

# The RV Tailgater: A Unique Subculture of College Football Fans in the United States

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## **Abstract**

*Attending sporting events is a popular leisure activity and people are willing to travel great distances to attend events. This phenomenon in the United States is a popular activity among college football fans that travel to participate in game-day activities which include both tailgating and attending the game. This study explored the demographics and motivations of fans that travel via recreational vehicles (RVs) to college football games. Data were collected at four universities (N = 206) in the Southeastern United States via in-person paper-and-pencil questionnaires. Five motivational factors explaining 64.9% of the variance emerged from an exploratory factor analysis: a) game attractiveness, b) achievement, c) escape, d) family, and e) group affiliation. The findings provide insight into the unique group of college football fans who are also tourists at some level. Understanding the RV tailgater will allow Convention and Visitor's Bureaus (CVBs) and college athletic departments to meet the needs of this unique subculture within college football fandom. The findings are also relevant in that provide insight into a unique subculture of tourists that could possibly be applied to other sporting events.*

## **Introduction**

College football fans in the United States have the opportunity to travel to their alma mater as well as away game destinations to see their favorite team compete. Fans traveling via recreational vehicle (RV) do not carry the concern to find hotel accommodations and have the freedom to make last-minute decisions to travel to the game or extend their stay. The RV experience adds a unique dynamic to the tailgating and game-day experience by providing a kitchen, utilities, sleeping capabilities, and bathroom as well as the ability to travel with friends and family. Research has been conducted on RV travel and tourism but there is little to no research on RVers in regards to sporting events (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003; Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). Thus, the purpose of this study is to understand who the RV tailgater is and to look at the motivation fans have to travel via RV to college football games.

The RV tailgater is an individual or group of individuals who travel and tailgate at sporting events, specifically college football games for the purposes of this study. Understanding this group is critical to develop strategies to market to them and to meet their needs at the venue. Developing a demographic profile of the RV tailgater and examining their motivations will allow sport management professionals, athletic department administrators, and other stakeholders to better serve the needs of this population.

## **Sport Tourism**

Traveling greater distances to attend sporting events has become part of the culture of sports, especially college sports (Gibson, et al., 2003). These people are often choosing to stay in

hotels, dine out and may possibly stay longer than the event itself to visit other attractions in the area. This particular niche of the tourist industry has become known as sport tourism. Sport tourism has had a major impact on tourism and the tourism experience (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005). A number of definitions have been developed and modified for sport tourism despite it being a relatively new area of research and marketing (Gibson, 1998; 2005a; Hinch & Higham, 2005; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005; Leiper, 1990). Travelers must be either motivated or involved in sport while on a trip in order for it to be sport tourism (Hinch & Higham, 2005). Sport tourism itself is not just the participating or attending of an event as it can encompass visiting sports museums and facilities as well (Hinch & Higham, 2005; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005). Hinch and Higham (2001) defined sport tourism as “sport-based travel away from the home environment for a limited time” (p. 49). Gibson (1998; 2005a) provides a similar definition in that sport tourism explains those individuals who are away from their home community and are either actively participating, watching or visiting sport attractions.

Sport tourism is popular across the globe and sporting events are becoming “integral components of a global political economy” (Nauright, 2004). Hallmark and mega-events (i.e., the Olympic Games) are attracting tourists to countries to experience sport and a different culture. Sport tourism is being used around the globe to improve economic development by hosting large-scale sporting events and promoting tourism (Nauright, 2004; Roche, Spake, & Mathew, 2013). In order for a sport tourist to consider a sport destination, the location itself must solicit and host events that are attractive enough to entice sport tourists to visit (Roche et al., 2013). Destinations in any country or region will benefit from sport tourists when the event attracts a broad range of tourists that stay and partake in the sport-related event as well as other attractions in the area. These tourists will spend additional money in the area through hotels, restaurants and for sport and local merchandise (i.e., souvenirs). There is a growing demand for sport event consumption, which leads to fans traveling to new locations—both international and in their home country (Wright, 2007).

Gibson (1998, 2004, 2005) identifies the sports tourist to be either nostalgic, passive, or active depending on the event, length of stay and motivations behind the trip. Sport tourists may express varying degrees of involvement on a single trip or excursion. It is also possible the individual may express more than one behavior on a single trip. The nostalgic sport tourist has traditionally been viewed as someone who tours sports halls of fame or stadiums, but according to Gordon (2013), the nostalgia is displayed beyond the experiences. Gordon (2013) describes other possible definitions and examples of nostalgia sport tourism to include two general ideas of nostalgia—social experience and place or artifact. The place or artifact encompasses the sport memorabilia and halls of fame while the social experience might bring the individual back to the past where good sport memories were generated. Perhaps nostalgia is an important piece to why people are dedicated to travel to new and exciting locations to see their favorite team compete in a sporting event. Passive or watching sport tourists might be a spectator for a college football game, a professional basketball game or even a large-scale event such as the Olympics or World Cup (Gibson, 1998, 2004; Gordon, 2013). The active tourist travels to participate in a sporting activity either as an individual or in a group setting (Gibson, 1998). An active sport tourist might choose to play a round of golf while on vacation or participate in some other outdoor individual sport.

