Status Seeking in Conspicuous Spectator Sports Consumption: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

Yong Wang

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STATUS SEEKING IN CONSPICUOUS SPECTATOR SPORTS CONSUMPTION: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

According to self-determination theory, people are intrinsically and/or extrinsically motivated to self-regulate their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Sport fans watch games for intrinsic rewards such as having fun and supporting a team, which, from the identity fusion perspective (Swann Jr et al., 2009), derive from their visceral sense of oneness with a team. Although they can choose to watch games at home, many fans spend money attending expensive games (e.g., major sports) and publicly display their experience. A plethora of sport management literature has addressed the intrinsic motivation for attending games; however, less attention has been paid to the extrinsic motivation systematically. Drawing on Veblen’s concept of conspicuous consumption (1899/2007), this study attempted to explore the meanings of fans’ public display of their game attendance and how motivation for conspicuous consumption influences their intention to attend games.

Specifically, the study aimed to (a) know whether sport fans perceive attending major sports as conspicuous consumption and whether they practice conspicuous consumption when attending games, (b) explore the meanings (dimensions) of conspicuous consumption as extrinsic motivation for attending major sports games, and (c) test the moderating effect of
conspicuous consumption on attending future games. In addition, in this exploratory study, demographic group differences in motivation for conspicuous consumption were also studied.

The study was contextualized in the NFL and consisted of a pre-test (N=80) and the main study (N=535) using the online survey method. The pre-test confirmed the conspicuousness of attending NFL games in the eyes of American football fans. In the main study, Marcoux et al.’s (1995, 1997) five-factor conspicuous consumption model (materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, social status demonstration, interpersonal mediation, and ostentation) was adapted to extract the meanings of conspicuous spectator sport consumption. As a result, this study identified a two-factor model: Social Status Demonstration for Interpersonal Mediation and Materialistic Hedonism to explain the meanings of extrinsic motivation for attending NFL games (rather than watching mediated games). Further analysis revealed that Social Status Demonstration for Interpersonal Mediation and Materialistic Hedonism positively impact fans’ intentions to attend future games, primarily on fans with a lower level of identity fusion with the team. Social Status Demonstration for Interpersonal Mediation alone does not improve their motivation for future games, but Materialistic Hedonism does, possibly because fans’ intrinsic motivation must be the premise. Lastly, gender, age, income, education, and marital status affected participants’ perceptions of conspicuous consumption in NFL game attendance.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Consuming spectator sports is one of the most popular leisure activities in the world. In the United States, the four major sports—the National Football Association (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Hockey League (NHL)—epitomize the popularity of spectator sports that draw countless fans’ attention domestically and internationally. When it comes to watching sports, many fans must choose between attending games and watching mediated sports (e.g., at home and bars). For instance, in 2021, more than 18 million fans attended NFL games (Pro Football Reference, 2021), and many more people watched the most popular sport in the America through cable networks and the Internet. It is hard to obtain the exact number of fans watching mediated sports, but the revenue streams can reflect the size of the two segments. For instance, the NFL generated a revenue of $17.19 billion in 2021, with the biggest portion coming from broadcasting rights, about $11 billion (Gough, 2021a).

Although the revenue from broadcasting rights contributes the most to the bottom line of the major sport franchises in the current professional sport business landscape in the United States, the per capita expenditure on watching mediated sports is a fraction of the amount fans must pay for their trip to the game. For example, the average cost for a family of four attending NFL regular season games was about $568.18 in 2021 (Gough, 2021b), making it the most expensive major sport to attend. Similar patterns exist in other major sports. The cheapest cost for a family of four attending NBA Hornets’ games was $237.55, and the most expensive visit for a family of four was the Knicks’ games,
$936.72 in 2021 (Shea, 2022). The cost increases as the importance of the sport games increases, such as the NFL Super Bowl, NBA Finals, MLB World Series, and NHL’s Stanley Cup. Given the differences between how much they pay for consuming spectator sports, one general question arises: why would many fans be willing to pay the hefty price and take all the effort into the game when they can stay at home watching the game comfortably at a lower cost instead?

As much as researchers in mainstream marketing are interested in knowing what factors play a role in consumers’ purchase decision-making (Goldsmith et al., 1996), sport marketing researchers are eager to know what influences sport consumers’ decision-making (Foroughi et al., 2016; Kim & Mao, 2021; Kwak & Kang, 2009; McDonald et al., 2002; Trail & James, 2001). Whether attending games or watching mediated sport, the motivation for watching games falls on the intrinsic end of the continuum of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012). That is, sport fans watch games for inherent rewards and benefits such as entertainment, supporting the team, and socialization (McDonald et al., 2002). From a marketing perspective, attending games and watching mediated sport are two products that provide a similar function to satisfy sport fans’ wants. From an economic perspective, many fans must make a tradeoff between attending games and watching mediated sport. It is highly possible that for most fans, attending games is a no-brainer. Unfortunately, price is the primary reason for keeping many fans outside the stadium (Larkin et al., 2015). Fans who attend games likely talk about it with others before and after the visit or post their visit on social media platforms and expect reactions and feedback from others, a behavior that can fall on the
extrinsic side of the self-determination continuum—external rewards and benefits such as impressing others through wealth display, forming conspicuous consumption.

