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Important Factors Influencing Attendance at Northwoods League Games

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the importance of various factors as they related to attendance at Northwoods League baseball games. This league was an ideal fit for the study as little research has been conducted on this level of baseball. A survey was sent out via the Facebook page of the Lakeshore Chinooks to gather responses from fans on what factors encouraged attendance. Fans were asked to then rate how important each factor was on a five-point sliding scale. The research revealed that situational factors such as convenience, day and time, and weather of the game were the most influential in fans' decisions to come to games while factors related to marketing were the least important in their decisions.

Acknowledgements

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Also, I would like to thank assistant general manager Eric Snodgrass and the entire Lakeshore Chinooks organization for distributing the survey and allowing this study to be possible. Lastly, I am grateful for all the Chinooks fans that spared their time to take the survey with no incentive whatsoever. You all provided a great sample of valuable information for this research.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
Limitations	8
Literature Review.....	10
Promotion	11
Price Promotion	12
Non-price Promotion	13
Game Characteristics.....	14
Stadium Effect.....	18
Northwoods League	19
Psychological Factors.....	20
Perception.....	22
Methodology	24
Data Collection, Instruments, and Analysis	25
Participants	26
Quantitative Analysis	28
Discussion.....	32
Conclusions.....	35
References.....	36
Appendix A: Survey Questions	42
Appendix B: Snipes and Ingram (2007) Survey	45
Appendix C: Wakefield and Sloan (1995) Survey	46

List of Figures

Figure 1: Framework.....11

Figure 2: Age Distribution.....26

Figure 3: Yearly Game Attendance Distribution.....27

Figure 4: Household Income Distribution.....28

Figure 5: Statistics by Factor.....29

Figure 6: Statistics by Grouping.....30

Introduction

Many different levels of baseball exist such as professional leagues, NCAA collegiate competition, collegiate summer baseball, and minor league baseball. The Northwoods League is a collegiate summer baseball league that operates in the Midwest region. Teams play a 72-game season condensed from the end of May to mid-August with minimal off days during the season to prepare the collegiate players for the rigors of professional baseball. Games are typically held at smaller stadiums that can hold over a thousand people. It is not uncommon for these teams to share facilities with NCAA-affiliated teams. This league and others like it are places for these players to further develop their skillset and attempt to attract attention from professional scouts with the hopes of being drafted by a Major League team. It is not uncommon for players to be signed and/or drafted directly from the league and subsequently enter the minor leagues.

The purpose of this study was to determine which factors and groupings were most important to fans attending Chinooks games. Specifically:

1. How do fans rank characteristics that are associated with value, marketing, social, operational, sensory, and situational factors for attending a game?
2. What variables draw fans to the ballpark in this Northwoods League setting?
3. Are there specific attractants that fans want to see added to these baseball games?

Would this increase their attendance?

This study was necessary because limited marketing-based research exists that examines the Northwoods League and other similar collegiate summer leagues. What little literature does exist focuses primarily on unrelated topics (Burnett & Van Scyoc, 2018; Hartke et al., 2019). However, there was one related study that evaluated attendance at

Madison Mallards games, a rival Northwoods League team, using different methods with a differing focus (Burnett & Van Scyoc, 2008). While this study does add to the body of knowledge, further investigation and evaluation needs to be conducted to more thoroughly understand fan motivations.

Sport administrators are faced with numerous tasks when managing their respective organizations. These tasks include maintaining a competitive team, generating revenue, marketing, and managing human resources among other duties. The scale of each of these tasks will vary based on the level and size of the organization. However, while characteristics of teams and organizations differ, one variable remains constant; organizations need to be financially successful to have the ability to operate.

One way that sport administrators can measure their organization's prosperity and level of success is through fan attendance (Burnett & Van Scyoc, 2008; Browning & Debolt, 2007; Cebula, 2013; Cebula et al., 2013). Having a fan physically come to a game is the ultimate pathway for teams to monetize their fans. The price of a ticket is only one form monetization. Once a fan is in the game environment, teams have an opportunity to introduce fans to several other forms of monetization. Concessions, merchandising, and entertainment are additional sources of revenue for the organization and thus increase the importance on how many fans attend.

Attendance also has monetary benefits beyond the transactions that are made in person on game day. Strong attendance is an indicator of the perceived brand equity of an organization. Strong brand equity helps the organization build partnerships with other organizations. When an organization shows strong brand equity, other organizations will have a desire to build partnerships that can enhance their brand equity in return. Because

of these reasons, fan attendance is a highly researched topic. However, the connections that are made in the research often examine what factors increase attendance rather than why strategies increase attendance (Browning & Debolt, 2007; Cebula, 2013; Cebula et al., 2013; Falls & Natke, 2014; Falls and Natke, 2016; Gifis & Sommers, 2006; Gitter & Rhoads, 2014; Jane, 2014; Jane, 2016; Lee, 2018; McEvoy, et al. 2005; Ormiston, 2014; Welki & Zlatoper, 1999).

Limitations

Many limitations exist within this study. First, it is possible that people outside of the targeted population for this study were included in the results. Online surveys, while convenient, can be difficult to control in regard to who responds. While it was assumed that most people who follow the team on social media have been to a game, there was no way to guarantee that they have. This could impact the integrity of the results.

Another limitation exists in the extent to which fans may be reached to participate in the study. Certain parts of the Chinooks' fan base may have been left out because they do not follow the team on social media or do not care to complete the survey even though they attend games. Without an incentive, it was difficult to entice participants to complete the survey without the exchange of some form of personal benefit. Therefore, this potentially reduces the diversity of opinions provided by the respondents.

