a not-for-profit enterprise and perhaps buyers believe supporting a collegiate team is seen as a contributing to a greater community benefit than supporting professional sports teams. In early work by Lachowetz et al. (2003), premium seating sellers identified the factors of (a) adding value, (b) building and developing customer relationships, and (c) educating customers, as the keys to retaining premium seating customers year over year.

While all of these prior studies examine the issue of how well sport organizations understand the motivations of some of their largest spending consumers, they each have limitations; notably all buyer motivations examined were those as perceived by sellers. Past sales research has suggested sport sellers may not always spend adequate efforts exploring or understanding buyer motivations (Pierce et al., 2017; Sutton, Lachowetz, & Clark, 2000). For example, in his

book discussing sport sponsorship, Crompton (2014) writes, “Too often, sport organizations spend too much time thinking about their own needs and not enough time considering what their prospect, the potential investor, is likely to seek from a partnership” (p. 213). While some individual sport organizations have conducted internal studies examining top motivations of their premium seat consumers, little work in this area has been published in the academic literature.

Two recent studies have examined factors which may impact the price of luxury seating in both professional sport (Shapiro, DeSchriver, & Rascher, 2012) and collegiate sport (Mayer & Morse, 2017) settings. In both studies, regression models were able to predict well over 50% of the variance in luxury suite prices. However, many of the independent variables of significance in these studies offer little assistance to sellers who are working to target the right prospective buyers. For instance, team performance and league/conference affiliation, number of competing sport organizations, and suite capacity were all significant variables in the models, but these are factors which premium seating sellers can do little to change or position during sales meetings with buyers. Similarly, Lawrence et al. (2013) identified firm-related factors most commonly found among suite buyers in professional sports such as number of employees, company sales volume, and ownership structure of the firm. The identification of these factors certainly can assist sellers in identifying the most likely prospects but do not necessarily explain their purchase motivations.

Only two published studies to date examine premium seating buyer motivation utilizing consumer data. Blair et al. (2016) surveyed suite owners of an NHL team and found the motives of: (a) enhancing business relationships, (b) providing access to space for business entertainment, (c) providing exclusivity, and (d) providing opportunities for employee recognition were the most highly-rated among respondents. In the second study, conducted by Titlebaum et al. (2013), qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 decision-makers at firms which use premium sport seating as a business-enhancing strategy. Participants suggested relationship development and customer entertainment were two of the primary motives for buying premium seats, although several participants also suggested premium seating was often part of a bigger sponsorship package and that other components of the package held greater importance to them, such as opportunities to activate within the sport setting and in-venue signage.

Of note in the Titlebaum et al. (2013) study, the researchers stated subjects owned both “luxury suites and premium tickets” (p. 52), suggesting the research team did not differentiate between suite ownership and club seat ownership in their work. Motivations for owning a suite and motivations for owning club seats are, however, an important distinction. As stated earlier, club seats are frequently marketed to business owners to use for business purposes (Irwin et al., 2008; Pierce et al., 2017). Club seats for many professional teams and college athletics departments frequently include elements similar to those of suites, such as complimentary food and beverage, exclusive meeting spaces and common lounge areas, and upgraded seats. These amenities provide owners with potential business tools and can be used quite similarly to suite ownership, but at a smaller price tag (Muret, 2012). However, in his book *Winning the Customer* (2011), former Chief Marketing Officer for the NFL’s New England Patriots, Lou Imbriano, suggests when club seats were first added to Gillette Stadium, his sales team struggled to sell club seats to sponsors. The team was far more successful selling club seats to fans who wanted the tickets for personal use. Unfortunately, to answer the question of whether buyers of luxury suites and buyers of club seats share similar motivations, only anecdotal evidence exists. More empirical data examining this key difference is needed.

