

Alumni Giving: Sport Consumption and Donation Intention

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Abstract

University athletic departments depend on alumni giving to fund operations, as most departments have expenses that exceed revenues (NCAA, 2023). Group of 5 mid-major athletic programs have a much larger expense gap to fill and thus must aim to maximize revenue to reinvest in the department. Alumni giving is a vital revenue stream for college athletic programs, and as such, athletic departments must fully understand the intention of their donors to amplify their gifts.

Alumni have donated significantly to intercollegiate athletic departments (Stinson & Howard, 2007), and multiple studies have explored the motivations behind these gifts (Jae Ko et al., 2013; Staurowsky, 1996; Strode & Fink, 2009; Stinson & Howard, 2004; Verner et al., 1998). In a recent study, athletic donors have expressed three primary motivators for giving: to support and improve athletic programs, to obtain ticket-oriented benefits, and to help the student-athletes (Fridley et al., 2020). Gladden et al. (2005) suggested sport marketers emphasize philanthropic donor motives, such as the importance of donations in athletic achievement, university growth, and student-athlete success. Further, as multiple organizations compete for financial capital, a finite resource, athletic departments must implement strategies to control or diversify their resource base (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). As such, inclusive strategies need to be incorporated to reflect the various consumption motives of diverse target markets, which will broaden the potential for increased spectator and fan connection, attendance, and likely donations (Fridley et al., 2022).

This research is framed by the resource dependence theory, which has been widely used to inform various organizational inquiries based on resource dependence, resource scarcity, dependency, resource control, and environment (Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1987). It highlights the importance of understanding and managing dependencies on external resources for organizational success. Development offices can save and maximize resources by prioritizing relationships based on the characteristics predisposed to alumni giving intention. The resource dependency theory posits the dependency on athletic giving (external resources) influences building relationships to secure resources (behavior) and structure of the athletic department. The present study examines the link between gender, motivation for sport consumption, and one's intention to donate to their university athletic department as an alumnus. This study utilizes a variety of statistical analyses to address the research questions, including multiple regression, hierarchical multiple regression, ANOVA, and ANCOVA.

Purposeful sampling enabled data to be collected from students (3226 participants) enrolled in universities within an NCAA mid-major Division I FBS Group of 5 athletic conference. The questionnaire included descriptive information, including age, gender, race, year in school, and LGBTQ status. Further, questions inquired about the likelihood of attending university athletic events and donating to the athletic department. Trail and James' (2001) Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) measured student motives for attending athletic events at their institution. This is framed by two specific research questions:

RQ1: Does the intention to donate to the athletic department as alumni differ by gender? RQ1A: Does intention to donate to the athletic department as alumni differ by gender when controlling for overall sport consumption motive?

RQ2: Does motivation for sport consumption (MSSC subscales) contribute to the explained variance in alumni donation intentions?

RQ2A: Does gender moderate the interaction between motivation for sport consumption and donation intentions?

A one-way ANOVA was employed to examine the first research question. Intention to donate as alumni significantly differed between all gender groups $F(2, 2969) = 21.796, p < .001, \omega^2 = 0.14$. Donation intention was lowest for the non-binary group (2.93 ± 1.93), followed by the female group (3.73 ± 1.86), and highest for the male group (4.11 ± 1.90). Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the increase from the female group to the male group (0.385, 95% CI (0.246 to 0.524)) was statistically significant ($p < .001$). Further, the increase from the non-binary group to the male group (1.186, 95% CI (0.678 to 1.694)) and the female group (0.801, 95% CI (0.297 to 1.306)) were also statistically significant ($p < .001$) and ($p = .002$), respectively. The second part of the research question used a one-way ANCOVA to control for the effect of the overall MSSC covariate. After adjustment for sport consumption motivation, there was not a significant difference in intention to donate as alumni between gender groups, $F(2, 2968) = .354, p = .702, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .0$.

The multiple regression model, addressing the second research question, showed motivation for sport consumption contributed significantly to the explained variation of intention to donate as alumni, $F(8, 2963) = 256.92, p < .001, \text{adj. } R^2 = .408$. Six of the eight added significantly ($p < .05$) to the explained variation, achievement, knowledge, aesthetics, family, physical skills, and social. In the second part of the analysis, hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to control for gender as a moderator. The full model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .410, F(9, 2962) = 229.02, p < .001; \text{adj. } R^2 = .409$.

This study provides valuable insights for development offices within athletic departments on the specific motivations of particular groups that drive giving, thus providing guidance to maximize fundraising efforts. Practical implications will be discussed during the presentation.