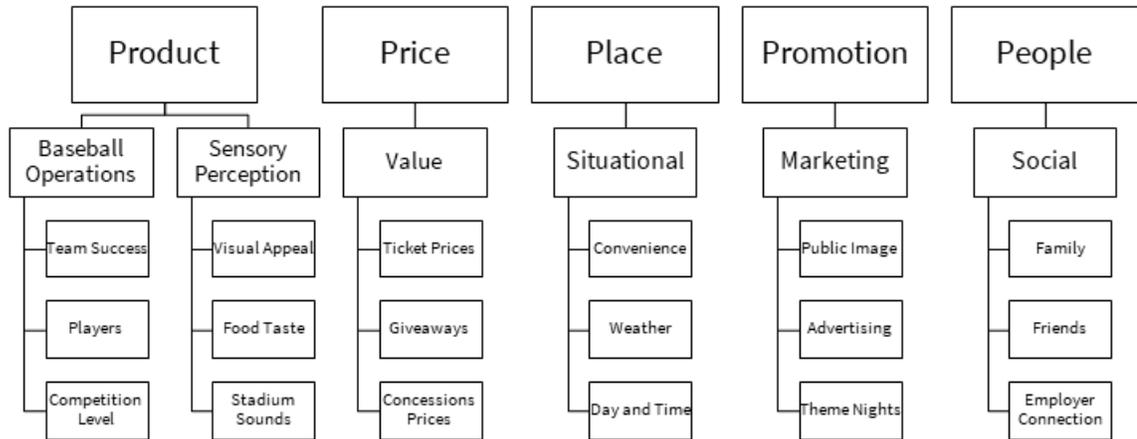
Ideally, this research study would have generated responses from fans of every team in the Northwoods League; providing a much broader analysis. However, for the purposes of this study, the scope was limited to one single team of the Northwoods

League. Baseball fans living in different areas of the state or country could have differing views than this specific population, leading to varying results.

Literature Review

Factors that were researched in this study were chosen based on the concept of the marketing mix. This concept theorizes that there are five primary factors that are foundational and are ultimately going to determine whether or not a product offered is consumed. The number of factors varies based on which definition one uses. For the purposes of this study five common factors were used. Those factors include: 1. the characteristics of the product, 2. the price of the product, 3. the placement of the product for sale, 4. how the product is promoted, and 5. how people interact with the product and the process (Lin & Lee, 2012). Each factor has significance in the baseball environment. The various aspects of the product involve what a fan receives with the price they pay for admission to the game; which may include but is not limited to the level of baseball being played and the general atmosphere including proximity to the field, sight lines, and type of seat at the stadium. Place applies to where and when the game is being played. Promotional strategies are heavily involved the process of bringing fans to games through various methods as is discussed in more detail later in this analysis. Lastly, people are integral part of the game experience. Crowd-noise, chants, and other forms of personal interaction are common-place.

Within this study, these types of concepts were integrated into a study-specific context resulting in 18 chosen factors within six related groupings. The groupings include value, marketing, baseball operations, social, sensory, and situational. Each factor relates to one of the factors of the marketing mix. The relative importance of the factors will then determine the potential validity of the model. Figure 1 illustrates how the marketing mix influenced the structure of this study.

Figure 1*Framework***Promotion**

Promotion is heavily involved in creating the sense of value that fans perceive they have received when attending games, thus promotional tactics are significant in determining what brings fans to games. Broadly, promotion is how organizations make the public aware of their product. There are multiple pathways for organizations to accomplish this. The promotional mix defines these pathways as advertising, public relations, sales, direct marketing, and personal selling. In sports, promotions are used to boost sales, often in the form of price and non-price promotion. Price promotions focus on the sticker price of tickets, such as buy one, get one free. Non-price promotions have the goal of adding perceived value to the existing ticket package. These promotions exist in many forms such as fireworks nights, special guest appearances, and giveaways.

Price Promotion

Price promotion is a tactic used by the vast majority of sports teams. These types of promotion involve teams altering the overall price for a ticket or a product to generate further sales volume. These types of promotions involve the economic, measurable, and monetary costs. A common practice of a price promotion would include having a night where tickets are half-priced as opposed to the normal price.

Most of the previous research that has been conducted on the effect of promotions has been in the baseball industry for many reasons. First, baseball seasons hold the largest inventory of games throughout a season when compared to other sports. Baseball also has an extensive minor league system with hundreds of teams, providing a large sample size to examine. However, minor league teams rely more heavily on promotions because their games hold less overall significance. Because of this, they need the promotions to sell their product (Hixson, 2005). This makes professional baseball an ideal target for research focusing on the topic.

Price promotions have been shown to increase overall game attendance in previous studies (Browning & Debolt, 2007, Cebula, 2013, Cebula et al., 2013). This type of promotion has shown effects across multiple levels of competition as well. Browning and Debolt (2007) measured the effect of promotions in two minor league teams, one major league team, and one independent team. When measuring the effect of only price promotions on game attendance, the researchers found an increase in attendance for two of three teams while the independent team experienced no results in this category.

Previous research focused on minor league baseball has supported price promotion as an effective tool when it comes to increasing attendance. Cebula (2013) and Cebula et al. (2013) examined the 2007-2011 seasons and the 2006 season using the same model. The studies were conducted in the Carolina League, a Single A level, major league-affiliated group of teams. Players in this league are similar in age to players in the Northwoods League; however, these teams typically play to larger crowds. Both studies revealed price promotion as a statistically significant way to increase attendance. Significant results at the 99 percent level of confidence were found in ticket promotions as well as food and drink prices in the panel data study, among other variables. However, ticket price promotions were shown to be more effective than food and drink price promotions in the single year study.

Non-price Promotion

Non-price promotions involve giveaways or other value-added strategies that do not involve the use of price changes in any way. Popular non-price promotion strategies that are used by teams include fireworks, guest appearances, and theme nights. However, teams develop new trends and different types of promotions every year that can be placed into this category which continue to keep pushing the boundaries of sport promotion. General studies on these new, unique types of promotion have not been published yet. One common example of these promotions are timed team re-brands. These involve teams changing their names, uniforms, and merchandise to a new identity for a short amount of time. This was exemplified by the Single-A Wisconsin Timber Rattlers when they changed their name for one night to the Wisconsin Brats (Mehring, 2018). Similar to

price promotions, these strategies have shown to cause statistically significant increases in attendance when used (Browning & Debolt, 2007; Cebula, 2013; Cebula et al., 2013).

