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How do Bills fan motivations to attend home games relate to their feelings about the fan experience?

Abstract
The purpose of the research was to examine why Buffalo Bills fans come out to games, and how that further affected their individual experience. The importance of the research was critical because the results of the surveys were sent to the Buffalo Bills, to potentially use to help guide decisions which have impacted the Guest Experience positively at New Era Field. With a continued push for enhancing the guest experience positively, the importance of the research was critical due to the potential use of the data being collected to make executive decisions for the organization as a whole. It’s been known that there have been many issues with the fan experience at New Era Field, as arrests and ejections have been a part of the culture with Bills fans in the past. It’s also known, that the NFL has taken part in marketing campaigns to improve the fan experience, as tailgating has brought attention to the league through arrest records. The method used to help draw conclusions were stratified random sampling methods through the administration of a survey through Qualtrics. Descriptive and inferential statistics were both used to further examine significantly different variables in the study. It was determined that Bills fan motivations differentiated among gender, as gender provided an outline of significantly different statistics within the study. It was found that Bills fan motivations aligned mostly towards in game entertainment that includes music, fantasy updates, mascot appearances, pre-game tailgate and family inclusion at games. Despite these being the most significant points, there was also a huge curve to the results in relation to new tailgating methods and pre-game methods that have been used in the past at the stadium. These methods used by the Bills were the Billevard, Fan Zone and Tailgate Guys being added to pre-game tailgate festivities. The information was determined important because of the impact the results had on decisions made for the fan experience. With continued research and plan development made to impact the experience at the stadium, the results found have helped strengthen research to reach the best outcome for the organization.

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How do Bills fan motivations to attend home games relate to their feelings about the fan experience?

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the research was to examine why Buffalo Bills fans come out to games, and how that further affected their individual experience. The importance of the research was critical because the results of the surveys were sent to the Buffalo Bills, to potentially use to help guide decisions which have impacted the Guest Experience positively at New Era Field. With a continued push for enhancing the guest experience positively, the importance of the research was critical due to the potential use of the data being collected to make executive decisions for the organization as a whole. It’s been known that there have been many issues with the fan experience at New Era Field, as arrests and ejections have been a part of the culture with Bills fans in the past. It’s also known, that the NFL has taken part in marketing campaigns to improve the fan experience, as tailgating has brought attention to the league through arrest records. The method used to help draw conclusions were stratified random sampling methods through the administration of a survey through Qualtrics. Descriptive and inferential statistics were both used to further examine significantly different variables in the study. It was determined that Bills fan motivations differentiated among gender, as gender provided an outline of significantly different statistics within the study. It was found that Bills fan motivations aligned mostly towards in game entertainment that includes music, fantasy updates, mascot appearances, pre-game tailgate and family inclusion at games. Despite these being the most significant points, there was also a huge curve to the results in relation to new tailgating methods and pre-game methods that have been used in the past at the stadium. These methods used by the Bills were the Billevard, Fan Zone and Tailgate Guys being added to pre-game tailgate festivities. The information was determined important because of the impact the results had on decisions made for the fan experience. With
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Introduction

The purpose of this research was to give the Buffalo Bills a research template of how fan motivations have connected to the fan’s feelings on the overall experience. As a research template, the Buffalo Bills can work off of the research gathered and come to conclusions on why a new idea created to enhance the fan experience was justifiable. The research question of this study was:

How do Bills Fan motivations to attend home games relate to their feelings about the fan experience?

The aim of this research was to fill the gap of relating the fan experience to fan motivation. This was important because the Buffalo Bills have had a checkered history of fan behavior in the past, which overall has shifted the focus of fan motivation and perspective of the fan experience. The information collected was important to the Buffalo Bills front office, as it pertained to the Guest Experience and Event Operations department.