### ***Recreational vehicle users (RVers)***

Sport tourism travel can involve trips around the globe to experience international events to fans traveling within their own country. One group of sport tourists that are unique to the United

States are fans who travel via RVs to attend college football games. These fans typically own some type of RV and will utilize this mode of transportation to travel to both home and away games to watch their favorite team compete. Traveling via RV is a popular pastime in the United States as RV ownership has increased in recent years to just under 9 million households owning a RV in 2014 compared to 7.9 million in 2005 (Recreational Vehicle Industry Association [RVIA], 2014). The RV industry was valued at more than \$10.8 billion in 2013 with those numbers expected to continue to increase. The reasons for this growth is the RV experience allows individuals to spend time together with family and friends as well as the cost savings as money is saved on meals, hotels and there is no need for airline travel (RVIA.org, n.d.). The RV owner can be described as older, married, nearing retirement or retired (RV Perceptions & Purchase Motivators: A Communications Planning Study, 2010).

The RV traveler or tourist can be defined as a person who takes a “camper trailer, van conversion, fifth wheel, slide-on camper, caravan or motorhome on holiday with them, and use the vehicle as their primary form of accommodation” (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011, p. 194). RV travelers generally have more time, money and the desire to have increased comfort when traveling (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). The option to bring your own accommodations is highly appealing to the RV owner and allows them to be more independent in their travel habits (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). The ownership of an RV also allows the traveler to have a sense of familiarity and comfort and which allow them to more adventurous in the travels and try new destinations (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005).

The RV is not just about accommodation and transportation but more about socialization and new experiences (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). The actions of RV travelers can vary greatly across North America and could be divided into various sub-groups depending on the goals and intentions of the RV traveler (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). The lifestyle of freedom and the opportunity to change travel plans on a whim is growing. This allows RV travelers the freedom to engage in additional activities in the region either before or after events to enhance the experience of the trip.

One advantage the RV allows is the ability of sport tourists to arrive early to an event and participate in pregame activities. A popular game-day activity in the United States is commonly referred to tailgating. Tailgating can be described as a ritual before sporting events that involves specific behaviors (i.e., eating, drinking, socializing) and are repeated for each sporting event (Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenbeck, 2009). The tailgate experience for fans varies from just attending the tailgate prior to the game to those who arrive via RV for a complete weekend experience. The tailgating experience has become a tradition for college football and many other collegiate and professional sports.

### ***Fan motivation***

Several studies have examined motivations in regards to sporting events in a variety of settings (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Trail & James, 2001; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; Wann, 1995). James et al (2001) found tailgating is a long-term pastime, the motivations behind it included social interaction with friends and family, atmosphere, and of course, the food and beverages consumed at the tailgate. Wann (1995) developed the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) in order to examine fandom amongst sport fans and included a number of possible motivations as to why individuals support a specific team or individual. Trail and James (2001) developed the Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) in order to examine motivations



of sport spectators and fans. The MSSC utilized many of the motivations from the SFMS and sought to increase the validity and reliability of the SFMS.

The aforementioned studies have identified the generally accepted motivations used in consumer research regarding sports. These are not stand alone dimensions as a combination of the factors could be influencing a person's decisions to take part in sport-related activities such as attending an event or participating in game-day activities. The motivations may vary by name and sport setting but there are 12 generally accepted motivations.

1. Social – an opportunity for interaction with others in the group or those with common interests (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Trail & James, 2001).
2. Family – the opportunity to spend time with (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995).
3. Escape – removal from daily activities, a change in daily routine, or a break from the normal schedule taking the focus away from the hectic daily responsibilities (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995).
4. Eustress – when the senses of an individual are stimulated or excited. Sport events create a sense of excitement for individuals with the anticipation of the match-up as well as the various activities occurring during the sporting event (Wann, 1995).
5. Group Affiliation – desire to be part of the group or associated with a team or individual Wann, 1995).
6. Entertainment – participating in the sport-related activity for enjoyment or fun (Wann, 1995).
7. Self-esteem –the feeling of pride when the team performs well (Wann, 1995).
8. Knowledge – being aware of information or statistics about the game, team, or athlete (Trail & James, 2001).
9. Economic – chances to gamble or place wagers on an event (Wann, 1995).
10. Aesthetics – appreciating and admiring the skill, grace, and ability of athletes and their performances in competition (Wann, 1995).
11. Game Attractiveness – the status of the event or something that will draw an individual to watch the event or athlete such as the World Cup or Super (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995).
12. Achievement – the feeling of triumph or success when the team or athlete is successful (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995).

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

Ajzen's (1985, 1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) set the foundation for this study The TPB is a modification of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which has been widely used in behavioral research (Ajzen, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991; Fishbein, 1967; Taylor & Todd, 1995). The components of attitude and subjective norms in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, 1967) are the basis for TPB with the addition of perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes, or behavioral beliefs, expose the positive or negative attitude toward or about a specific behavior (Hrubes, Ajzen, & Daigle, 2001). In addition, the higher the intent to perform the behavior, the more likely the individual is to actually complete the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Conner & Armitage, 1998; Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Hrubes et al., 2001). TPB is utilized within this study to understand the motivations of RV tailgaters to attend college football games (attitudes, subjective norms).