The concept of conspicuous consumption was coined by economist Thorstein Veblen more than 100 years ago. In classical *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen described that people publicly display expensive consumer products to show off their financial capability in front of others for social status, resulting in self-image and self-esteem enhancement (Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 1899/2007). It was mainly an economist tradition to study this phenomenon, but it has gained popularity in marketing, sociology, and other fields. Many researchers believe that consumers’ preference for a product/brand is not only influenced by what the product can solve a practical issue (intrinsic utility) but also by the conspicuous (extrinsic) utility (Basman et al., 1988; Belk, 1985; Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Correia et al., 2016; Mason, 1981; Memushi, 2013; O’cass & McEwen, 2004; Page, 1992; Phillips & Back, 2011; Sundie et al., 2011). Within this framework, conspicuous consumption is preconditioned by luxury, scarcity, and exclusiveness to very few people (Bourne, 1957; Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Trigg, 2001). A wide range of consumption has been examined under the concept, including luxury vehicles (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Sundie et al., 2011), designer’s fashion (Goldsmith et al., 1996; Wang & Griskevicius, 2014), brand products (Huang & Wang, 2018), private education (Ozkan-Pir & Karaduman, 2017; Vick, 2007), and tourism (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018, 2019; Carr, 2005; Correia et al., 2016; Phillips & Back, 2011; Song et al., 2022). Nevertheless, conspicuous consumption has less been explored in spectator sports, even though attending high-profile sports like major sports is luxurious.
Sport consumption permeates many aspects of people’s life. Sport fans have two roles in sport consumption: one is the active role as they play sports, and the other is the passive role as they spectate sports (Rancière, 2021). Researchers have realized that people may use sport participation (particularly lifestyle sports) to display their wealth-related social status (Coakley & Pike, 2014; Song et al., 2022). However, little effort has been made to understand the meanings of conspicuous consumption behind spectating sports to fans, who need to impress others using wealth, success, and prestige, dubbed as status seekers by Packard (1961). Marketing researchers in the quantitative paradigm usually use scales to measure the dimensions of a construct. Marcoux et al. (1995, 1997) were among the first scholars who contributed to scale development to fulfill such research needs in measuring conspicuous consumption. Marcoux et al. (1995, 1997) identified five dimensions within conspicuous consumption: materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, social status demonstration, interpersonal mediation, and ostentation. This scale has been applied to test the influence of conspicuous consumption on consumers’ decision-making in many cultural contexts and consumption segments (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; O’cass & McEwen, 2004; Phillips & Back, 2011). This study was to apply Marcoux et al.’s scale to explore the underlying meanings of conspicuous consumption in spectating sport in sport fans’ life, which can help improve the understanding of how fans can be extrinsically motivated to attend games.

Watching sport is usually intrinsically motivated as fans self-categorize themselves into sport groups (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Heere & James, 2007; Lock & Heere, 2017; Tajfel, 1982; Turner & Reynolds, 2011). However, sport researchers may disagree on which theory best conceptualizes the relationship between fans and the team.
Since high-cost consumption is the focus, this study attempts to conceptualize sport fans’ relationship with the team using identity fusion theory. Identity fusion theory (Buhrmester & Swann Jr, 2015; Gómez et al., 2011; Swann Jr et al., 2009) suggests that individuals conduct certain costly pro-group behavior to display not only their group identity but also personal identity because social self and personal self are porous and work together to guide pro-group behavior. With the identity fusion framework, sport fans are willing to spend a good amount of money to support the team because it is how they can best communicate the group essence of being fans. Group essence can be those shared personally and socially self-defining experiences and qualities (Buhrmester et al., 2018), such as commitment, loyalty, knowledge about the sport, and experience, distinguishing them from peer fans and outgroup members who cannot do the same.

**Statement of Problem**

The study aimed to apply the concept of conspicuous consumption in spectating sports and explore the extrinsic motivation in fans’ intention to attend games in the United States. Specifically, this study was contextualized in the NFL and attempted to (a) know whether fans perceive attending major sports as conspicuous consumption and whether they practice conspicuous consumption, (b) explore the meanings (dimensions) of conspicuous consumption as extrinsic motivation for attending major sports, and (c) test the moderating effect of conspicuous consumption on attending future games. Based on self-determination theory, a conceptual model was provided in Figure 1 to illustrate the framework for attending major sport games in the United States.

[Insert Figure 1]
To that end, the present study consisted of a pre-test and the main study. In the pre-test, the study tried to gain empirical evidence to answer two questions as follows:

*RQ1*: Do American sport fans consider consuming major sport games (e.g., the NFL) conspicuous?

*RQ2*: Do American sport fans consider attending major sport games (e.g., the NFL) more conspicuous than watching mediated games at home?

After the pre-test, the main study was conducted to answer the following questions and hypotheses:

*RQ3*: Do sport fans share their experience of attending major sport games (e.g., the NFL) when (3a) talking to others and (3b) on social media?

*RQ4*: Which dimensions of conspicuous consumption in the literature are relevant for sport fans’ motivation for attending expensive major sport games (e.g., the NFL)?
**H1:** Identity fusion with sport teams will be positively related to attending major sports (e.g., the NFL).

**H2.** Conspicuous consumption will be positively related to attending major sports (e.g., the NFL).

**H3:** Conspicuous consumption will interact with identity fusion to affect fans’ intention to attend games.

**H4:** Consumers with different demographics have different perceived levels of conspicuous consumption in spectating sports (e.g., the NFL).

**Delimitations of the Study**

First, this study focused on spectator sports, in which fans play a passive role and seek the vicarious achievement of the sport team, different from fans who play an active role in sport participation (Rancière, 2021), such as those who fly to golf and skiing resorts for leisure involvement for health (Song et al., 2022).

Second, this study was contextualized in major sports (e.g., NFL), which may differ from other spectator sports like college sports, individual sports, and prominent championships.

Third, this study was conducted using American NFL fans, which may not generalize to other populations in the United States or sport fans in other countries.

Fourth, this study used Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for data collection.

**Significance of the Study**

Researchers have conducted extensive studies on understanding the motivation for spectating sport consumption in the theoretical development of sport consumer behavior (Funk & James, 2004; McDonald et al., 2002; Wann, 1995). From a self-
determination perspective, extant literature has primarily focused on the intrinsic utility of spectator sports based on sport identity (Kim & Mao, 2021; McDonald et al., 2002; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). The conspicuous (extrinsic) utility has less been systematically addressed. The present study made an initial effort to apply the concept of conspicuous consumption to the major sports in the United States, providing insights into this highly visible consumption choice.

The study empirically tested conspicuous consumption in major sports. The results confirmed that publicly displaying consuming major sports (e.g., the NFL) in the United States is conspicuous. While attending games is important to display the essence of being sport fans, equally important is that fans want to use their spectating experience to impress others, particularly on their personal success and wealth. Such findings further informed important implications for sport managers to understand how extrinsic motivation may drive sport fans to attend games.