Non-price promotion has even been shown to be a more powerful attractant than price promotion. The study Browning and Debolt (2007) conducted showed greater increases in attendance in games with non-price promotions than price promotions in every team measured. Further detail on what was included in non-price and price promotion was not included in the study. Similar results were found by Cebula et al. (2013) showing non-price promotions to be just as effective as price promotions, and, possibly more effective depending on the value of the non-price promotion. High-value items were more effective at increasing attendance than low-value items. Congruently, the items associated with each category were also undisclosed. Firework nights showed the highest attendance boost out of any category measured in the study followed by high-value merchandise giveaways. Similar results were found by Gifis and Sommers (2006) in an analysis of the minor league, AA-level, Trenton Thunder where firework nights had the highest co-efficient in the regression equation followed by special guest appearances, and bobblehead giveaways. Other factors tested included variables for weekend games and day of the week which showed no statistical significance.

Game Characteristics

Factors that affect game attendance go beyond what marketing departments can influence. The quality of the game itself can draw fans in or keep fans away. This is especially important to consider when operating a Northwoods League team due to the variety of players that participate in the league. Anecdotally, the quality of player can differ highly due to certain relationships, circumstances, and philosophies teams have

when recruiting players. Players in many different circumstances fill the rosters of the league. Some of these athletes competed sparingly in their collegiate season and their coaches want to get them game experience to assist their development. Other players are the top-end talent that want to expose themselves to professional scouts hoping to improve their future draft position. There are also players that just happen to be available to play when a player needs to leave a team. Teams hope to balance their goals of on-field success with the goals of the collegiate coaches that provide the players, while also keeping the athletes themselves happy. If collegiate coaches are not satisfied with the organizational handling of players, they could be less inclined to provide players in the future. Likewise, if players are not satisfied with their usage, they may be less inclined to play for the organization.

Certain aspects of individual or team sports, when examined, can show trends in attendance for teams (Jane, 2016; Jane, 2014; Ormiston, 2014). Star players playing in games have proven to increase per-game attendance across multiple sports to a statistically significant level (Jane, 2016; Ormiston, 2014). In professional basketball, star players, players who are in the top thirty highest-paid positions or top thirty in performance statistics, increase game attendance, regardless of whether or not the star player is on the home or away team. The effect also showed to be tiered. Players with a higher star power increased attendance more than players with a lower star power. Specifically, for every one million votes a player receives in the all-star voting for that year, a six percent increase in game attendance should be expected (Jane, 2016). The effect is not isolated to solely basketball.

Strikingly similar findings have been found in starting pitchers in Major League Baseball (MLB). Star pitchers significantly, with confidence levels between 95 and 99.9%, increase attendance on a tiered basis with the pitchers with the most star power increasing attendance on a greater basis than pitchers with a lower star power. The effect was also shown to be true regardless of whether the pitcher was on the home or away team. However, the effect of pitchers, while still significant, has been declining over time. Their effect has been cut in half since the first year of measure in the study, 1964 (Ormiston, 2014). This trend is unsurprising given the trend that baseball fans are starting to value a more offensive-minded game. Lee (2018) indicated that today's fans care more about the offense in a game than whether or not it was the best strategy for the home team to win a game. In the period from 1958-2012, homeruns more than doubled in correlative factor and number of strikeouts increased by almost 70 percent. The study also showed outcome uncertainty to be a significant factor in attendance of games in the MLB in the modern period. This is confirmed by a study on professional football that found that the increased uncertainty of the outcome of a game tended to increase the attendance of that game (Welki & Zlatoper, 1999). However, these findings run contrary to what was found to be the correlation in professional basketball (Jane, 2014).

Consumers in professional basketball, specifically, the National Basketball Association (NBA) tend to have preferences in the kind of game that they want to see on a game-level basis. In the NBA, fans tend to want to see less outcome uncertainty on a game-level basis. The strongest correlation measured on uncertainty showed to be between rival teams with a low level of outcome uncertainty (Jane, 2014). Fans want to see their preferred team play a rival in a high-stakes game and want to see their team win,

if possible, by a large margin and they tend to seek games out where those conditions are probable to be met. Support for increased attendance in rivalry games can also be found in studies examining college football. Studies on both the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision and Football Championship Subdivision show a significant relationship between fan attendance and rivalry games (Falls & Natke, 2014; Falls & Natke, 2016). Fans seem to want to attend games that they are emotionally interested in, and rivalry games tend to carry more emotional weight than traditional, non-rivalry games typically do. Another important observation from this study comes on game day weather conditions. Precipitation has been shown in multiple studies to have a negative impact on attendance (Falls & Natke, 2014; Falls & Natke, 2016; Welki & Zlatoper, 1999). However, it should be noted the venues included were outdoors. The results have been found at the collegiate and professional level. This shows that the relative importance of the game does not negate the effect of precipitation.

While there are many factors that influence attendance that are isolated to a single game, the longer-term competitive environment of a league has a significant influence as well. One factor where this is clearly seen is in competitive balance. Competitive balance involves how talent is distributed between teams and how successful or unsuccessful a team is when playing another. This also involves the number of games a team wins versus the number of games a team loses throughout the year. The NBA is a league where overall competitive balance is more important for attendance than the competitiveness of a single game. Fans in the NBA want to see talent more evenly distributed among teams so that more teams have a chance of winning the league championship in a given year (Jane, 2014). When the chances that one particular team

wins the championship are increased, it gives the fans a sense of meaninglessness in the regular season games and keeps them from wanting to attend games. Similar results have been found in college football where playoff contention and a history of success significantly increased attendance in Division I FCS and FBS schools. Games against non-FBS, non-BCS or Power Five, and conference opponents all decreased attendance in FBS schools. (Falls & Natke, 2016; Falls & Natke, 2014). It stands to reason that with greater league-wide competitive balance, more teams would be in playoff contention, thus increasing attendance. In the MLB, fans have grown to attract to uncertainty in all forms. Individual game uncertainty and a more even league-wide competitive balance both increased attendance significantly (Lee, 2018).