The TPB is comprised of three behavioral components used “to predict the intentions to engage in a specific behavior” (McCullough, 2013, p. 148). These intentions will eventually predict the behavior or action of the individual (Conner & Armitage, 1998; McCullough & Cunningham, 2011; McCullough, 2013). The three components consist of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Ajzen, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991; Cunningham & Kwon, 2003; Taylor & Todd, 1995). In this particular study, TPB can be used to predict the motivation of RV tailgaters to travel to college football games. Individuals compare the execution of a specific behavior (cost) to the possible outcome (benefit) which would determine if it is “worth it” to complete the action (McCullough, 2013). RV tailgaters must weigh the investment required to determine if the experience of traveling to a college football game in this capacity is worth it both in terms of cost and the time.

Social norms suggest that outside influences play a role in one’s decision of whether or not to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; McCullough, 2013). Tailgating is a ritual that fans enjoy with family and friends and adding an RV to the situation increases the pressure for others to join in with their own RV experiences. In contrast to attitudes, subjective norms is the pressure from outside sources to engage or not engage in a behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; McCullough, 2013). The individual is more likely to perform the behavior as the intent of an individual to perform a behavior increases and societal norms become more favorable (Ajzen, 1991; McCullough, 2013; McCullough & Cunningham, 2011). The final piece of TPB is perceived behavioral control (PBC). Ajzen (1991) refers to PBC as the “perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior” (p. 188) as individuals may factor in previous experiences in the decision (Bamberg, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2003; Cunningham & Kwon, 2003). Taylor and Todd (1995) add that PBC accounts for instances where the individual does not have complete control over the situation. For many college football fans, the reality of purchasing a RV and becoming part of the RV tailgater group can be difficult due to limited resources (i.e., time, income). Instead, these fans will engage in RV tailgating as a family or friend versus the owner of the RV.

The PBC piece of TPB consists of two components: facilitating conditions and self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991; Taylor & Todd, 1995). This component might be critical to the RV-goer since the “availability of resources needed to engage in a behavior” (Taylor & Todd, 1995, p. 139) is critical since RV experience and associated expenses can be costly. Secondly, self-efficacy is an individual’s certainty in the ability to execute the behavior (Taylor & Todd, 1995). PCB is concerned with the actual ability to engage in the behavior or activity and if an individual believes he or she can do it (McCullough & Cunningham, 2011; Taylor & Todd, 1995).

The TPB has been used in a variety of settings including sport. TPB has been used to examine the recycling behavior among sport fans and spectators as well as in a study on sport spectator’s behavior at youth sporting events (McCullough, 2013; McCullough & Cunningham, 2011). Cunningham and Kwon (2003) investigated the intentions of individuals to attend a sporting event, and this theory was utilized studying the intentions of becoming a head coach (Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006). Hrubes, Ajzen and Daigle (2001) examined the motivations of hunters, and Bamberg, Ajzen, and Schmidt (2003) used TPB to assess the travel mode chosen among travelers based on previous experiences.

### **Purpose**

Understanding the unique expectations and requirements of the typical college football RV tailgater will allow sport management professionals, athletic departments and city and regional

tourist departments provide these travelers with additional opportunities while in the area. In addition, many of these college football RV tailgaters might be willing to purchase season tickets and donate to the university's athletic department in order to reserve a RV tailgating spot on campus. This dedication to football, athletics and the university will bring this type of sport tourist to the area multiple times per season offering several opportunities to extend the trip. Limited research has been done on this group of tourists because the general RV population is typically nomadic and traveling at the ease and convenience to where ever they like (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011).

College football games bring the promise to bring thousands of spectators, fans and other people to the area. It is important to sport administrators to understand this group so they create better relationships with the local CVB and tourism boards. The purpose of the study is to determine who the RV tailgaters are and why they attend games. This study looks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the demographic profile of people who travel to college football games via RV?

RQ2: What are the motivations of RV tailgaters to travel to attend college football games?

## **Methods**

### ***Instrument***

The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) and the Motivation Scale for Sports Consumption (MSSC) provided the foundation for the instrument development (Trail & James, 2001, Schofield, 1983; Wann, 1995). The instrument measured eight motivational factors of eustress, escape, self-esteem, group affiliation, family, entertainment, achievement, and game attractiveness. The SFMS and MSSC included four other factors in addition to the eight previously listed. This study focused on the motivations as to why people were RV tailgaters so dimensions that measured actual event attendance were excluded. For example, aesthetics was not a motivation utilized in this study since the appearance and athletic ability of the athletes in the game were not related to traveling via RV. Twenty-five statements were used to measure the dimensions as respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 7-point scale anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree. Demographic questions were included.

### ***Data collection***

College communities reap the benefits of college football season by having up to eight weekends of booked hotels and tens of thousands of additional people spending money shopping and dining. These communities rely on this additional income and positive economic impact to boost the local economy each fall (Gibson et al., 2003). A sport tourist was defined for this study as someone who travels to the area with the primary intent to participate in game day activities in the RV parking section on the university's campus before, during, and after a college football game. In addition, any other fan that was part of the RV owner's party and/or traveled with the group was included in the study. Only those RVs parked in the campus designated parking lots were included in this study. All participants were 18 years of age or older.