Moreover, this study conceptualized the psychological connection between fans and the sport team using identity fusion theory (Swann Jr et al., 2009). Identity fusion underpins sport fans’ willingness (intrinsic motivation) to support the team financially, so their pro-team consumption manifests their high loyalty and commitment to the team and their personal self. Through such an argument, this study took one step further to look at ingroup variance and its impact on conspicuous spectator sports consumption. To the author’s best knowledge, this study was the first to adopt identity fusion theory in sport management research (except for in sociology), which may provide a fresh perspective of understanding sport consumption that has been extensively studied using the popular
social identity framework (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Lock & Heere, 2017; Turner, 1999).

The third significance of the study is the contribution to the literature on conspicuous consumption study, particularly in the field of experiential purchase for self-expression. Existing literature on experiential purchase has a particular interest in identity revealing through their consumption choice but often takes price away from the equation because either price is hard to measure (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Phillips & Back, 2011) or the elite class is not willing to admit their showing off financial status (Mason, 1981). This study provided a balanced view of the conspicuousness of game attendance. That is, in an identity-driven consumption like attending expensive sport games, consumers may also be motivated to seize the opportunity to display social status.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Overview of the Section

The study attempted to explore conspicuous consumption in spectating sport and how motivation for conspicuous consumption influences sport fans’ intention to attend games. In this chapter, the present study first reviewed self-determination theory to provide a framework for the study. Second, the study reviewed the literature on the relationship between fans and sport teams, as an intrinsic motivation for attending games. Social identity theory was reviewed and criticized before identity fusion theory was introduced. Third, the study would review conspicuous consumption as an extrinsic motivation for attending games. Social status, the meaning of conspicuous consumption, and demographic determinants would be the focus.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 2012) is a macro-theory of human motivation that has been extensively used to study cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences of different types of motivation. SDT posits three general motivation forces: (a) intrinsic motivation, or the drive for individuals’ fulfillment and growth plays an important role in motivating people to conduct a behavior, (b) extrinsic motivation, or people perform an activity in order to attain some separatable outcomes that are different from inherent satisfaction of the activity itself, such as reward and avoiding punishment, and (c) amotivation, or a lack of intent to engage in a behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 2012). Amotivation is least relevant to this study.
**Intrinsic motivation.** The positive potential of human nature can be best reflected in intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 1992). Those elements of intrinsic motivation are essential to individuals’ growth, development, and enjoyment throughout life (Ryan, 1995). According to cognitive evaluation theory (CET; Deci & Ryan, 1985b), a sub-theory of SDT, intrinsic motivation focuses on three fundamental psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence is related to the feeling of efficaciousness in producing desired outcomes. However, the sense of competence will not strengthen intrinsic motivation unless accompanied by the feeling of ownership in one’s action (De Charms, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). Therefore, people must perceive not only the internal locus of causality but also their behavior as self-determined to ensure the existence of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within a given social environment, the sense of competence and autonomy creates a meaningful relationship between an individual and others (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). Thus, intrinsic motivation maintenance and enhancement need supportive conditions because it can be easily disrupted without external support (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relatedness, the third factor in CET, refers to the interpersonal dynamics in which intrinsic motivation is more likely to flourish in contexts characterized by a sense of security and relatedness. People may argue that relatedness with others is not necessary for intrinsic motivation because many intrinsically motivated behaviors can be performed in an isolated environment. However, a secure relational base is essential for the expression of intrinsic motivation to be noticeable (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
CET emphasizes the significance of social and environmental factors in intrinsic motivation. Researchers are fascinated by the dichotomy of autonomy versus control rather than competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Normally, positive social and environmental outcomes like rewards, choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, negative social and environmental outcomes like threats, deadlines, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals dimmish intrinsic motivation. Nonetheless, the effect of extrinsic motivation on intrinsic motivation is debatable. Many also believe that extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation, which, according to Deci (1975), diminishes autonomy because people feel a more external perceived locus of causality.

**Extrinsic motivation.** However, much of people’s behavior is extrinsically motivated. The focus of extrinsic motivation is how an individual acquires and carries out the motivation and how the motivation affects perceived autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Deci and Ryan (1985a) proposed organismic integration theory and provided four types of extrinsically motivated behaviors based on the extent to which their regulation is autonomous: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

External regulation refers to behavior regulated by external forces such as pay, rewards, or coercive pressures. This type of regulation is the least autonomous. In external regulations, individuals typically experience externally regulated behaviors as controlled or alienated, and their actions have an external perceived locus of causality (De Charms, 2013), compared to the internal perceived locus of causality in intrinsic motivation.
Introjected regulation refers to the situation in which individuals take in a regulation but not fully accept it as their own. It is a relatively controlled form of regulation in which behaviors are performed to avoid negative consequences such as guilt and anxiety or to obtain ego enhancements such as pride and success, called contingent self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). Therefore, such behavior is not authentically self-determined.

Identified regulation is a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation and refers to a conscious valuing of a behavioral goal or regulation. People tend to accept the action and place a certain amount of personal importance on it (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Despite the instrumental and non-process-oriented nature of this type of motivation, the activity will be pursued out of choice.

Integrated regulation occurs when the identified regulations are fully assimilated to the self, or the extrinsic motivation is in harmony with other aspects of the self, such as values and needs.

Self-Determination Theory in Sport

SDT has been a useful framework to guide a broad variety of motivation-related outcomes in various settings, including sport participation and eSport participation (Qian et al., 2022; Standage & Ryan, 2020; Vlachopoulos et al., 2000). Within the framework of SDT, intrinsically motivated behavior is typified by participating in an activity for inherent pleasure and satisfaction. Hence, the motivation for sport participation essentially lies in the process of participation rather than in the derived external reward or avoidance of negative consequences associated with non-participation (Vlachopoulos et
al., 2000). However, when someone participates in an activity to gain external rewards or avoid negative consequences, it indicates extrinsic motivation.