Stadium Effect

Stadium quality was also a large factor that can influence attendance in the long-term as well. What exactly the mechanism is for this remains unclear. However, the effects are understood. The relevance in this effect exists in the form of new sensory experiences for fans, which was why it was important to understand for the purposes of this analysis. Multiple studies have shown that building a new stadium increases attendance for years after the initial season (McEvoy et al., 2005; Gitter & Rhoads, 2014). McEvoy et al. (2005) analyzed the relationship in MLB teams and found that attendance increased significantly in the first few years after the construction of the facility and started to fall off after that and, at the 48th year of existence, started to rise again. In cases where a stadium does not reach 50 years of existence, it can be extrapolated that near the end of the life of the facility, game attendance will rise again. However, the positive effect was undeniable. The same effect has been shown in minor

league baseball as well. Gitter & Rhoads (2014) found that the effect can be as high as a 49% increase over the initial season, and that effect may extend itself beyond a ten-year period while slowly decreasing each season after the first. However, the effect for minor league stadiums tends to be greater and longer-lasting than new stadiums at the major league level. The researchers attribute this to the smaller markets that minor league teams inhabit where there are less substitute leisure opportunities, therefore the minor league teams have a more dedicated fan base.

Northwoods League

There are only three studies that have specifically analyzed the Northwoods League in any aspect. Studies by Hartke et al. (2019) analyzed the statistical aspect of the on-field play while Burnett and Van Scyoc researched how the overall league competitive balance compared to other sport leagues (2008). The most relevant research to this study was conducted again by Burnett and Van Scyoc (2008) in a case study of the Madison Mallards, a similar team in various aspects to the Chinooks, both located in suburbs of bigger cities in the state of Wisconsin. This case study analyzed the on-field baseball statistics and promotional strategies of the Mallards and how they correlated to game day attendance. The researchers found that the on-field variables that included at-bats, runs, hits, runs batted in, errors, earned runs, net score, wins, and winning streaks could have been thrown out completely and the study would have yielded similar results as they had almost no impact on attendance. The only on-field variable with a significant impact on attendance was innings pitched. This runs contrary to Lee (2018) which found statistical significance in some on-field factors in Major League Baseball such as slugging percentage and home runs. This suggests differences in reasons for fans attending games

at various competitive levels. Favorable weather, average cost of promotion, and area income proved significant among off-field variables.

Psychological Factors

Psychology is the study of the mind and behavior and has also been largely involved in the bases for marketing, sociology, and sensory functions. The field of psychology provides valuable information that sport administrators should be examining to better understand the motivations of their customers and subsequently market to them. When an administrator can understand their fans on a psychological level, it can provide needed context for their strategic decision making. With this information, administrators can better plan and execute strategies that will more likely lead to team financial and social success, as large companies and corporations are already starting to do this. These organizations with access to large amounts of data and the capacity to analyze it are doing so to try and better understand their consumers on a deeper level than they can understand themselves (Uzialko, 2018).

Various factors impact what influences a consumer to take an action. The AIDA model was one of the first developed to evaluate the success of marketing and advertising campaigns on a psychological level. The acronym AIDA refers to capturing the awareness of the consumer, the interest level of the consumer, how much the consumer desires to consume a product, and the action of consuming that product. Each portion of the acronym should lead to the next in a decision-making process (Wijaya, 2012). Lee et al. (2018) used this as a basis to measure what characteristics influenced people to attend pop-culture destinations in South Korea. They found several key observations throughout the study. First, previous exposure influenced the interest in a topic and noted that this

was in-line with what previous studies had found (Thorne, 2011). In the case of this research, those who had more previous exposure and interaction with Korean pop culture were more likely to visit the destination. Awareness was also found to be a significant factor in whether or not they were likely to take action. However, AIDA might not be the lone comprehensive guide to human decision making. Tests on the AIDA model have revealed that it does not do enough to compensate for the role of the unconscious mind in decision making. Montazeribarforoushi et al. (2017) suggested that the model be amended to include a separate AIDA for the unconscious and conscious.

While there can be many different definitions of what constitutes the conscious mind versus the unconscious mind, the basic concept of each revolves around the awareness of the individual in their decision making. Conscious decision making occurs in the forefront while unconscious thinking occurs in the background in which the individual is rarely aware of. The role of the unconscious mind can be influential in decision making. While the degree of significance in the role of the unconscious mind may be difficult to fully quantify due to the abstract nature of the concept, research has shown that it does have more than an inconsequential effect (Harris & Murawski, 2010; Creswell et al., 2013). This has been revealed when analyzing the effect of brand recognition on decision making, and if the image of certain brands made people more or less likely to seek an immediate reward. The participants were shown the brand images without their knowledge, meaning they would have had no conscious idea of how that brand image affected their decision-making. Brands with a more favorable image by the consumer triggered the desire to seek an immediate reward as opposed to a delayed reward (Harris & Murawski, 2010). Furthermore, it has been shown that information

encoding, and processing of product attributes has distinct neural networks for the conscious and unconscious, respectively. Unconscious information processing keeps occurring even after the conscious network has been distracted by another stimulus and this can even improve consumer decision-making overall when the time comes for the decision to be made (Creswell et al., 2013).

Perception

Perception is how people interpret the stimulus they receive from their environment. This includes the stimuli that they see, smell, and feel. These experiences can shape their opinions about what they are experiencing. For sport administrators, maximizing the sensory and non-sensory experience of fans and non-fans alike is going to be beneficial. There are several different components to perception and each element affects the way that a product is viewed. How studies separate and define those components was highly variable and there does not seem to be a consensus on a defined set of components. However, there seems to be a general consensus on the micro-ideals behind the components. Research conducted by Li et al. (2013) examined consumer perceptions of a 3G network in China and divided brand image into six components: corporate perception, benefit perception, product knowledge, brand personality, and subjective popularity. Subjective popularity emerged as the most important influence on perceived quality followed by corporate perception, brand awareness, and brand personality with benefit perception being insignificant. Subjective popularity being the most significant factor was an important revelation as it means that people are heavily influenced by the perceptions of others, even more than their own thoughts about the product. This amplifies the importance of each impression a brand makes with a

consumer. Each positive impression on a consumer can create an indirect impression on another prospective consumer.

However, the impact of the other factors should not be understated, especially brand personality. Ivens & Valta (2012) examined how brand personality affects consumer attitudes, preferences, and satisfaction with the brand. Brand personality can be segmented into smaller measurable variables like sincerity, excitement, competence, and sophistication as found in the study. Positively influencing the smaller variables has an overall positive effect on brand personality. However, most organizations are failing to properly maximize the value of brand personality. Rather than finding a strong, distinct style, consumers have different views of various brands. While this research only measured national, highly visible brands, the implications of the study apply to many other fields. Sport administrators need to be aware of the importance of how they are projecting themselves to not make the same mistakes and maximize their value to consumers.