The questionnaire was distributed at home college football games at four major universities in the same conference in the Southeastern portion of the United States. An institution was

deemed “major” by its athletic department’s membership in one of the Power 5 conferences with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Data collection was conducted during four different college football weekends at four different Division I FBS institutions in the Southeastern United States. Those that provided permission to survey determined the games and institutions selected to participate in the study so there were limitations involved in the data collection. The questionnaire was distributed via paper-and-pencil in order to gain the largest amount of participants possible. Most game weekend RV parking opened the day preceding (typically Friday) a home football game, however, two opened earlier in the week. Members of the research team solicited participation by those in the RV parking areas which resulted in 206 completed questionnaires.

## Results

The RV tailgater in this study was typically 46 or older with 64.5% of all respondents fitting this description and were mostly married (77.2%). More than half (50.6%) had a household income of more than \$100,000 per year with 32.3% of the respondents having household income of more than \$150,000 per year (see Table 1). All types of RVs were represented by the participants: travel trailer, 5th wheel, Class A, Class B, Class B+, Class C and Class Super C (see Table 2). The most common type of RV present was the Class A at 43% of all respondents. The majority (70.1%) indicated that they owned the RV in which they traveled.

**Table 1: Motivations**

Motivation
<b>Social Interaction</b> <i>Interaction with others in the group, sitting near during an event or just the chance to socialize with others (Trail &amp; James, 2001)</i>
<b>Family</b> <i>Spend time with family, it is important to tailgate as a family and experience time together (James, Breezeel, &amp; Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Escape</b> <i>Removal from daily activities or a change in daily routine, break from normal schedule (James, Breezeel, &amp; Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Eustress</b> <i>The senses of an individual are stimulated and excited (Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Group Affiliation</b> <i>The need to be a part of the group, avoid loneliness or alienation (Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Entertainment</b> <i>Seen as a pastime, does not require actual skill unlike being an athlete (Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Self-Esteem</b> <i>Feeling of triumph or success, especially when their team is successful/wins, fans will expand their connection with the team when it wins (Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Keeping up with the statistics (i.e., scores) of a team or athlete (Trail &amp; James, 2001)</i>
<b>Social</b> <i>Spend time with friends, especially those who may live far away and do not see often (James, Breezeel, &amp; Ross, 2001)</i>
<b>Economic</b> <i>The chance to gamble or place wagers on an event (Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Aesthetics</b> <i>The beauty of the game or athlete (Trail &amp; James, 2001; Wann, 1995)</i>
<b>Game Attractiveness</b> <i>The events, status or something that draws an individual to watch the game (Schofield, 1983; Wann &amp; Waddill, 2003)</i>



**Table 2: Demographics**

Characteristic	n	%
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	28	13.8
26-35	23	11.3
36-45	21	10.3
46-55	61	30.0
56-65	42	20.7
66-75	24	11.8
76 and older	4	2.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	32	15.5
Married	159	77.2
Domestic Partner	8	3.9
Widowed	1	0.5
Divorced	6	2.9
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$29,999	13	7.0
\$30,000 - \$39,999	9	4.8
\$40,000 - \$49,999	8	4.3
\$50,000 - \$59,999	9	4.8
\$60,000 - \$69,999	18	9.7
\$70,000 - \$79,000	9	4.8
\$80,000 - \$89,000	9	4.8
\$90,000 - \$99,000	17	9.1
\$100,000 - \$145,999	34	18.3
\$150,000 and up	60	32.3
<b>Alumni-Home Team</b>		
Yes	76	37.6
No	126	62.4
<b>Alumni-Visiting Team</b>		
Yes	13	6.7
No	182	93.3

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization was conducted to address RQ2. EFA is often used in the development of an instrument, but Costello and Osborne (2005) indicated that it can be used to investigate motivations. EFA has been utilized in other studies on motivations and perceptions (Huang & Hsu, 2009; Riaz, Rambli, Salleh, & Mushtaq, 2011; Sao & Green, 2008; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). This study utilized EFA to determine the motivations specific to the RV tailgater population. The orthogonal rotation—varimax—allowed for the distinct identification of each motivation (Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001).

Hair, Black, Babin, and Tatham (2005) and Yong and Pearce (2013) explained the importance of selecting the appropriate (i.e., not too many or too few) number of factors. Items with eigenvalues of 1.0 or higher were retained and the associated factors were identified (Kaiser, 1960). In addition, a scree test was analyzed to establish the natural break in the curve to select the dimensions. Five motivational

dimensions or factors expressed eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and explained 64.9% of the total variance (see Table 3). The five dimensions that resulted from the EFA were 1) game attractiveness, 2) achievement, 3) escape, 4) family, and 5) group affiliation.



**Table 3: RV Characteristics**

Characteristic	N	%
<b>RV Type</b>		
Travel Trailer <i>Towable, Size ranges from 9' to 40'</i>	37	20.6
5 <sup>th</sup> Wheel <i>Towable, Size ranges from 25' to 45'</i>	27	15.1
Motorhome: Class A <i>Most luxurious, amenities</i>	77	43.0
Motorhome: Class B <i>Camper/van</i>	2	1.1
Motorhome: Class B+ <i>Hybrid between Class B &amp; C</i>	6	3.4
Motorhome: Class C <i>Built on a truck platform</i>	20	11.2
Motorhome: Class Super C	4	2.2
Don't Know	6	3.4
<b>RV Ownership</b>		
Yes	143	70.1
No	44	21.6
Rent	17	8.3