Tailgating has played a big role in why Buffalo Bills fans love going to home games. This has been seen through decisions from the Bills organization, and from fan decisions to sign up for designated drivers (Rodak, 2018; TeamCoalition, 2017; Fans Don’t let fans drive drunk, 2018). Psychological factors that impacted fan motivation, can be measured on a scale (Shaik, 2014). The NFL has also provided good and bad experiences at each team’s respective stadiums, as the NFL experience has been marketed in a variety of ways (Babb 2016; New England Patriots 2018; Seattle Seahawks 2018). Lastly, the efforts of how the NFL has marketed their experience through pregame activities and merchandise sales (Seahawks 2018; Osbourne, Coombs 2014). Fan behavior and personal team identity were also examined in great detail, as it pertained to fan motivation (Shaik, 2012).
Background

A plethora of different actions taken by both organizations and fans has set the current context of the fan experience, within the NFL.

The objective of this research was to determine how Bills fan motivations relate to their feelings about the fan experience. Through several studies on fan motivations, it’s already known that several variables have influenced fan motivation: stress, group affiliation, aesthetic, entertainment, economic, escape, self-esteem, and family needs (Shaik, 2012). This has been a gap in research, as many variables have influenced their fan’s motivation, but is not specifically known as it pertained to the fan experience at the stadium. That’s where this research design, has given a better understanding of why Bills fans come to games, and how that has been tied to the perceived notion of fan experience. This research has provided examples of what we’ve seen up to date, in-regards to what teams have done, and the positives and negatives of the NFL experience.

Fan Motivation to Attend

Van Shaik (2012), claimed that aspects of the personal identity of fan have been looked at, as it related to fan motivation. Shaik focuses on how Daniel Wann put together a unique sports fan motivation scale through specific research, on initially becoming a sports fan (Shaik, 2012). The factors that attribute to the initial psychological engagement, were positive stress, group affiliation, aesthetic, entertainment, economic, escape, self-esteem, and family needs (Shaik, 2012). Looking at fan engagement and intensity through these factors, Wann’s scale has given a sense of where a fan has been placed for their fan motivation. Wann also discovered that some fans have found a sense of belonging and acceptance in sports, which they haven’t
necessarily found within their own life (Van Shaik, 2012). Taking group affiliation from Wann’s scale, it has been seen that a motivator to attend throughout the NFL, has been linked to tailgating.

When having looked at the Buffalo Bills, Rutkowski (2018) had provided data that the Bills have been ranked towards the middle among all 32 NFL teams, as the ranking related to factors of fan motivation (Rutkowski, 2018). Some of the factors are arrival experience, leaving experience, game-day satisfaction, and safety/security (Rutkowski, 2018). Rutkowski also claimed that the Buffalo Bills had 150 Designated Driver sign ups in 2011, while in contrast, 2017 had 26,000 designated driver sign ups at New Era Field (Rutkowski, 2018). In addition, it’s also been claimed that the Bills came in second place (In 2017) for designated driver signups in the NFL (Fans don’t let fans drive drunk, 2018). Throughout the first four home games in 2018, the Buffalo Bills have sold out all of their camper lots. The camper lots have held up to 150 limos within their lots comfortably (Rutkowski, 2018). When looking at fan motivation, it’s important to also look at how motivations are affected between both genders. When looking at fan motivation and the relation to women, there is a strong relation of how community ties related to their motivation (Osbourne & Coombs 2014). The community ties which related to fan motivation among female attendees, are family-oriented factors, which are prominently highlighted in past years (Osbourne & Coombs 2014). These consist of family settings which included growing up watching a sporting event with family, as the family ties which related to bonding, created a ritual for families within a community (Osbourne & Coombs 2014). For women, this has led to television, and home viewership being a central focal point for their family traditions (Osbourne & Coombs 2014).
Fan Behavior in Facility