In addition to the active role in sport participation, people can be sport fans who are interested in watching others play. Unlike the active role in a sport where individuals have control of their own body and action (autonomy), perceive their own competency, and foster their own relatedness with relevant stakeholders, sport fans think they “own” the team or are part of the team, but have no control of the team, perceive their competency using the team’s competency, and relate themselves with athletes, teams, and other fans, so they obtain vicarious success from spectating sport consumption. Extant literature on the relationship between fans and the team argues that individuals adopt a sport identity by integrating a sport team into their self-concept, and such internalization process helps form positive attitudes toward the sport team (Funk & James, 2004; Kolbe & James, 2003). Amiot et al., (2014) used SDT and social identity theory to explain and predict that highly internalized fans are more likely to conduct derogatory behaviors toward the opposing team and fans as they endorse it freely and out of choice. These studies suggest that the relationship between fans and the team is a good indicator of fans’ intrinsic motivation for watching spectating sports.

**Intrinsic Motivation for Watching Sport**

According to SDT, the intrinsic motivation for watching spectating sport is seeking intrinsic enjoyment of watching spectating sport, which can be moderated by the outcome (win or loss of the team fans support) of the game (Van Leeuwen et al., 2002). Fans and the sport team are separate entities. Research on the motivation of supporting a team has been primarily focused on relationship marketing using the social identity
approach that consists of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner & Reynolds, 2011).

**Social Identity Approach**

Social psychologists believe that people possess personal identity (i.e., aspects of self that distinguish individuals from others) and social identity (i.e., being a group member) to reflect their self-concept. Within the popular social identity framework (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987), individuals identify with a social group based on their knowledge of the group and the level of alignment of themselves and the social group, so they congregate as group members, which is helpful to explain intergroup relations (ingroup vs. outgroup). As identification increases, social identity eclipses personal identity, so people see themselves as group members and take prototypical behavior to reflect the group norms rather than their own thoughts (Hogg & Hardie, 1992).

**Sport Identity.** Stems from the social identity framework, sport identity has dominated the research on the relationship between fans and sport entities (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Lock & Heere, 2017). Sport identity can be of different levels. Team identification has been most discussed in the literature, but athlete identification (Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Lee et al., 2015) and league identification (Wang et al., 2022) have also been discussed. Through depersonalization, sport fans identify with a team, and their team-related consumption is considered robotic and prototypical (Hogg, 2001b; Turner, 1999), such as cheering for the team. Thus, team identity has been a useful construct to explain and predict sport fans’ behavior, including the intention to attend games and watch mediated sport (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Fink et al., 2009; Lock & Heere,
purchase team licensed products (Kwon et al., 2007), and perceive higher service quality (Gau et al., 2007). Fans obtain vicarious success through the team’s success (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Jensen et al., 2016), so they feel that their group is superior to the opponent in the sport competition (Stets & Burke, 2000). Sport fans tend to form biased points toward their own athletes, team, and the sport, so sport identity can also provide the buffer effect during negative events. For instance, when sport entities are involved in adversary incidents, such as an athlete’s transgression, fans with higher identification are more likely to forgive the athlete (Fink et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2015).

In summary, the social identity approach has been a powerful framework in sport fan behavior research. Despite its merit, the social identity framework has been criticized for overlooking the role of personal agency in pro-group behavior (e.g., Jong et al., 2015; Lin & Sung, 2014; Swann Jr et al., 2009, 2012; Walsh & Neff, 2018).

Personal identity has been considered a separate but critical construct in group process research, and its impact on intergroup and intragroup relations has been appreciated and studied (Jetten et al., 1999). Sport psychologists are concerned with intragroup variation, such as group centrality or who takes the central role within a group (e.g., leadership) (Hogg, 2001a; Jetten et al., 1999). Noel et al. (1995) found that in sports, peripheral group members are more likely to publicly derogate the outgroup so that the core members may accept them but less likely to do it in private life. On the contrary, the derogatory attitudes of core fans to the opponents do not change in private life and public life. In sport management, scholars have accepted that fans can use sport consumption for self-expression, mainly through sport participation (Kirkcaldy et al.,
In terms of spectator sports, a few have studied sport fans’ self-expression (e.g., narcissism) through team involvement (Alexandris & Tsiotsou, 2012; Funk et al., 2004; Larkin et al., 2021; Larkin & Fink, 2019), particularly on social media (Cunningham & Eastin, 2017; Stavros et al., 2014; Vale & Fernandes, 2018).

Identity Fusion Approach

In contrast to the hydraulic nature of identification where only the social self is activated in pro-group behaviors (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Swann Jr. and his colleagues (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann Jr et al., 2009; Swann Jr, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann Jr & Buhrmester, 2015) proposed identity fusion theory to describe individuals’ visceral sense of oneness with a group, in which the boundary of personal identity and group identity becomes porous. In fusion, personal identity and social identity play an equally important role in motivating pro-group behaviors (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann Jr et al., 2009; Swann Jr, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann Jr & Buhrmester, 2015). In group life, they retain an agentic personal self and cultivate the bonding relationship with the abstract group (e.g., religion and country) and its associated parties (e.g., peer religious members and country fellows) like their family members (Swann Jr et al., 2009; Swann Jr, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann Jr & Buhrmester, 2015). As a result, highly fused individuals are predisposed to ask, “what can I do for the group?” and put the words into action, so they are more likely to engage in extreme pro-group behaviors to display their commitment and loyalty to the group (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Swann Jr et al., 2014). For instance, highly fused individuals provide more financial and emotional support to peer ingroup members (e.g., country fellows) in need than lowly fused individuals as a means
of self-expression (Buhrmester & Swann Jr, 2015; Semnani-Azad et al., 2012; Swann Jr, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010). Those who are highly fused with a country are more likely to purchase products that are in patriotic marketing than lowly fused consumers (Yoo et al., 2014).

Further, the difference between fusion and identification has been supported using scale measurement validation, in which the two constructs load on different factors in factor analysis (Gómez et al., 2011). Also, Gomez et al. (2011) found that fused group members and identified group members responded differently to contextual manipulation. For example, in identification, group members may stay away from the social group that suffers a failure to cut off reflected failure (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). However, in fusion, threats to the personal self can be related to the social self and vice versa (Swann Jr et al., 2009), so fused fans will not cut off reflected failure. Therefore, some scholars argue that fusion can be a better predictor than the identification of pro-group behaviors in both extreme situations (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Newson, 2019; Swann Jr, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010) and less extreme behavior such as donation, the forgiveness of consumer brands’ wrongful doings and patriotic purchase (Hawkins, 2019; Lin & Sung, 2014; Swann Jr, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann Jr & Buhrmester, 2015; Yoo et al., 2014).