When conducting consumer motivation studies, collecting data directly from buyers is ideal. However, little information has been collected in such a manner in the sport management academic literature. In fact, no prior studies have surveyed premium seat buyers in the collegiate athletics setting. Titlebaum et al. (2012) suggested premium seat buyers at big time college athletics events may be motivated to purchase their seats for different reasons than consumers of professional sport, but this notion requires greater empirical evidence. In fact, the authors specifically suggest premium seating buyers for college events likely have different motivations “particularly if they are alumni of the school” (p. 5). Similarly, Stinson and Howard (2010) found alumni and non-alumni have different motivations when donating to an athletics program, with non-alumni more likely to give because of transactional motives (ie. better sports tickets), as opposed to philanthropic motives. Again, however, better empirical data and analysis is needed to approach these issues of consumer motivations.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

The population for the current study included current football premium seating lease holders from a single NCAA Division I Power Five school ( $N = 843$ ). The football stadium at the focus of this study contains a total of 20 16-person suites and 4,284 club seats. The club seats are distributed among six different locations within the venue (multiple levels on the sidelines and endzones). While club seat ownership within each section includes slightly different views and is located at different distances from the field, all club seat owners are entitled to similar premium amenities. These upgraded items include exclusive access to indoor, climate-controlled lounge spaces, complimentary food and non-alcoholic beverages, access to cash bars, larger chair-back seating, parking permits, and access to restrooms and merchandise stands which are only available to club seat and suite owners. A membership list was obtained from the institution's athletic development office and a survey was created to distribute via e-mail. A request to complete the survey and two follow up reminders were sent to all members of the list.

### ***Instrumentation***

The survey was designed to collect information related to purchase motivations of premium seat holders, as well as demographic data. The first portion of the survey addressed buyer motivations related to the eleven factors established by Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) and Titlebaum et al. (2012). Respondents were asked to rate their motivation on a five-point Likert-type importance scale in response to eleven factors. The factors developed by Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) included: (a) entertaining new business clients, (b) entertaining existing business clients, (c) entertaining employees, (d) supporting the community, (e) perception in the community, (f) exclusivity from competitors, (g) personal use, (g) value of exclusivity in the venue, (h) current team performance, (i) history of team performance, and (j) “brand image” of the team. At the request of the athletic department assisting with this research, the item “personal use” was changed to “upgraded services and amenities” as the school's football stadium had recently undergone renovations to their premium seating. The second portion of the survey requested demographic data including: (a) gender, (b) age, (c) household income, and (d) alumni status.

### **Data Analysis**

To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were tabulated to measure motivations of consumers who had purchased premium seating. Motivation scores were divided between those owning club seats and those owning suites. Independent samples T-tests were conducted to determine if statistically significant differences existed on motivation scores between the two groups. To answer the second research question, mean scores of each motivation were compared to results of a prior study conducted by Titlebaum et al. (2012). To answer the third research question, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical test was conducted to examine mean group differences for motivational factors based on the alumnus status of the respondent.

### **Results**

From the 843 electronic surveys distributed, 221 subjects completed the survey. Thirteen surveys were removed due to incomplete data, for a response rate of 24.7%. Among the 208 responses, 197 were club seat owners (23.9% response rate) and 11 were suite owners (55.0% response rate). Club seat respondents owned an average of 4.4 seats. Respondents were predominately male (87.3%), which was not surprising as the athletic department indicated most premium seat account holders were registered in the name of the husband, if the account holders were married. The mean age of all participants was 58.0 years old ( $SD = 13.2$ ). Fewer than 1% of participants did not graduate from a 4-year university, and 80.3% were alumni of the university that was the subject of the study. Just over 85% of respondents indicated a household income of over \$150,000.