The NFL has claimed that a $250 Fan Code of Conduct class has been required to be taken for all offenders who are ejected on stadium premises (NFL, 2008). This has been a league wide policy, that has been accepted and implemented within each NFL team’s code of conduct (NFL, 2008). The NFL has also stated, that the arrests which were reported in parking lots, accumulated to 500 total arrests in the 2015 season (Babb, 2016). Isolated incidents that were reported not only in Babb’s article, but also at New Era Field, give a sense of what’s happening pre-game, in-game, and post-game, as it pertained to facility behavior. In an article written by Mike Rodak, it’s stated that the Buffalo Bills will prosecute those who’re caught table slamming on Buffalo Bills and New Era Field premises (Rodak, 2018). Rutkowski also has claimed that 45-50 fans, have had to take the fan code of conduct class at New Era Field. This has been accompanied by Rutkowski’s comparison of ejections and arrests at New Era Field (Rutkowski, 2018). Rutkowski claimed that in 2011, the Buffalo Bills dealt with an average of 150 ejections per game at New Era Field. In 2017, there had been less than 50 ejections and an average of 2 arrests per game (Rutkowski, 2018).

NFL Marketing of the Fan Experience

When looking at how the NFL has marketed the fan experience, the way the NFL has attracted women through merchandise sales, was a key factor in female motivation to sporting events, and how it has given them a sense of the fan experience (Osbourne & Coombs 2014). Osbourne stated that 45% of the NFL fan base are women, as the NFL have made a strong effort to continually market their product towards women, through merchandising. This has overall increased sales by three times the amount between the years 2009-2013 (Osbourne & Coombs
2014). Some past actions that spectators have seen the NFL take, has been the approach of marketing breast cancer awareness and educational programs on the NFL. Osbourne states that the centrality of television, and home viewership, has been a connection to female motivation (Osbourne & Coombs, 2014). Another example of how the NFL experience has been marketed, was information taken directly from the Seattle Seahawks website. The Seattle Seahawks have enhanced their fan experience through a variety of ways. This included concessions, mobile apps, interactive finger recognition technology and Lyft services (Seattle Seahawks, 2018). The Buffalo Bills have also enhanced their fan experience through the addition of the Billevard and Fan Zone made available on game days (Rutkowski, 2018). The Fan Zone specifically has averaged an attendance of 2,500 people per game (Rutkowski, 2018). Along with the NFL experience the Buffalo Bills have provided for their fans, the Buffalo Bills have also sold out of their guest speaker series (Rutkowski, 2018). Rutkowski also claimed that the guest speaker series, contained a guest speaker to speak to a select amount of season ticket holders. The guest speaker would consist of front office staff, or coaching staff (Coach McDermott, Kim Pegula, Brandon Beane). For the Guest Speaker series, 250 tickets were sold out for each event (Rutkowski, 2018). The NFL experience has been marketed through different NFL franchises, which can be compared to a motivational factor of pre-game and post-game experiences.

**Summary**

There are several factors which have influenced fan motivation. Even though Wann’s motivation scale described important factors of fan motivation, there were other factors (such as tailgating) to be considered, when viewing NFL franchises (especially the Buffalo Bills). Entertainment during pre-game and post-game hours for NFL teams, has represented different
marketing actions the NFL has taken to market the NFL experience. Even though the NFL and their individual franchises have marketed the NFL experience on game days, a sense of marketing has also played a role in sales, which has progressively increased viewership of female-based audiences. The NFL has used fan motivational factors, marketing strategies and rules to enhance the level of fan behavior in facility which has further enhanced fan experience.

Methods

The purpose of the research collected was to look at the link of fan motivation for attending Buffalo Bills home games and the fan experience at New Era Field. This was by having looked at the research question:

How do Bills Fan motivations to attend home games relate to their feelings about the fan experience?

There are several methods which were taken into consideration which created the most accurate research possible.