One important variable that some brands overlook is the messages sent by their pricing models. Price points influence the perceived characteristics of their products both from brand-to-brand and from product-to-product provided they are in the same line. Baishya & Kakati (2019) found that product prices within the same line influenced how consumers evaluated the products within the line. The prices of the models also are intertwined within one another, rather than interacting with the consumer as an independent product. For sport administrators, product lines are abundant. Ticket prices based on seat location, how merchandise is priced, and concessions all are examples of product lines and should be evaluated as such.

Methodology

The following design was chosen based upon multiple factors. First, many studies that examine the topic of attendance categorize certain factors like giveaways, ticket promotions, and concessions giveaways and compare them with the attendance of the games they are utilized and try to find a correlation. This design would not work within the objectives of this study, as not all the factors tested can be related to specific games. For example, it is extremely difficult to insert a variable like friends and family into a correlational equation, which is likely why these factors are left out of previously mentioned studies. A survey was deemed as the most viable option to examine those factors. The target population was chosen based upon a previous relationship between the researcher and the Lakeshore Chinooks front office that created an almost effortless mode of distributing the survey. Inquiring about other Northwoods League teams' willingness to participate was briefly considered. However, due to the timelines involved, it was deemed best to survey only one team's fan base.

Participants in the study were questioned about their demographics. Then each participant was asked how important a series of specifically chosen factors were in their decision to attend a baseball game. Each factor was rated on a five-point Likert scale. This measure was chosen based on the participant's ability to give weighted responses instead of a "yes" or "no" which would alleviate any nuance in responses. This fits with the purpose of the study to determine an order of importance of the factors.

Data Collection, Instruments, and Analysis

Data collection occurred through the distribution of an online survey hosted in Google Forms. The survey and process was approved through the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects. The full survey used for this study can be seen in Appendix A. The survey was sent out in conjunction with the Lakeshore Chinooks. The team agreed to distribute the survey link to their fans via social media on Monday, March 8th and the survey was closed on Friday, March 13th. Fans did not receive any incentive for their participation in this study.

The questions and structure of the survey were a combination of modified surveys used by Snipes and Ingram (2007) and Wakefield and Sloan (1995). The demographics section and sliding scale was modeled after Snipes and Ingram (2007) and can be found in Appendix B while the structure of the questions were modeled after the survey conducted by Wakefield and Sloan (1995) which used categories for questions that involved a five-point Likert scale ranging from least important to most important in their decision to attend a game and can be found in Appendix C. Open ended questions were also added onto the end of the survey to gauge the importance of non-inquired factors.

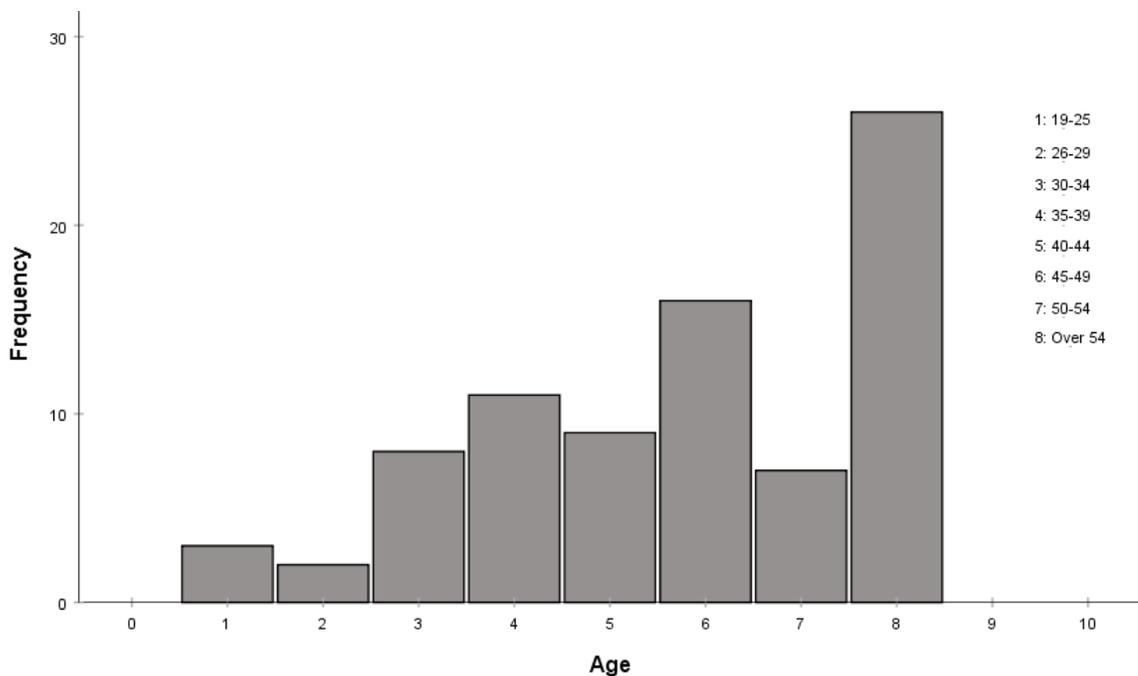
Results

Participants

The survey returned 82 responses. The demographics of the participants tilted toward the middle-aged category with over 70% of them reporting as being over the age of 40. The most dominant category of participants was overwhelmingly over 54 with 31.7% as reported in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Age Distribution