**Identity Fusion Theory in Sport.** People can be fused with various abstract entities, including sports. Hawkins argued that people fused with a sport (e.g., basketball) are more likely to consume a premium brand (e.g., Nike) to communicate their sport identity. Similarly, fans can develop a bonding relationship with the major sport team because the team represents the best of the sport. Since fans can develop a close tie with
the sport team, they are intrinsically motivated to do whatever they can to help the team win the game. For instance, Newson and colleagues use identity fusion to explain why some sport fans conduct violence (Newman et al., 2011; Newson, 2019; Newson et al., 2018; Swann Jr et al., 2009). Particularly, highly fused sport fans can have a high level of group bonding and loyalty to the sport/team, so when the team is in a threatening situation, such as playing against a rival team, highly fused fans can take unlawful and even life-threatening activities to maximize the chance of their team to win before the game and act violently when their team is defeated (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Newson, 2019). However, according to Buhrmester et al. (2018), fusion should not be misconstrued to motivate indiscriminate sacrifice at every opportunity because contextual factors moderate fused people’s decision to engage in pro-group action. Most people do not necessarily get involved in extreme pro-group behaviors, such as unlawful and risky conducts, to support the team. Instead, sport fans may support the team through other behaviors that may still look crazy in non-sport fans’ eyes, including purchasing pricy but less useful licensed-product (Mason, 1999), traveling extensively to road games (Horne, 2005) and some other addictive and crazy behaviors (Giulianotti, 2002). Therefore, when the team is playing, highly fused fans are intrinsically motivated to attend the game to support the team.

**Symbolic Value of the Sport Team.** While major sport teams provide the best spectating experience, the symbolic value of the sport teams has also been discussed within the social identity framework. Heere and James (2007) argued that many sport fans use the sport team to represent their other group memberships, such as gender, race, sexuality, geography, education, profession, and country. The close tie between sport and
other group identity is supported by Wang et al. (2022), who found that sport identity and masculinity can be threatened simultaneously as masculinity can be an essential part of the NBA image for certain NBA fans. Wang et al.’ (2022) work is consistent with the literature within the identity fusion framework, in which the shared core characteristics (masculinity and basketball skills) are considered the defining characteristics of being sport fans (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Swann Jr et al., 2014). The shared core characteristics, or shared essence, are the real, underlying nature that resembles the natural kinds of the ingroup and outgroup (Swann Jr et al., 2014). Such a difference can be decided by the biological qualities such as genes and socially acquired qualities derived through personal self-defining experiences such as social class and values (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Swann Jr et al., 2014; Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014).

**Shared Sport Essence.** Swann et al. (2014) argued that socially acquired qualities could be acquired later in life, such as values and beliefs. Sport identity can be considered as such a quality, which, in the social identity framework, can be understood as one’s sport knowledge of the sport entities (Fink et al., 2009) derived from social upbringing and formal education (Trigg, 2001) during growing up, which is meaningful in defining the self (Brewer, 1993). From a cultural perspective, the sport is a powerful secular ritual arena to facilitate social interactions and solidarity (Taylor & Taylor, 1997) and a liminal space within which male fans can enact various actions (e.g., kisses and hugs) and emotions (e.g., cry) that are otherwise seen as untypical for males (Harvey & Piotrowska, 2013). Sport fans generate a sport-related community that allows for non-contractual relations among themselves (Communities, 1983). According to Buhrmester et al. (2018), the shared essence of an entity can be symbolically represented by people, places, events,
and objects. In a similar vein, the sport can be embodied by the history of the sport team, athletes, coaches, staff, stadium, jerseys, and games, so fans can rely on those entities to represent how they value the shared essence of being fans of the team/sport.

The sport team is meant for competition, which is set to host spectators. Thus, attending games can be an essential part of sport fans. Through co-creation in live attendance, sport fans enhance group solidarity, display commitment and loyalty, basket in reflected glory, and blast the opposing parties (Behrens & Uhrich, 2020; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Fazal-E-Hasan et al., 2021; McDonald & Karg, 2014). Rituals are process-oriented, performed in a scripted manner in a fixed episodic order (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014), so fans who attend the game usually take it seriously and formally (Fazal-E-Hasan et al., 2021) with an address code (e.g., jerseys) and behavior code (e.g., chanting the slogan) and have a distinct beginning, middle and ending (Smith & Stewart, 2011) with emotions, symbolism, and cognition (Neale, 2010). The rituals that are embedded in attending games are less likely available in mediated sport consumption. It is through those visible rituals that fans demonstrate their commitment and loyalty to the team (Smith & Stewart, 2011), which helps fused fans perceive separation from fair-weather fans who do not do it.

As an alternative to game attendance, mediated sport provides a low-cost and less hassle way to consume spectator sports. MacIntosh et al. (2017) argued that sport fans’ game-day rituals could be personal and social. Personal rituals (e.g., watching at home) are not necessarily seen by others, while social rituals always involve others; thus, attending games can lead to greater group belonging, commitment, and belief than personal rituals (Cowan & Spielmann, 2017). On the other hand, commitment and loyalty
to the team are not decided by how fans consume the sport, but highly fused fans would manage to attend the game if the constraints can be somehow removed (such as saving money). Due to the emergence of social media, sport fans’ personal rituals at home can be easily seen through their social media posts (MacIntosh et al., 2017). However, the conspicuous value is subject to debate.