The desired sample for the proposal was the Buffalo Bills fan base across the ages 18-99, as stratified random sampling was used to collect the data for my population. The survey was administered through Qualtrics to reach the desired age group within the population of college students. This was to prevent bias by giving everyone an equal chance at being a participant. With the survey being administered through Qualtrics, there was an immediate desire for response, as there has been 89 total responses within the first week of the survey being taken. The descriptive statistics collected for the research were the means revolving around tailgate unity, pregame giveaways, gender, and age.
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Procedure

For the procedure, there are 4 main points which were looked at. That was the approach to getting access to the subjects of the study, data collection, demographic variables, and other variables. Gaining access to the subjects of study will be through administering surveys through Qualtrics. This was done having used nominal methods and added Likert scales.

With the data collected, there have been important variables which have resided within this research. Some demographic variables that have been determined were age, gender and region. Other variables were weather, traffic, tailgating, unruly fan behavior, opposing teams, fandom, and seating location. Having applied the variables to the surveys, it was deemed important to have used descriptive statistics, to ultimately tie with the population. The tested differences within the study, contained independent t-tests, as they were made apart of inferential statistics (ANOVA testing). Independent t-tests had a successful analysis through compared means (variables) which had been determined to be used for the data presentation. For the independent T-tests, it was looked at in further depth on how gender played a role with selected variables within the study.

Results

For the surveys being conducted, the sample was college students at a small private school in the northeast sector of the U.S. with a mean age of 4.84. For the participants who were male and female, there was a lot of luck which included 63 male participants and 70 female participants which created the best and most accurate representation of data recorded for the survey. Even though tailgate unity and pregame giveaways weren’t significant, they both rated important overall. The mean recorded for males at tailgate unity was 4.42 (SD=.926), while female was a mean of 4.17 (SD=.993). The pregame giveaway mean for males was 3.49
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The results seemed to captivate the aspect of both being an integral part of the fan experience at New Era Field. Inferential statistics were collected, as ANOVA testing was used for determining the significant difference based on sport gender when considering fan unity at tailgate and positive impact on pregame giveaways. When collecting the results, P was greater with multiple variables (as positive impact on pregame giveaways and fan unity at tailgate were not from those two), as the totals were greater than .05. These results gave the impression that they weren’t significant compared to the two variables of data collected. Having looked at the variables that were deemed to be most significant, it was clear that the female participant responses were much more significant compared to the male participants. Looking at specific examples from the research collected, p-values were recorded for the following: positive impact of mascot appearances (.022), positive impact of music in stadium (.018), positive impact of fantasy sports updates (.000), family inclusion contribution (.005). From the variables that were tested for a significant difference, fantasy sport updates were seen as the most significant among the two genders tested.

Discussion

The results were representative of the population because of the descriptive statistics gathered among the participants. The reason why the results were representative of the population is for several reasons. Starting with age, there was a mean of 4.84 (ages 22-23), as it was expected for there to be a relation of tailgating and entertainment throughout the stadium (with higher amounts of descriptive statistics collected). Looking at gender, 46.7% of the participants were male while 51.9% were female. Other descriptive statistics involved the mean and standard deviation of tailgate unity and pregame giveaways. The mean of tailgate unity was 4.42 for males, while females had a rate of 4.17. The standard deviation for males was .926,
while females represented a rate of .993. Having looked at the mean and standard deviation of pregame giveaways, males had a mean of 3.49 while females had a mean of 3.61. The standard deviation for males was 1.162, while females had a rate of .895. Having looked at the results and data ultimately collected for the research question, How do Bills Fan motivations to attend home games relate to their feelings about the fan experience?, the results from inferential statistic collection were divided between the variables deemed significant and those that were not (significant difference).

**Delimitations**

Having looked upon the process of the research for this project, there are some delimitations which have affected the research throughout the overall process. Decisions that were made which impacted the outcomes were keeping the results within the realm of college students only. Possibly using a different realm of providing the survey through, could ultimately change the outcome and number of responses for the survey, which may have benefitted the results. Despite the path taken to use students at a small private school in the northeast sector of the united states, the results and data collected/examined which has been sent out to the Buffalo Bills, has created the best outcome of results for the Event Operations and Guest Experience Department moving forward.