## Discussion

The RVIA has shown that the typical RV owner is in their late 40s and has a median income of \$62,000 (RVIA.org, 2014). The RV tailgaters in this study were a slightly older than the typical RV owner. More than 60% of the respondents were older than 45 with most falling between the ages of 46 and 65. This corresponds with literature that indicates the RV owner is near or at retirement age (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011). As the RV owner nears and reaches retirement, the flexibility to travel and adjust travel plans will increase since there is no work schedule to modify. One institution's RV parking area allowed individuals to arrive as early as Sunday and stay the entire week or even the entire season. This allowed access to the parking area but it was limited to athletic donors and season ticket holders. All four RV parking areas visited had varying degrees of restrictions on those who were allowed to purchase a permit and park in the area. Two parking areas only allowed athletic donors to receive a permit and "spot" within the RV area. The other

two parking areas required the purchase of season tickets to receive a season permit and a guaranteed spot, but also offered individual game permits as well as permits for RV tailgaters for the visiting team. The slightly older age of the RV tailgaters in this study might be a result of acquiring more disposable income would allow the purchase of season tickets, a season permit and provide donations to the athletic department and university.

The RV tailgater, in most cases, must purchase season tickets or provide a donation to the athletic department in order to be eligible for a RV parking permit. The minimum donation amount varies by school to secure season tickets, priority parking permits and RV parking spots. Approximately 50% of the RV tailgaters in this study had a household income of \$100,000 or more with 32% of the total sample indicating an income of over \$150,000. These numbers greatly exceed the RVIA's median income of \$62,000. The higher income levels allow the RV tailgater the luxury to donate the minimum, or even more, to secure a season long RV permit. One institution requires a minimum donation in order to be placed on a waitlist for the RV space, but despite a donation, a spot is not guaranteed in the premium spaces closest to the stadium.

Other demographics determined through this study included marital status and alumni status. More than 75% of all respondents indicated that they were married. The demographic category that was most interesting was the alumni status of the home and visiting institutions. All participants were asked if they were alumni of the home as well as the visiting team. For both categories, the overwhelming majority—62.4% (home) and 93.3% (visiting)—indicated that they were not alumni. It was expected that more would be an alumni of the home team since most of the RV parking areas were heavily populated for the home team and the requirement to purchase season tickets and donate to secure a RV parking permit. Typically alumni want to give back to the university and athletics department. There is a sense of loyalty as well as various motivations of team success, benefits of better tickets and parking and the chance for social interaction increase the likelihood of donations (Billing et al., 1985; Gladden et al., 2005; Staurowsky et al., 1996; Verner et al., 1998). Roughly one third of the RV tailgaters were alumni of the home team. This presented an interesting question as to why so many followed and donated to an institution that they did not attend. One possible answer is another family member is the alumnus, but that would make one think that alumni numbers would be more even. The numbers for the visiting team were even more lopsided with just 6.7% of those participating indicated being alumni of the visiting team. Only two of the institutions offered RV parking to non-donors and one-game passes. This could explain the low number of respondents indicating alumni of the visiting team.

All RV tailgaters were asked about the ownership of the RV that was brought to campus. A small number of the RV tailgaters (8.3%) indicated they had rented the RV used for the weekend. These particular RV tailgaters indicated that one weekend was chosen each football season for the group to get together and travel to a new sport destination, tailgate and attend the game. They did not meet the typical RV demographic and were much younger in age, newer in their careers and not quite financially stable enough to carry the cost burden of owning and maintaining any type of RV. As expected, the majority (70.1%) of the RV tailgaters owned the RV that was used for the weekend. Those who own the RV expressed the importance of being able to bring their belongings, pets, and beds along for the trip. Several also indicated purchasing the RV for the sole purpose of attending college football games. Hardy & Gretzel (2011) explained the appeal to RV goers to bring possessions from home when traveling and it might reduce the stress of being gone for an extended period of time.

One institution's RV parking area hosted someone from the RV industry the evening before the home football game. This individual provided a meal for all RV tailgaters present as well as a number of products to be given away in a drawing. The prizes ranged from small kitchen items to storage covers for the RV. This presence may have been allowed because of the location and type of RV parking available. The RV parking area was built off-campus specifically for RV

tailgaters and was set up like a typical RV park instead of a traditional parking lot allotted for RVs during a home football game weekend. No other institution allowed outside individuals (those permitted to park in area or with the RV tailgater) into the parking area. This was a limitation in regards to data collection as well as the athletic department controlled if and when data could be collected.

### ***Motivational factors***

A number of motivation factors were identified regarding sport consumption, tourism, and RV travel during the conceptualization of this study. Eight motivation factors were determined to fit this study best after an examination of research on motivations to consume sport and included in the instrument. The goal of this study was to understand the motivations for the RV tailgater to travel to college football games with a RV and five factors emerged through the exploratory factor analysis: 1) game attractiveness, 2) achievement, 3) escape, 4) family and 5) group affiliation.

