

## 2018 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XVI)

### The Antidote to an Aging Audience

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**2:00-2:25 PM, Ballroom D2**

**25-minute oral presentation**  
**(including questions)**

#### The Antidote to an Aging Audience

It is apparent that some experience services, such as sports leagues, are facing the threat of an aging fan base. For example, the average age of sports fans of Major League Baseball (MLB) is 57, the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) is 58 and the Professional Golf Association Tour is 64 (Lombardo & Broughton, 2017). The high average age is alarming for the longevity of those leagues. The answer to this problem for many has been to alter the product or pricing model. For example, MLB and its teams are working to cater to younger fans by speeding up the pace of play (Roscher, 2017) and introducing subscription ticket services that are more flexible (Fisher, 2017). In addition to these changes, another way sport marketers may address this problem is to consider ways to increase the perceived value of the current product to middle-class, emerging adults.

Emerging adults, or those between adolescence and complete adult life (Arnett, 2006), with a middle-class upbringing are an ideal target for sport marketers since they have strong buying power and are apt to seek out various experiences. Indeed, Millennials (many of whom are emerging adults) now have the greatest spending power of any generation (Antonow, 2017). Perhaps as important is the notion that this segment are experiential consumers. Specifically, middle-class emerging adults find the highest value in experiences that can be consumed in the near future because of their cultural capital potential in the far future (Weinberger, Zavisca & Silva, 2017). Cultural capital is defined as knowledge that is embodied through experiences (Bourdieu, 1984) that provide a social or market advantage in the future (Weinberger, Zavisca & Silva, 2017). For example, attending a NASCAR event this weekend can offer an opportunity to experience a new place, interact with different people and learn about automobiles, culture and racing. Having this and other similar experiences now may be useful in the future to provide status in social settings (Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007) and soft skills in the job market (Rivera, 2015). Given the spending power of middle class, emerging adults and their inclination to seek experiential services, this segment may be the antidote for the aging problem in some sports if they see value in the product.

The purpose of this study is to determine how marketers may increase the perceived value of sport experience services in middle-class, emerging adults. Specifically, we focus on how thinking about the future and related social advantages may increase value perceptions among this segment. The aging fan demographic in some sports requires further examination to help inform sport marketers working to expand their fan base. Furthermore, although well noted in popular press, there is a gap in the sport marketing literature regarding how this problem could be addressed without changing the product or pricing model.

Theoretically, when consumers choose an experience for advantages in future interactions with other people, their value perception is being altered by temporal and social psychological distance. Temporal and social psychological distances may be high when considering the thoughts of others in the far future (e.g., years from now) or low when the distance is nearer in time (e.g., this weekend) and thinking only of self-interests (see Trope & Liberman, 2010, for a review). Prior research indicates that fans see more value in a ticket for an event that is temporally near and socially far (Wakefield & Wakefield, in press). However, based on the findings of Weinberger, Zavisca and Silva (2017), we expect the perceived value of a sport experience among middle-class, emerging adults to increase with greater temporal and social distance.

Hypothesis: The greater the temporal and social distance, the greater the perceived value of a sport experience for middle-class, emerging adults.

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To test our hypothesis, a sample of middle-class, emerging adults ( $n = 178$ ) attending college in the Southeastern United States completed an online survey for course credit or an opportunity to win a prize (i.e. a tailgating chair). Subjects were verified as emerging adults by college student status and middle-class by whether the household income of their parents fell within its lower (i.e. \$42,000 annually; Long, 2017) and upper bounds (i.e. \$350,000 annually; Luhby, 2016). A 2 (social distance: low or high)  $\times$  2 (temporal distance: low or high) between subjects experimental design was employed. Participants were randomly assigned and first asked to write about experiences they (near social distance) or an average person their age (far social distance) would like to have this weekend (near temporal distance) or in the next 5-10 years (far temporal distance). Then, perceived value of a ticket to a NASCAR race was measured (Wakefield & Wakefield, in press). Disposable income was included as a covariate and measured as dollars available after fixed expenses each month.

A multivariate analysis of variance indicated a significant main effect of the manipulation ( $F(1, 174) = 2.87, p = .03$ ) on perceived value. Those in the high social and temporal distance group perceived the highest value in a ticket ( $M = 45.51$ ), followed by those in the high social and low temporal manipulation ( $M = 40.49$ ), the low social and high temporal group ( $M = 32.54$ ) and the low social and low temporal group ( $M = 31.07$ ). Disposable income was not a significant covariate ( $F(1, 174) = 1.38, p = .24$ ) and there was not an interaction between disposable income and the manipulation ( $F(2, 174) = 1.68, p = .17$ ).

In sum, given our results we suggest that increasing psychological distance (temporal and social) in the minds of middle-class, emerging consumers may be effective in increasing perceived value of a sport experience. Marketers who face aging fan bases may pay attention to this particular consumer segment and apply our approach when targeting them for tickets and other experience offerings.

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