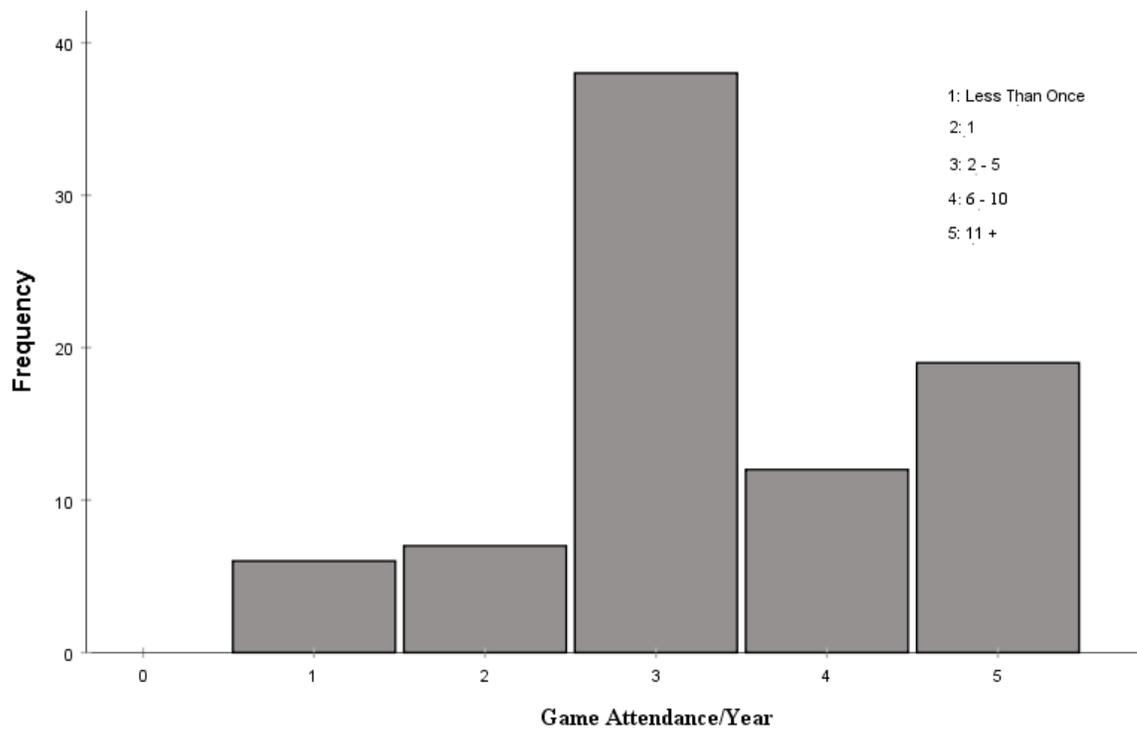


The gender split of the participants was almost even with 55% reporting as female and 45% as male. Another noteworthy result was the ethnicities of the participants with 80 out of 82 responses reporting as being Caucasian. The other two responses came in the form of one Asian and one Native American. However, this is not too far from the norm of the county the team is located in where 93.8% of residents are Caucasian (U.S. Census

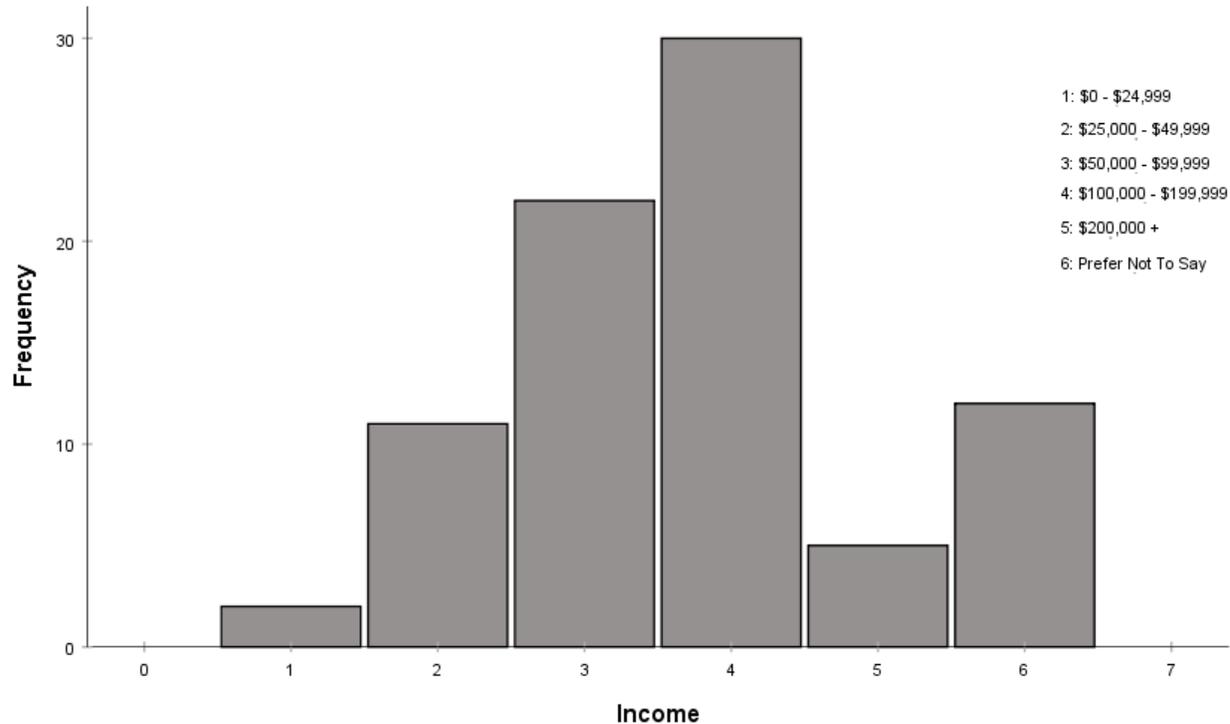
Bureau, 2020). Respondents also typically attend more than one game per year with this organization. Seventy-five out of 82 participants reported going to multiple games per year. These results are demonstrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Yearly Game Attendance Distribution



Approximately two-thirds of participants also reported as married. Primarily the respondents were parents as well with only 28% reporting as not having children and the most common answer being two children at 42%. Participants from the study also reported as being generally financially stable with 70% earning more than \$50,000/year. These results are demonstrated in Figure 4. It is also worth noting that 12 respondents did not disclose their income.