Game attractiveness accounted for the most variance and included 11 items from the questionnaire. This dimension was comprised of items from eustress, entertainment, game attractiveness, achievement and self-esteem. Not only does it include the excitement of highly ranked teams playing one another, but also the sense of pride and well-being from watching their favorite team compete. Rivalry games as well as match-ups of highly-ranked teams add a level of attractiveness to sport fans. Achievement is related to game attractiveness in that it creates a sense of pride and accomplishment when your team wins. Items from achievement, self-esteem and game attractiveness were collapsed into this dimension. Sport fans share the successes and losses of the team (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008). This type of vicarious achievement by sports fans brings students, fans and alumni together to watch and experience sport (Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003). Fans who highly identified with a specific team will expect the team to perform at a higher level (Trail et al., 2003). Everyone wants their team to perform well and win, especially during the “big game”, but some fans take it to another level and feel that sense of achievement or accomplishment when the team wins.

College football fans as well as much of society find themselves immersed in their work and personal lives and look to sport for an escape. Escape is removing oneself from the norm of our everyday schedules and routines (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995). RV tailgaters have the opportunity to escape the stress by spending the weekend on a college campus, enjoying family and friends and watching their favorite team compete for a win. Football fans often refer to other fans as their “family.” College football game weekends, tailgating and especially RV tailgating provide ample opportunities for alumni and fans to interact and spend quality time with their family. These weekend adventures allow individuals to experience the college campus and game day atmosphere together as a family (James, Breezeel, & Ross, 2001; Wann, 1995). Group affiliation provides an outlet for fans to be part of their intimate group, but the entire fan base (Wann, 1995). Students, alumni, family and friends associated with the university all have one thing in common: the love of the institution. During the game, fans often high-five one another when something great happens, regardless if they know the person next to them or not. These three motivations are very closely related in that RV tailgaters want to escape the hectic work week and spend it with family and friends enjoying college football and tailgating.

Game attractiveness encompasses several areas including the entertainment value of the event, closeness of competition, and excitement among others. It accounted for 32.8% of the

variance in the EFA. Athletic departments typically have differential prices for games throughout the season with the marquee match-ups bringing more per ticket than a non-conference opponent. Match-ups between two highly ranked opponents or rivals within a conference allow athletic departments to raise the ticket price since the demand is high. Due to the high demand, more tickets and additional concessions will be sold during the game. Marquee match-ups may only be available to season ticket holders and not to the general public. The demand and desire to see these high profile games in person create the need for fans to purchase season tickets. When a game is highly attractive the outside influences (i.e., societal norms) increase toward an individual and the pressure increases to attend the game. Fans don't want to miss a highly anticipated match-up, especially in the case of a win. The RV tailgater will most likely have season tickets to the game since many RV parking spaces on campuses have made this a stipulation to even be considered for a spot.

The excitement of the game can be expanded beyond the game for the RV tailgater. The ability to arrive on a Friday, or earlier in some situations, and tailgate the entire weekend allows for the excitement to build throughout the weekend as the game approaches. Once the game ends the excitement is extended through the remainder of the weekend without the fan ever needing to leave campus. As the RV tailgater, once all food and beverages are purchased for the weekend, there is no need to leave campus. The community will not reap the economic benefits of additional travelers if they have pre-purchased groceries for the weekend. However, if CVBs and other tourism authorities in the area understand this traveler and the reasons for coming to the area, they can find different ways to market the RV tailgater and entice them to stay longer in a local RV park.

Fans of a given sport team will feel a sense of achievement or accomplishment when good things happen with their favorite team, especially when the team wins. Achievement was the next biggest dimension from the EFA and accounted for 11.7% of the variance. Within this dimension, the RV tailgaters felt like they won or were winners when their team won. This is interesting as most of the RV tailgaters were not alumni of the home or visiting team. Some sort of identification with the team has occurred in the past whether it is a family member, son or daughter, or just a fondness for the team in question. People like to feel good about themselves and the teams they follow, so when the team or institution is successful, it makes alumni feel good about themselves.

Fans, including RV tailgaters, often enjoy sporting events because it gives them the opportunity to escape from the everyday struggles and stress of life. No one is immune to life's daily stresses and they vary from person to person. Sport is a great chance to escape the stresses, even if it is just for a few hours while attending a sporting event. RV tailgaters have the chance to escape the daily stresses for more than just the few hours of the game, but for the entire weekend. The event itself provides a temporary reprieve from the hectic day-to-day battles (Wann, Bilyeu, Brennan, Osborn, & Gambouras, 1999; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008). Another study has shown that fans consume sport and sport information as well as shopping online as a diversion from daily stresses (Hur, Ko, & Valacich, 2007). Hur et al. (2007) states that "diversion is measured by capturing perceptions of pleasure, willing to escape from daily work, and enjoyment when using sport-related Web sites" (p. 525).

As RV tailgaters, the opportunity to spend the weekend on a college campus, enjoying sport, family and friends is a perfect example and opportunity to escape the struggles of daily life and work. Spending the weekend with family, friends and other fans of the same team can provide the escape needed to balance out the stressors in life (Chen & Funk, 2010; Gibson & Yiannakis,



2002). The subjective norms—or the pressures from others—are present in RV tailgating. Individuals feel the pressures from family and friends to take a break from the daily routine to attend the game and RV tailgate. This aspect of TPB creates future RV tailgaters as they escape the stress and enjoy the camaraderie and festivities of RV tailgating. These RV tailgaters will experience the uniqueness of the RV tailgate—accommodations, kitchen, bathroom—and formulate a plan to one day become a RV tailgater. In addition to the sporting event, the flexibility of the RV allows the RV tailgater to spend more time in the area resulting in a need to find additional recreational activities. This is beneficial to the community—both city and university—since additional tourism and entertainment dollars will be spent in the area. Many areas have museums, outdoor parks and numerous other attractions to offer. When the university and city work together and understand the RV tailgater, appropriate travel information can be provided to the RV tailgater along with information for other RV parks within the area for either before or after the game weekend.