**Shared Community Essence.** Swann et al. (2014) argued that many inherent social and self-categorized identities might constitute a broader concept of the shared essence, represented by many accessible and concrete objects and entities. Individuals have many social identities simultaneously, many of which can be represented by sports (Heere & James, 2007; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Wang et al., 2022). The sport team is closely related to places, such as a country (e.g., the national team), city (professional sport), and educational institutes (college and high school sport). For instance, the shared essence of a country can be represented by its national sport (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Newson, 2019; Newson et al., 2018). Similarly, sport fans can use sport to represent their other beliefs, such as masculinity (Crosset, 1990; Park, 2015; Wang et al., 2022). In terms of spectator sports, fused sport fans are limited to two choices to display their bonding relationship with the sport team: attending games and watching mediated sports. The tradeoff leads to the question of which consumption type can better represent the shared essence. From a self-verification perspective, Swann (1983) assumed that effective symbols should meet three criteria: they must be noticeable, evoke reactions from significant others, and under the control of consumers. It seems that attending games can be better than watching mediated sports to express their loyalty to the team (and associated group memberships) because sport fans may talk about their game-
attending experience, which may draw attention due to the associated cost and limited supply. The constraint lies in the disposable money sport fans can allocate for a ticket. Unlike other experiential purchases, such as tourism, in which the reference groups may have a hard time figuring out the cost (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019), sport fans can easily decode the information from a well-known product because of their knowledge and engagement in the sport (Wann & Branscombe, 1995). Displaying their willingness to support the team financially, such as attending a high-profile game, can be meaningful to some individuals because others can admire them on not only their economic capability but also their cultural capital, such as experience, knowledge, and loyalty to the team and its associated community that others may not belong to (Bourdieu, 1984). Based on the above literature review, the study came up with the following hypothesis:

\[ H1: \text{Identity fusion with sport teams will be positively related to attending major sports (e.g., the NFL).} \]

**Extrinsic Motivation for Spectating Sport: Conspicuous Consumption**

While it has been widely accepted that consuming high-profile sport games like major sports is a means of sport identity display, publicly displaying high-cost spectating sport can be for social status. Consumer behavior researchers in the economy, marketing, sociology, and alike fields are interested in the feedback and reactions of others toward one’s consumption. People who consciously or unconsciously display their consumption may want to show off their wealth, success, and prestige, or at least others may perceive it as conspicuous consumption.

**Concept of Status.** It is imperative to begin the literature review by discussing what status is because it is a broad term that many researchers in this field of study use different terms to indicate status, such as wealth, success, prestige, taste, and
achievement. Status can be understood as “position or rank in relation to others” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). From the sociological perspective, Benoit-Smullyan (1944) defined status as a “relative position within a hierarchy” (p. 155). Weiss and Fershtman (1998) defined status as “a ranking of individuals (or groups of individuals) in a given society, based on their traits, assets and actions” (p. 801). Social status is related to human beings’ self-esteem (Faunce, 1984; La Greca & Stone, 1990; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). In classical Individual Psychology, Adler (1930) believed that individuals’ feeling of anthropological inferiority that is derived from childhood experience functions as an incentive for one’s development; thus, one of the basic driving forces behind all human activities is the desire for superiority/status. In a socially stratified society, it is of utmost importance for human beings to strive for “getting ahead” in many aspects (e.g., wealth, education, career, achievement, and popularity) in which individuals are compared and adjudged superior or inferior (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944; Coie et al., 1982; Faunce, 1984; Hogan, 1982; La Greca & Stone, 1990; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Benoit-Smullyan argued that

“By a hierarchy we mean a number of individuals are ordered on an inferiority-superiority scale with respect to the comparative degree to which they possess or embody some socially approved or generally desired attribute or characteristic. A hierarchical position is thus a position in which an individual is identified with others with regard to the possession or embodiment of some common characteristic, but differentiated from these in the degree, or measure, to which that characteristic possessed or embodied” (p. 151)”.

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**Status Types**

**Individual Status.** In a broad sense, social positions can be in various forms, which are generated by applying any socially accepted criterion to make any individuals stand out in society (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944). On an individual level, people can obtain a relative position in a social hierarchy based on economics, politics, and prestige. Wealth (economic status) is concerned with the possession of financial resources that can yield satisfaction directly or facilitate more production, while political status is the power and capacity to make decisions that require others to act in ways in which they would not act in the essence of such a decision. In the eyes of Marxists, political status cannot be abstracted from economic status, and differences in power are simply an institutional expression of differences in wealth. In contrast, most theorists from the West tend to view economic status as simply the material expression of the relationship of domination and subordination, considering the interconnection and mutual influence between economic status and political status (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944). Different from economic and political status, prestige status can be achieved when the person becomes an object of admiration, deference, and imitation, a source of suggestion, and a center of attraction (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944). Although the fundamental types of social position have been demarcated, it by no means denies their interconnections in the real world because people may never use these criteria in an isolated environment. In this study, economic status is relevant to conspicuous consumption.

**Group Status.** Second, people can obtain social status through group membership, such as biological, physical, geographical, psychological, and cultural groups (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944). For instance, within a given society, many people may
use marital status, education, sex, and occupation to decide individuals’ or nuclear family’s social position in the social structure (Hollingshead, 1975). Theorists in the study of group process (e.g., social identity theory) (Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) generally believed that group members could feel superiority through social comparison when their group is performing better than the outgroup to enhance self-esteem. In achieved social groups such as occupation and education, many jobs and roles with the greatest importance to society and/or require the greatest training or talent tend to have a higher social status (Davis & Moore, 1945). Group members usually play an active role in their groups, which is best captured in the framework of identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, in sports, athletes usually carry social status because they play sports at a higher level than amateurs. Meanwhile, in some forms of achieved (or self-categorized) social groups, group members (such as sport fans) play a passive role in supporting the core group (Rancière, 2021), so their performance may not impact the performance of the core members of the group, but they may bask in reflected glory to achieve vicarious success (Cialdini et al., 1976). Many researchers tend to use social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) to explain the mechanism of the passive role (Lock & Heere, 2017), including in the field of sport management (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Heere & James, 2007). For instance, Cialdini et al. (1976) found that university students tend to wear their university apparel to display their association with the university after their football team defeats their rival, even though these students do not play the game. Similarly, Wang et al. (2022) argued that NBA fans in China would use the NBA fanship to display their sport identity and gender ideology, so they set them apart from other sport fan groups and female-dominated groups.
Social Hierarchy Within a Social Group

People can be divided into groups based on their inherent identities, such as gender, race, and nationality, and achieved identities, such as occupation, education, and pop cultural groups (Kulich et al., 2017). Within a defined group, according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), intragroup variables play an important role in group life, especially in groups of small size (Hogg, 1996). One important intragroup variable discussed in the literature is the relative centrality of the various members in a socially stratified group (Jetten et al., 1999; Turner, 1999). Some group members have a central position and perhaps serve as the leader of the group, whereas others may fill a peripheral or marginal role (Noel et al., 1995).