#### **RQ1: What factors motivate college football premium seat buyers to purchase inventory and are there significant differences in motivations between those purchasing club seats compared to those purchasing suites?**

Respondents rated the importance of each of the 11 purchase motivations on a five point Likert-type scale, anchored by 1 = *Not Important* and 5 = *Very Important*. Results were split into two divisions based upon whether the respondent purchased a suite or purchased club seats. The order of motivations was nearly identical between the two groups, as “upgraded services and amenities” and “brand image of the team” were rated as the top two motivations by both. The top seven motivations were the same for both groups, with only a slight variation in rank order of those seven variables (see Table 1 for full results). Mean ratings were higher for 9 of the 11 variables among suite holders. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine if the differences between these two group means were statistically significant. Because of the large difference in sample size between the two groups, the data were first examined for homogeneity of variance. A Levene’s test conducted on the data determined variance among the two groups was equal (all  $p$ -values were greater than .05). Only two of the mean scores were significantly higher at the  $p < .05$  level; brand image of the team and historical team performance.

**Table 1: Importance of motivations for premium seating purchase**

Motivation	Club Seat		Suite		F
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Upgraded services and amenities	4.33	0.86	4.27	0.91	0.027
Brand image of team	3.04	1.36	4.00	1.25	0.459*
Value of exclusivity in venue	2.90	1.39	3.45	1.37	0.391
Current team performance	2.81	1.28	3.55	1.04	0.617
History of team performance	2.69	1.23	3.45	1.13	1.172*
Supporting the community	2.48	1.41	2.40	1.51	0.010
Entertaining existing business clients	1.77	1.21	2.12	1.64	2.768
Exclusivity from competitors	1.69	1.12	1.71	1.25	0.109
Entertaining employees	1.63	1.09	1.75	1.04	0.068
Entertaining new business clients	1.62	1.07	1.87	1.25	1.075
Perception in the community	1.58	0.99	2.00	1.32	2.492

\*  $p < .05$ 

### RQ2: How do motivations for premium seating purchases as perceived by sellers compare to actual purchase motivations of buyers?

Previous research on premium seating (Titlebaum et al., 2012) measured perceived motivations of premium seat buyers in the NBA, NFL, NHL, and MLB, as well as at Southeastern Conference (SEC) NCAA schools, as suggested by those who sell such seating. In the current study, luxury seat buyers' actual motivations were compared to perceived motivations established by the prior studies. In those prior studies, the business objectives of entertaining new and existing clients, entertaining employees, and creating exclusivity over competitors, as well as perception in the community, were the five highest rated motivations perceived by premium seating sellers at major league professional teams. In the current study, those same five motivations had the five lowest mean scores among buyers of college premium seating. This was true for both buyers of suites and buyers of club seats. Current results were slightly more aligned with previous results from the Titlebaum et al. study examining premium seating sellers at SEC universities. Results from that study still had entertaining new and existing business clients as a top motivation, but the third highest rated motivation was brand image of the team, which was also highly rated in the current study. Mean scores from the SEC results, however, had much less variance than the results of the current study. A side-by-side comparison of all results can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Comparison of perceived and actual motivational factor mean scores across studies

Motivation	Professional (Perceived)	SEC (Perceived)	Suites	Club Seats
Entertaining new business clients	4.30	3.80	1.87	1.62
Entertaining existing business clients	4.30	3.90	2.12	1.77
Perception in the community	2.96	3.30	2.00	1.58
Exclusivity from competitors	3.19	2.90	1.71	1.69
Entertaining employees	2.55	2.80	1.75	1.63
Supporting the community	2.26	3.30	2.40	2.48
History of team performance	2.85	3.30	3.45	2.69
“Brand image” of the team	3.41	3.50	4.00	3.04
Value of exclusivity in the venue	3.04	3.30	3.45	2.90
Current team performance	3.43	2.80	3.55	2.81

### RQ3: Do motivations to purchase premium seating at college sporting events differ when the buyer is an alumnus of the university?