RV tailgaters expressed the importance of the opportunity to be with family and friends while having a comfortable place to tailgate and spend the weekend without the need to travel from hotel to campus for the weekend (James et al., 2001; Wann, 1995). It provided a “home base” for people to meet, visit, spend time with each other, eat a little and have a place to rest. The ease of having the RV on campus, within walking distance of the stadium, provided more time to tailgate before the game and a place to gather immediately following the game. Fans of a particular collegiate team want to be involved with the team and be part of the experience. RV tailgating provides an opportunity for fans to meet societal norms of attending and participating in tailgate activities. While not all RV tailgaters attend the game, the prospect of seeing family and friends throughout the weekend is a reason to be a RV tailgater.

Another reason fans enjoy sporting events is to spend time with family (Smith & Stewart, 2010). While not all members may be a fan of sport, a team following creates a time for family to get together and enjoy each other’s company. Allegiances are often created toward specific teams based on family history, a family member attending the university or having some type of affiliation with the university (Raney, 2006). In relation to the attitude dimension of TPB, the RV tailgater will travel to the destination and tailgate but may not necessarily attend the game. The reason for travel is solely to see and visit family. This cost-benefit allows the RV tailgater to see a new destination, visit family and friends while still having the convenience of the RV. This RV tailgater might stay at the RV during the game despite subjective norms of attending the game with the group.

Finally, group affiliation is the enjoyment of being part of the group. At sporting events you have your personal group of friends to tailgate and have fun with, but you also have the larger group of the entire fan base as well. In essence, you have the “desire to identify with something bigger than oneself” (Smith & Stewart, 2010, p. 161). Fans of a specific sport team will have some things in common as it relates to the fandom of the team. Despite having different backgrounds, the shared idea of watching your team and experiencing the sport allows individuals to be part of “the group.” The RV tailgater might bring all members of the family to the tailgate along with close friends as well as some new friends. Not all members of the tailgating party may be interested in the outcome or experience of the game, but the time spent and camaraderie experienced over the weekend is important to feeling part of the group. PCB is the individual’s ability to engage in a particular behavior. A majority of the RV tailgaters in this study have found a way to become RV owners and active RV tailgaters due to the age and income demographics of this group. The older age, which provides flexibility in time off from work, coupled with higher

incomes has allowed individuals to not only purchase a type of RV, but also the ability to secure college football season tickets and a reserved RV parking space for the duration of the season.

TPB was utilized to understand the motivations for attending sporting events (attitudes, subjective norms) and traveling to the sporting events with a recreational vehicle (subjective norms and perceived behavioral control). Cunningham and Kwon (2003) looked at the need for a theoretical base for TPB within sport management. Motivations were looked at using TPB and they discussed how the three aspects of TPB—attitudes, societal norms and PBC—were different for sport rather than exercise science settings. They also found a “positive relationship between attitudes towards a team and intentions to attend a game” (Cunningham & Kwon, 2003, p 140). In relation to this study, when RV tailgaters and fans feel part of the group and experience achievement by their team, they are more likely to travel to, attend the game and RV tailgate with other followers of their team. Funk, Haugtvedt and Howard (2000) examined various theories used for behavior intentions and motivations. TPB shows that attitudes added in the anticipation of a behavior thus creating the motivations for future actions. RV tailgaters enjoy the experience of RV tailgating (attitude), they often feel the need and want to be part of the tailgating experience (societal norms) and eventually will be motivated to purchase their own RV and join the RV tailgating experience on a seasonal basis (PBC).

Sport fandom is evident in all sports around the world. Sport fans—and nostalgic sport tourists—will purchase various types of memorabilia to commemorate their team and to remember the experience (Hughson & Free, 2006). Due to the lack of literature on RV tailgating, it is difficult to assess if RV tailgating is a phenomenon in other parts of the world for soccer or any other international sport. This study could provide a foundation to build on research in other parts of the United States and the world on being who travel via RV to sporting events.

### ***Implications***

The RV tailgater has been provided a unique way to experience college football, the tailgate and the overall game-day experience. Societal norms have shown that tailgating is part of the general game day activities. When anyone mentions college or professional football, the tailgate and all included food and activities are also part of the conversation. However, many do not mention the experience of the RV tailgater.

This study has provided insight as to “who” the RV tailgater is and how this group compares to previous studies on sport fan consumption, motivations and RV owners and travelers. This knowledge will allow CVBs and universities to provide a better game day and weekend experience for the RV tailgater. While many motivations have been identified for sport fans in general, the motivations specific to RV tailgaters have been identified. Understanding which motivations are important to the RV tailgater will allow both the institution and the city or CVB to spend marketing dollars in a more efficient way to entice repeat travel to the area and not just for a sport event. For example, RV tailgaters are interested in spending time with others and escaping the daily hassles of work. When CVBs and athletic departments are working together, a package can be created and offered to RV tailgaters to extend their stay and take in the local attractions and museums.