Figure 4*Household Income Distribution***Quantitative Analysis**

The chart below summarizes the responses to each individual factor question. The factors are sorted by mean in descending order. As per the objective of this study, it explains which factors are most important in a consumer's decision to attend a game, convenience (where and when the game is played, weather, personal schedule, etc.) being the factor reported as most important and a connection with the participant's employer being the least important. Other important figures to note would be the standard error of the mean and standard deviation indicating the variation between the responses to a given factor as noted in Figure 5.

Figure 5*Statistics by Factor*

	N		Mean	Std. Error of Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
	Valid	Missing						
Convenience	82	0	4.26	.090	4.00	5	.814	.662
Family	82	0	4.18	.125	5.00	5	1.135	1.287
Weather	82	0	4.12	.097	4.00	5	.880	.775
Day and Time	82	0	4.10	.106	4.00	5	.964	.929
Food Taste	82	0	4.02	.108	4.00	4	.981	.962
Visual Appeal	82	0	3.96	.086	4.00	4	.777	.604
Competition Level	82	0	3.91	.097	4.00	4	.878	.770
Ticket Prices	82	0	3.82	.129	4.00	5	1.167	1.361
Friends	82	0	3.74	.125	4.00	5	1.131	1.279
Theme Nights	82	0	3.73	.115	4.00	4	1.043	1.088
Concessions Prices	82	0	3.72	.114	4.00	4	1.034	1.069
Stadium Sounds	82	0	3.71	.086	4.00	4	.778	.605
Public Image	82	0	3.48	.136	4.00	4	1.230	1.512
Giveaways	81	1	3.42	.137	3.00	3	1.234	1.522
Team Success	82	0	3.34	.118	3.00	3	1.068	1.141
Players	82	0	3.33	.116	3.00	3	1.055	1.112
Advertising	82	0	3.12	.124	3.00	3	1.126	1.269
Employer Connection	82	0	2.87	.152	3.00	3	1.377	1.895

The same applies to Figure 6. As mentioned previously, each individual factor was placed within a grouping with related factors. Analyzing the factors in a grouping allowed for more general conclusions to be made about the data that could possibly be extrapolated out to factors that could be placed into one of the six categories as noted in Figure 6, but were not included in this study.

Figure 6*Statistics by Grouping*

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
Situational	3	.16	4.10	4.26	4.1600	.05033	.08718
Sensory	3	.31	3.71	4.02	3.8967	.09493	.16442
Value	3	.40	3.42	3.82	3.6533	.12019	.20817
Social	3	1.31	2.87	4.18	3.5967	.38490	.66666
Baseball Operations	3	.58	3.33	3.91	3.5267	.19169	.33201
Marketing	3	.61	3.12	3.73	3.4433	.17704	.30665

Qualitative Observations

Each of the four open-ended survey questions yielded a variety of responses. However, there were several trends apparent throughout each question. Overwhelmingly, fans indicated that time with their family and friends was their favorite part of attending games with 34% of respondents indicating this. Furthermore, 23% of respondents cited the atmosphere of the game and ballpark as their favorite part and 17% liked the monetary value they get from attending. Lastly, 13% of participants indicated that they enjoy watching the baseball game being played.

Responses varied further in what fans would like to see added to the ballpark. While there was no overwhelming favorite, five fans indicated they would like to see new food options added to the concession stands. Specifically, one participant would like to have expanded vegan options included in the menu. Other additions that four participants would like to see are celebrity meet and greets, and expanded benefits for season ticket holders.

Overwhelming trends occurred in what fans would like to see expanded. Thirty-three percent of fans want to see more concessions options, 22% want to see more giveaways, and 18% want to see more theme nights. No other common response generated more than three mentions to this question. The last question added other feedback that may not have been covered in the survey. Regarding what specifically drives their attendance, very little was learned from this question. However, many responses involved fans sharing their positive experiences with the team and words of encouragement on how the organization conducts itself.

Discussion

Significant implications can be drawn from the results of this study. One finding that was notable included factors associated with promotions like giveaways, ticket prices, and concession prices, which placed 14th, 8th, and 11th in the survey results respectively. Previous studies have shown factors like these to be statistically significant in many levels of baseball (Browning & Debolt, 2007; Cebula, 2013; Cebula et al., 2013; Gifis & Sommers, 2006). It should also be noted that there was a demand for more giveaways and fans generally perceive value reception at games when attending based on the qualitative data.

There are a couple possible reasons for this underperformance in importance in promotional factors in relation to others examined. First, the method of distribution and demographics of the participants may have predisposed them to having a loyalty toward the team to make their attendance less reliant on promotions. Ninety-two percent of the participants have attended multiple games per year and 38% of participants reported going to more than six games per season that includes only 36 home games. Participants were also already following the team on Facebook and possibly felt compelled through their relationship with the team to take the survey. Another possible reason for promotional factors finishing so low in the survey results is the difficulty in quantifiability of the factors that were reported as more important. Convenience, family, food taste, visual appeal, friends, stadium sounds, and public image are all factors that finished above giveaways and have not been tested in previous available studies. This is likely due to their lack of fit with quantifiability in a non-survey form study. It is possible

that these factors, had they been tested in a way to compare with other factors in previous studies, may have shown significance in game attendance.

Analyzing the results in the context of their groupings, situational factors rated as being the most important. This revealed an important reality about how the fans viewed this level of baseball. Essentially, this showed that fans are not typically willing to make too much of a sacrifice to attend a game of this level. In fact, the most important factor to the participants was that the game was convenient for them to go to. Weather, along with day and time, also ranked as third and fourth respectively, demonstrating a low tolerance to go to a game in inclement weather, or if the game time did not align with their schedules. This would suggest that fans view this level of baseball as more of leisure activity than something that they really take seriously or get emotionally invested in.

Another notable result from this study is in sensory factors rating so highly above the other factors tested. Participants cared more about how the ballpark affected their senses than they did about the value they get from going to a game. Again, these factors are not easily quantifiable in any other form than a survey. This could be one reason that value has shown as significant previously in the literature and sensory factors have not.

One finding that should be questioned is the result from the social category. Family rated very high, while friends rated in the middle of important factors. However, being paired with the employer connection brought the grouping rating down. In fact, the grouping had the highest range, standard error, and standard deviation of all groupings tested by far. The employer connection also rated as being the only tested factor to have a mean below three, the mid-point of the scale. This implies that corporate partnerships, while still beneficial, may not be a way to increasing attendance at this level of baseball.