To analyze RQ3, participants were categorized into four categories: (a) obtained only an undergraduate degree from the institution of interest ( $n = 122$ ), (b) obtained only a graduate degree from the institution of interest ( $n = 14$ ), (c) obtained multiple degrees from the institution of interest ( $n = 31$ ), and (d) did not obtain any degree from the school of interest ( $n = 41$ ). A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to determine if group mean buyer motivation scores differed across alumni status categories. Statistically significant differences at the .05 level were found for current team performance,  $F(3, 202) = 3.642, p = 0.014$ ; and brand image of the team,  $F(3, 202) = 3.184, p = 0.025$ . Post hoc comparisons using a Bonferroni test were conducted for significant factors to determine where specific group mean differences between the four categories existed. For both “current team performance” and “brand image of the team”, respondents who did not receive any degree from the school of interest rated the factors more important than those who received multiple degrees from the institution of interest. The mean rating for “current team performance” by respondents who did not obtain any college degrees from the school of interest was 3.10 ( $SD = 1.38$ ), while those who received multiple degrees from the school of interest rated the factor on average 2.17 ( $SD = 1.26$ ). The mean rating for “brand image of the team” by respondents who did not obtain any college degree from the school of interest was 3.34 ( $SD = 1.46$ ), while those who received multiple degrees from the school of interest rated the factor a 2.43 ( $SD = 1.38$ ).

### Discussion

The rate of spending in NCAA Division I college athletics is skyrocketing, to some experts at an unsustainable trajectory (Knight Commission, 2010). One way many schools are trying to combat this trend is to generate greater amounts of income from existing revenue streams. As big-time college football continues to enjoy great popularity, many athletics departments have

opted to add or increase premium seating availability in their football stadiums (Muret, 2016; Newcombe, 2013). With this in mind, it is crucial athletic administrators gather data to gain a thorough understanding of consumers who purchase premium seating, evaluating both demographic characteristics and motivational factors influencing purchase decisions. While previous research has explored the perceived motivations of the premium seat holder as seen by sellers (Lachowetz et al., 2003; Titlebaum et al., 2012; Titlebaum & Lawrence, 2010) this study collected data directly from premium seat buyers. The results will allow administrators to create better sales strategies in terms of both prospecting and appropriately positioning the product. Doing so is like to increase retention and revenue from premium seating inventory.

When examining the results of the current study, the most notable findings are the clear lack of motivation to use premium seats for business purposes by respondents in the sample. Prior research by Titlebaum and Lawrence (2010) and Titlebaum et al. (2012) suggested sellers firmly believe buyers of premium seats in both professional sport and collegiate sport settings are highly motivated to buy so they can entertain new and existing business clients, hold an advantage over their business competitors, or reward their business employees. In the current study, however, the findings suggested the exact opposite. Business motives were the lowest rated motivations among actual buyers. Instead, buyers were far more motivated by the personal benefits of premium seating ownership (upgraded amenities) and team related factors such as brand image of the team and both current and historical team performance. This was true for both owners of suites and owners of club seats.

These findings are notable for several reasons. First, the data suggests sellers may not have a strong understanding of buyer motivations. Successful selling always begins with understanding the buyer's needs and interests (Pierce et al., 2017). If sellers believe buyers are motivated by one thing, but in actuality they are motivated by something quite different, the selling relationship can be at minimum inefficient, and at worst case, a failure. The results of the current study suggest it is critical premium seat sellers in the college space learn to ask the right questions to clearly understand current and prospective buyers' motivations before attempting to sell them inventory. In addition, sellers and sport organizations should routinely engage with current buyers through personal communication, surveys, focus groups, and other data gathering mediums to understand their experiences and interests.

Additionally, the literature is not clear whether buyers of one level of premium seating; suites, are motivated by the same factors as those who buy a different level of premium seating, namely club seats. While these two types of premium inventory have different price points and typically include a smaller number of seats, some authors (Irwin et al., 2008; Pierce et al., 2017) have suggested they are both commonly positioned as business solutions rather than personal purchases. Our results would suggest, at least in the college athletics sector, otherwise. In the current study, the motivations for buyers of either club seats or suites were virtually identical in terms of rank order. Yet they were in almost completely opposite rank order of the buying motivations suggested by sellers of professional sport premium seating. Titlebaum et al., (2012) hinted that buyers of collegiate athletics premium seating may indeed have different motivations than buyers of professional sport premium seating. Our finding would seem to provide some evidence to this assumption.