This point of view is reinforced by researchers in management (e.g., Magee & Galinsky, 2008), whose interests are focused on organizational behavior. The prevalence of hierarchy, in all its forms, in social groups and organizations makes it one of the most fundamental features of social relations (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Within the context of a social group or an organization, Magee and Galinsky (2008) defined social hierarchy as “an implicit or explicit rank order of individuals or groups with respect to a valued social dimension” (p. 5). Whilst social hierarchy can be decided by a large number of variables, they can be outlined by rules and consensually agreed upon in a formal hierarchy system, or they can be subjectively understood and taken for granted in an informal hierarchy system (Blau & Scott, 1962; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Some achieved/self-categorized social groups based on certain subjective characteristics of the group (Turner & Reynolds, 2011) can fall within an informal hierarchy system, such as sport fans, because they categorize themselves in certain sport fan group based on their own knowledge of
the team. Research studying small groups demonstrates that informal hierarchal differentiation within groups tends to develop spontaneously because individuals can form inferences and make judgments of others based on seconds of observation and/or interactions (Magee, 2009; Todorov et al., 2005). There also tends to be a high agreement between group members about the rank of each individual, which is meaningful to group members even when the rank order is based on a feature as subtle as nonverbal behavior (for a review, see Hall et al., 2005). The hierarchical differentiation process is important in a group because as one characteristic or a resource has more value than others in a group, individuals will naturally and spontaneously differentiate hierarchically along that dimension. Hogg (2001a) described this process as one in which individuals achieve a higher rank in a group to the extent that they represent the defining features of that group. In sports, high-ranked fans can be determined by various features of being sport fans, such as sport knowledge they have, sporting goods they own, games they have attended, the history they have witnessed, and so on.

**Conspicuous Consumption**

Wealth-based social status can be best represented through consumption rather than how much money people actually make (Dowd, 1958) because consuming premium products serves as a signal of non-observable abilities (Weiss & Fershtman, 1998). Veblen’s concept of conspicuous consumption is an evolutionary framework based on the differences between social classes in holding resources (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Sundie et al., 2011; Trigg, 2001). Preoccupation with status-directed consumption by the elite class existed in the earliest societies (See Mason, 1981 for a review). It is widely accepted that all social classes, including the most economically disadvantaged groups,
are subject to conspicuous consumption to signal their wealth, social power, and prestige, be it real or perceived (Basmann et al., 1988; Carr, 2005; Goldsmith et al., 1996; Huang & Wang, 2018; Trigg, 2001).

**Bandwagon vs Snobism.**

Two types of conspicuous consumption have been identified: the bandwagon effect and the snob effect (Leibenstein, 1950). The bandwagon effect means that consumers acquire and display certain goods and services by imitating others. For example, if an individual never buys a brand but realizes all his/her friends buy the brand, this person may purchase the brand to “keep up with the Joneses.” The snob effect refers to the fact that consumers want to distinguish themselves from the rest, so they do not consume the product that is consumed by many people (Leibenstein, 1950) to create and enhance the desired sense of self, public image, and social relationship (Belk, 1988; Goffman, 1978). For example, if an individual buys a brand and finds all his friends also bought the brand, he/she may take his/her business to another brand. Status seekers are prone to be brand conscious, subjective to interpersonal influence and self-monitoring (Bearden et al., 1989; Day & Schleicher, 2006; Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Goffman, 1978), resulting in the tendency to purchase products that are usually sold for a premium price in order to obtain stratification from others’ reactions to the wealth displayed rather than from the value of the product itself (Mason, 1984).

**Flaunting Wealth.** Within the discussion in economics, the key to the transformation of wealth into status is through wasteful consumption in either extensive leisure activities (non-productive use of time such as tourism) or luxury products (spending more money on goods than they are worth) that are publicly displayed in front
of the reference groups (Trigg, 2001) such as neighbors, friends, and colleagues (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Phillips & Back, 2011). Such wasteful consumption confers symbolic values of status, honor, and a position of esteem in the social hierarchy (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 2007).

Consumers may use conspicuous consumption for other benefits, including facilitate interpersonal relationships (R. W. Belk, 1985). For instance, some males purchase luxurious goods such as cars to attract mates temporally (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Sundie et al., 2011); in contrast, some females use premium goods bought by their partners to deter female rivals (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014). In professional sports, athletes are prone to purchase conspicuous products and set such a norm in the locker room. The newly joined athletes purchase similar conspicuous products so they can be accepted as ingroup members (Law et al., 2020).

** Flaunt Identity.** However, some researchers argue that conspicuous consumption does not necessarily relate to wealth (Chen et al., 2008). Many consumers may also derive social status using products that represent their social aspect of their self-concept, such as prosocial (Johnson et al., 2018), pro-environment (Beall et al., 2021), culture relatedness (Correia et al., 2016) and fashion knowledge (Goldsmith et al., 1996).

However, identity display can also be expensive. For instance, wealth people in China undertake expensive sport tourism to desired destinations for participating in lifestyle sports such as golf and tennis to display their health consciousness (Song et al., 2022). Therefore, Chen et al. (2008) expanded the scope of conspicuous consumption as “the extent of one’s behavioral tendency of displaying one’s social status, wealth, taste or self-image to one’s important reference groups through consumption of publicly visible
products” (p. 686). The present study tends to adopt the original concept of conspicuous consumption as it flaunts wealth because consuming spectating sport is displaying identity. Based on the literature, the study came up with two questions:

**RQ1:** Do American sport fans consider consuming major sport games (e.g., the NFL) conspicuous?

**RQ2:** Do American sport fans consider attending major sport games (e.g., the NFL) more conspicuous than watching mediated games at home?