**Limitations**

A decision that was made for the research, which may have impacted the results was surveying an unbiased group. Obviously, the research being sought after had to be unbiased to get the most accurate results, although possibly having used social media accounts in collaboration of the topic may have benefited the research overall. If the research were repeated, the path to ultimately stick with one original source would’ve been the one aspect taken
Going into depth on different options was not a smart approach. Narrowing the focus on unbiased material should’ve been the go to from Day 1.

**No Significant Difference (But Important)**

Starting with variables that did not have a significant difference when having looked at gender, it was seen that the Billevard attendance, fan zone attendance, and tailgate guys attendance were statistically lopsided. Despite the results not having a significant difference, the variable was deemed important. The Billevard attendance rated 96.1% in favor of fans either not knowing what the Billevard was. The Fan Zone similarly ranked 84.1%, and the tailgate guys ranked 94.4%. It was made clear that Bills fans between the ages of 22-23, either have not been aware of the pre-game activities/entertainment or haven’t attended for other reasons. Having continued onto the additional variables that were not seen as significant, the variables that involved identity had an interesting tie to the survey as a whole. The highest rate of how much an individual identified with the Buffalo Bills, was a two and a three. That represented Bills fans who took the survey were not die-hard fans or fans who had an identity revolved around being a Bills fan. They were more casual and not as associated with the team. The rate for the two numbers equaled nearly half the valid percent (47.4%).

**Significant Difference**

Having looked at the significant difference among the results from the ANOVA testing, there were several variables which were deemed significant. To start, the impact on music within the stadium proved to have had a significant difference among male and female participants. Having examined the impact on the positive impact of music within the stadium, females had a higher mean of 4.17, compared to men who had a mean of 3.81. With similarity, the mean of a positive impact on mascot appearances was also higher for females (3.20), compared to a mean
of (2.83) for males. In contrast, the mean of the positive impact fantasy sports updates had during the game, was higher for males (3.83) compared to females (2.84). Lastly, out of the variables which determined a significant difference, family inclusion was one of the most significant. For family inclusion, the mean for female participants was 3.43, compared to a 2.82 mean for males. The results determined, explain that when looking at fan motivations, different sensory atmospheric variables vary among the gender of participants within the study. Compared to what is known about the Buffalo Bills behavior at New Era Field, it’s now determined that the degree of male and female fan motivation ranges depending on the variables studied within this proposal.

**Ultimate Answer**

Overall, having a diverse set of significant and insignificant variables, provided an important set of results which the Buffalo Bills could use for further implementation of programs, or further research that may have benefitted Bills fans when attending games. The information collected to start the proposal, provided information which had already been known. That was the statistical data which showed there being a cultural based issue among Bills fans. The data originally mentioned was arrests, ejections, code of conduct classes taken, and designated driver signups (Rutkowski, 2018). Accompanied with that information, it’s been seen that different motivational factors range on a scale for different fans in sports (Van Shaik, 2012). Other information that was already known, were that teams have taken steps to enhance their guest experience through a variety of tactics (concessions, in game apps, in game entertainment…etc) [Seattle Seahawks, 2018]. Having seen what changes are brought to different organizations to overall benefit the fan experience at games, there has been a lack of the
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known fact of why fans come out to games. The Bills have decreased arrests and ejections throughout the years from new rule implementation, but now the Bills have results collected that involved students around the ages of 22-23, if examined, can overall help with changes made moving forward. The original data collected by the Buffalo Bills revolved around concrete statistics of fans either getting in legal trouble or not, not why they ultimately did it or what has motivated them to go to games. The ultimate answer to the research question created, is that Bills fan motivations align mostly towards in game entertainment that includes music, fantasy updates, mascot appearances and pre-game tailgate. Despite these being the most significant points, there was also a huge curve to the results in relation to new tailgating methods and pre-game methods that have been used in the past at the stadium. The variables help explained the tie to the fan experience at the stadium.
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