Cities and universities often work independent of one another when attracting individuals to the area. The cities are looking to bring new and repeat tourists to the area while universities are looking to attract new students. However, with these students, come the family and friends as well. This can translate to new dollars spent in the local community for everyday living but also

include sporting events and game weekends. The CVBs often are tasked with attracting new events to the area, but also tourists.

University athletic departments should work with the local CVB to market to the RV tailgater. These sport tourists often have the flexibility to adjust their travel schedule without much additional cost since their travel vehicle is also their accommodations. Now that the demographics of the RV tailgater are known, it will be easier for CVBs to provide information on specific attractions that are popular to similar demographics. For example, travel or admission packages can be created to entice the RV tailgater to stay beyond the game weekend and visit local museums, wineries, or other attractions. Athletic departments could be the vehicle to distribute the tourism information to all individuals who purchase the RV parking permit.

Many institutions are located within larger cities and are bound by other areas of the city and cannot add additional parking areas for tailgaters or RV tailgaters. The athletic department and CVB can provide information to potential RV tailgaters – specifically those for the away team – about RV parks located off campus, but within the area. This information could be administered via email or postal mail, depending on the contact preferences of the individual. The athletic department stands to gain as well. If the RV tailgater has a good experience on campus and in the community, the likelihood of return travel as well as season ticket and permit purchase will increase.

The athletic department has an opportunity to provide services to the RV tailgater. The RV tailgater may or may not bring another mode of transportation to campus. This could severely limit travel and spending in other areas of the city or region if no other vehicle is available for the RV tailgater to leave the RV parking area. Some potential services could be a grocery service. This service would allow the RV tailgater to select needed groceries, paper goods or other needed items from a predetermined list of items. The items would be purchased and available to the RV tailgater during set-up preventing providing a stress-free option to get needed supplies that were either forgotten or needed to be purchased upon arrival. Fans often want to document their trip by purchasing athletic merchandise on the trip. A traveling bookstore or cart located within the RV tailgating area would allow fans to purchase a new t-shirt or hat for the game. Both of these options allow for additional spending in the area and benefit both the city (i.e., taxes) and the athletic department (i.e., sales revenue).

Few studies have been conducted where the RV tailgater at a college football game was included as a specific part of the sample. Those who attended the game with an RV were used as a way to distinguish parking privileges for the fans versus the reasons and motivations for attending and tailgating with a RV (Gibson et al., 2003). It is important to understand this subculture of college football fans and sports in general.

### ***Limitations***

Only four institutions were utilized for this study. This limited the number of potential RV tailgaters who could be invited to participate. Another possible limitation is the day of data collection. All data were collected on a Friday before the home game. In theory this made sense so as not to interfere with game day activities and the potential to get more individuals willing to participate. However, in reality, very few of the RV tailgaters actually arrived on the Friday before the game. Since game start times are typically announce one to two weeks in advance, it was difficult to determine the best game weekend for data collection.



In all four instances, the game start time was the following evening which might have led to more people traveling Friday evenings and arriving very late or traveling early Saturday morning. The late game start time may have affected the number of potential participants for the study. In the future, data collection should be done on Saturday, or game day, to maximize the number of possible participants. Many of the participants indicated that more people would be tailgating with them on Saturday. It would also perhaps be beneficial to collect data at specific games to determine if the motivations vary, e.g. rivalry games, homecoming, season-openers.

Gaining access to the RV parking areas was another limitation. One of the institutions only allowed access during a specific set time in order to comply with their non-solicitation rules. Fridays before a home game, local sponsors provide a dinner to all those in the RV parking area. The RV park president only allowed permission to seek participants at this dinner. Many potential participants were hesitant to participate and left immediately following the dinner and door prizes. The lack of opportunity at this site solicit participation hindered the amount of completed surveys collected at the institution. Another institution allowed permission to seek participants, but restricted the number and location of RV parking areas allowed to visit. While this restriction actually provided a mix of season and individual game permit holders, it may have altered the demographics of the group since season tickets were not required to purchase a permit for the designate lots. Also, other parking lots on the campus were reserved for high dollar donors, which were not represented in the sample from this particular institution.

### ***Future research***

The idea of the RV tailgater is new and will require additional research to learn more about this group of individuals. Sport tourism is still a growing area of research but lends itself to learning more about the RV tailgater. To learn more about the RV tailgater, future studies should include more institutions within the same conference to better generalize and learn about the RV tailgating population. College football is popular throughout the United States, but is considered a way of life in the South. This study focused on college football in the South, particularly a high profile conference.

The RVIA found that RV owners are most likely from the Pacific Northwest. Looking at the RV tailgater in other regions of the United States is important to learning more about who these individuals are and why they are motivated to travel to college football games with a RV. The comparison of RV tailgaters across the Power 5 Division I FBS conferences would give insight into the group. It would also be helpful to understand how they are different across the country because each CVB will need to market their area differently based on the characteristics of the RV tailgaters and tourists for the area. Research should also examine if the RV tailgaters are participating in other activities either prior to the game or in the days past the game.

In addition to applying the study to different potential RV tailgaters across the United States, the information collected from this and future studies could be examined through the lens of different theories. For example, expectant value theory could look at the social behaviors of RV tailgaters along with the identified motivations for the group. Future research might also include utilizing destination image as a moderator between the factors identified and satisfaction and behavioral intentions.



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