In addition, these results may indicate a significant difference between buyer motivations of premium seating in a collegiate sports setting and within professional sports. In the current study, nearly 80% of respondents earned at least one degree from the institution of interest. As alumni of the institution, it is very possible a strong team identification grew out of respondents'

prior experience, resulting in greater fandom and a strong interest in purchasing premium seating for university sporting events. This sort of alumni connection to the sport organization does not occur in professional sports. In addition, nearly all North American professional sport franchises are located in major metropolitan areas containing more corporate headquarters and larger business communities. Many big-time NCAA Division I institutions, however, are located in less populated areas with diminished corporate influence. This may explain some of the variation in perceived business motivations of professional sport team premium seating buyers and actual motivations of collegiate sport team premium seating buyers. Of course, this still begs the question of why such a large discrepancy was seen between perceived motivations of collegiate buyers and actual motivations of collegiate buyers. Perhaps one explanation is that many collegiate sellers were hired from professional sport settings and had been trained to emphasize business motivations when selling premium inventory. Or perhaps sellers made assumptions about buyers based on knowledge regarding professional sport premium seating sales. It is also possible that while the institution used for the sample in current study is a Power 5 school, it is not in the Southeastern Conference, which is regarded by most football fans as the strongest and most popular collegiate football conference. Because of its popularity and strong brand, SEC football programs may attract a different type of buyer than the ones participating in the current study.

A final intriguing finding from this study involves motivational differences among buyers holding different alumni status. Premium seat buyers who had never received a degree from the institution rated the team's current performance and brand image as a significantly more important motivation than premium seat buyers who had received multiple degrees from the institution. Among all alumni status categories, it would seem those who chose to obtain multiple degrees from the same institution would likely have the closest attachment to the institution, particularly when compared to those who never received a degree from the institution. The findings offer some evidence that perhaps this institutional attachment is strong enough that fleeting or fluctuating variables such as current team performance and brand image are not as important to their decision to purchase premium seating. This is certainly a finding which needs to be investigated further. Past research has suggested fans indicating higher levels of team identification are likely to spend more money following their team (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002; Kwon, Trail, & Lee, 2008; Lee, Trail, Lee, Schoenstedt, 2014; Shapiro, Ridinger, & Trail, 2013). However, little research has examined the buyer motivation of these more highly identified fans. Sport sellers of inventory such as premium seating can have a more difficult challenge when a team is not performing on the field or the team's brand image has taken a hit, whether due to team performance or poor off-field behavior exhibited by players and coaches. When selling to prospective buyers who do not possess a high level of identity with the team, team performance and brand image become more important selling points. This is an important finding to assist premium seat sellers within college athletics who must target multiple prospects. The current research suggests the pitch they may use to approach non-alums might be different than the approach used for alums.

### ***Limitations and Future Studies***

Understanding consumer motivations are important for both sport management academicians and practitioners. Ample evidence exists to suggest buyer motivations vary depending on a variety of contextual factors related to the buying experience and interpersonal factors related to buyers themselves. The results of the current study are isolated to motivations of buyers of premium seating in collegiate football at a single institution. Future studies should examine the phenomena in other settings, including at multiple universities, within multiple sports, and

throughout professional sport settings. In addition, more research should be done examining the prospecting methods used by sport marketers and sellers, particularly in the collegiate space. Little is known regarding whether collegiate marketers predominately target community business owners and decision-makers or university alumni in their premium sales efforts. Comparing success rates of both approaches would be of interest to academicians and practitioners alike.

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