Fans showed a relative disinterest in the marketing efforts of the team and the actual baseball being played on the field. However, it should be noted that this survey was completed by existing fans who are already aware of and have experienced games. Most do not need convincing to come to games. This is typically the role of marketing. Therefore, this low result does not mean marketing is not important regarding attendance for baseball at this level.

Conclusions

The body of research focusing on competitive baseball at the Northwoods League level, even after this study, still remains small. It is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions without a larger body of knowledge to examine. Similar studies should be conducted with more teams around the league to determine if these results are only unique to this team or if they are applicable league wide. Additionally, a lack of survey-based studies exists in sports regarding game attendance. As seen in the results of this study, there may be important factors that get overlooked concerning attendance because of their lack of quantifiability. Similar studies need to be conducted across many sports and levels to provide this study more context and determine if such factors exist and what the extent of their influence is.

The results of this study left more questions than answers regarding the body of literature. Are these results applicable outside of the team? Are there factors that are important to attendance that have not been discovered yet? Were the results influenced by the types of participants? Considering factors that have shown importance previously were viewed as less important in this study, it does provide an intriguing basis for further research. This methodology should be built upon and be replicated with future research before drawing any firm conclusions from the results. However, these initial findings do provide an interesting preliminary perspective on game attendance that, optimistically, will lead to further research.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONS:

AGE

Under 18	19-25	26-29	30-34	35-39	40-44
45-49	50-54	Over 54			

GENDER

Female	Male	Prefer not to say
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ETHNICITY

African American	Asian	Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American	Multi-racial
Other					

MARITAL STATUS

Married	Not Married	Prefer not to say
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CHILDREN

No children	1 child	2 children	3 or more children
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ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Less than \$25,000	\$25,000-\$49,999	\$50,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$199,999	\$200,000+
Prefer Not to Say				

GAME ATTENDANCE

Less than once per season	2-5 per season	6-10 per season	11 or more per season
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SCALE QUESTIONS (How important is each factor when deciding to attend a game) = [5 = important, 1 = not important]

1. Ticket Prices – Value	[5	4	3	2	1]
2. Giveaways – Value	[5	4	3	2	1]
3. Concession Prices – Value	[5	4	3	2	1]
4. Theme Nights/In-game Promotions – Marketing	[5	4	3	2	1]
5. Public Image – Marketing	[5	4	3	2	1]
6. Advertising – Marketing	[5	4	3	2	1]
7. Friends – Social	[5	4	3	2	1]
8. Family – Social	[5	4	3	2	1]
9. Employer Connection – Social	[5	4	3	2	1]
10. Competition Level – Operations	[5	4	3	2	1]
11. Team Success – Operations	[5	4	3	2	1]
12. Players – Operations	[5	4	3	2	1]
13. Visual Appeal - Sensory	[5	4	3	2	1]
14. Food Taste – Sensory	[5	4	3	2	1]
15. Stadium Sounds - Sensory	[5	4	3	2	1]
16. Weather – Situational	[5	4	3	2	1]
17. Day and Time – Situational	[5	4	3	2	1]
18. Convenience – Situational	[5	4	3	2	1]

OPEN FEEDBACK QUESTIONS:

19. What is your favorite part about games?

Text here...

20. What would you like to see added to games?

Text here...

21. What existing aspect of games would you like to see more of? (Theme Nights, Giveaways, Music, etc.)

Text here...

22. Other comments and feedback about games that you would like to share?

Text here...

Appendix B: Snipes and Ingram (2007) Survey

(1) How often do you currently attend sporting events? *(Please check one)*

- Never
- Less than once a year
- 6 to 10 sporting events a year
- 1 to 5 sporting events a year
- More than 10 sporting events a year

(2) Please **rank** the following sporting events in order of your preference (*1 = most preferred*)

- Baseball *(Please rank with 1 = most preferred*
- Basketball *and 4 = least preferred)*
- Soccer
- Other sport _____ *(please specify)*

(3) Please rate the following in terms of the **importance** that each might have in your *sporting event attendance and enjoyment*, as follows:

	<u>Not</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Very</u>		
	<u>Important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Important</u>		
Concession food quality	1	2	3	4	5
Concession food prices	1	2	3	4	5
Special prizes and giveaways	1	2	3	4	5
Audience participation games	1	2	3	4	5
Corporate sponsorships	1	2	3	4	5
“School spirit” contests/competitions	1	2	3	4	5
CSU Cheering Squad	1	2	3	4	5
CSU Band	1	2	3	4	5
Game admission price	1	2	3	4	5
Half-time entertainment	1	2	3	4	5
Team Success/Winning Record	1	2	3	4	5
Game times/schedule	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of the facility (physical layout/appearance, comfort, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C: Wakefield and Sloan (1995) Survey

Table 1 Scale Measurement

Scale/Scale items	Alpha
Desire to stay	.77
1. I like to stay for the entire game.	
2. I enjoy spending time at this stadium.	
3. I like to stay at the stadium as long as possible.	
Team loyalty	.91
1. I am a loyal [home team] fan.	
2. I like to let people know that I'm a [home team] fan.	
3. Win or lose, I'll always be a [home team] fan.	
Stadium parking	.86
1. This stadium has ample parking.	
2. Stadium parking is easy to get out of after the game.	
3. Stadium parking is conveniently located.	
Stadium cleanliness	.88
1. This stadium maintains clean restrooms.	
2. This stadium maintains clean concession areas.	
3. This stadium maintains clean walkways and exits.	
Fan control	.89
1. This stadium makes certain that offensive fans are controlled.	
2. This stadium monitors abusive fans.	
3. This stadium is concerned about controlling offensive fans.	
Food service	.90
1. This stadium offers a wide variety of food choices.	
2. This stadium offers good tasting food.	
3. I like the food offered at this stadium.	
Crowding (Hui & Bateson, 1991)	.83
Respondents were asked to rate how accurately the following words described the stadium (8-point scale):	
<i>confined, stuffy, crowded, cramped, restricted</i>	
Attendance intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992)	
In the future, will your attendance of games at this stadium be	
Not at all	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	
Very frequent	