**Materialism.**

Consumer behavior researchers believe conspicuous consumption is closely associated with materialism (Richins & Fournier, 1991)—“The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person’s life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction” (Belk, 1984, p. 291). Belk treated materialism from a perspective of personality traits. In his measurement scale, there were three traits: possessiveness, envy, and nongenerosity (Belk, 1985). Those traits are perceived to measure a successful and happy life and a symbol of social status, power, and popularity (Kasser, 2003; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Different than Belk, Richins and Dawson (1992) defined materialism from a value perspective, so their conceptualization of materialism consists of three components: acquisition centrality, acquisition as a pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. The two most popular conceptualizations of materialism share two aspects: happiness and success. Therefore, central to the lives of materialists are possessions of goods that serve as a source of meaning, provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and provide structure for life’s goals.
and daily activities (Belk, 1985; Daun, 1983). Hudders and Pandelaere (2012) found that materialistic consumers who purchase luxury goods report a higher level of subjective well-being than those who do not.

Despite the association between materialism and happiness, many scholars questioned whether materialism is good or bad (Belk, 1985; Richins & Fournier, 1991). Mason (1981) argued that many people consider materialism and its associated consumption behaviors inherently bad for moral and religious reasons. Slightly different from Mason, some scholars believe that materialism should be understood as an instrumental/terminal dichotomy (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981). Instrumental materialism is generally good, so consumer goods provide practical utility to make life more manageable, safer, and more enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981). When possessions of goods do not promote life qualities, instrumental materialism becomes terminal materialism, a destructive form that may induce a negative impression. Using consumption (e.g., luxury cars) to signal wealth and other social status is generally considered terminal materialism (Belk & Pollay, 1985). This instrumental/terminal dichotomy of materialism has also been criticized. Scholars in the economic theory of utilitarianism believe that all products are utilitarian in the sense that the products serve as a means to bring about psychological needs (e.g., pleasure) or solutions (e.g., prevention of pain) (Bentham & Mill, 2004); therefore, only instrumentals materialism exists (Beaglehole, 2015). Richins and Fournier (1991) suggested that the general public does not distinguish between materialism and status display, so they may consider materialism and conspicuous consumption as the same.

_Trend of Experiential Purchase._
While most literature focuses on luxury/brand material goods that consumers can handle and display publicly, the importance of immaterial goods that are consumed by the leisure class through experience has been recognized (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019, 2019; Correia et al., 2016; Phillips & Back, 2011). From a historical perspective, in affluent societies, such as the United States after the 1950s, the ostentatious display of wealth using material goods waned due to the rich elite’s witness of the great depression in the 1930s and the rise of the middle class after the World War II. However, the interest in conspicuous consumption did not decline accordingly (Mason, 2000). The only change in this type of consumption is the direction (Trigg, 2001). Inglehart (1981) argued that affluent societies emphasize less on lower order needs of material; instead, consumers turn their goals to more abstract, less materialistic goods. In his masterpiece, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, Bourdieu (1984) argued that the aesthetic taste of cultural capital (e.g., knowledge, style, and skills) that is learned through education and social upbringing has become a critical criterion for distinguishing individuals from others, which also serves as a cultural barrier for emulation by other classes. Unlike wealth, the aesthetic taste of an individual (e.g., sport and folk music) cuts across social classes so that the popular working-class culture can trickle around from the middle class to the elite class (Bourdieu, 1984; Trigg, 2001).

In the era of experience society, an increasing number of consumers take their conspicuous consumption to experiential products/activities (e.g., tourism, arts, dining, concerts, etc.). Yang and Mattila (2017) found that consumers in low need of status feel happier in what they do and experience rather than what they own, while consumers in high need of status are more likely to talk about material goods and experiential goods.
equally. Existing research found that consumers may derive more satisfaction from the experiential purchase than from material goods because the former can provide several benefits, including showing off without being negatively judged, presenting self and self-concept confirmation, less regret, and seeking social connections and belongings (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Gilovich et al., 2015). However, spectator sports are an understudied area even though commercial sports have been a visible consumption in the world, particularly in the United States.

Visibility. The precondition of conspicuous consumption is visibility (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 2007). Some experiential purchases are considered highly visible nowadays, such as attending events and tourism (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Phillips & Back, 2011), which was placed second and tenth on the list of visible goods of 43 products by Mumel and Snoj (1999). Whether visibility should be an issue has not reached agreement. Goldsmith et al. (1996) argued that many products are not publicly consumed (e.g., brand underwear) and are still purchased by status seekers, dubbed status consumption. Further, many individuals may disagree that they purchase certain products for flaunting wealth but for other purposes, such as better quality, that has been discussed above in instrumental materialism. To understand the dispute, Trigg (2001) used Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to argue that status seekers may purchase conspicuous products under unconscious cultural force, so the symbolic value of the products can be objectively adapted to their purpose in certain situations, but not salient in the purchase decision-making.

Visibility used to be an issue for spreading the “good name” of status seekers from experiential purchases, but it is not the case nowadays as social media has become
part of people’s social life (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Taylor & Strutton, 2016). Consumers can record their experience by sending a message, picture, and video on social networks so the reference group can witness their consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019). The consequence of the extended social network makes the social comparison more complicated due to the dynamics of ingroup-outgroup categorizing (Onorato & Turner, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2011). Based on the above literature review, the study came up with the following research question:

**RQ3:** Do sport fans share their experience of attending major sport games (e.g., NFL) when (3a) talking to others and (3b) on social media?

**Consuming Spectating Sport as Conspicuous Consumption**

Sport fans consume spectator sport for many reasons. Trail and James (2001) identified the acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama, escape, family, physical attraction, physical skills of players, and social interaction as motivations for watching spectator sports. Some other leading scholars in the field, like Wann (1995) and Kahle et al. (1996), identified similar motivations. Furthermore, Kim and Mao (2021) delineated the differences and similarities between the reasons for sport fans’ live games attendance and mediated sport consumption, in which they identified authenticity, history witnessing, and identity cultivation are more prominent with live attendance than watching mediated sports. Put simply, those studies mainly address the intrinsic utility of spectator sports. Nevertheless, in the United States where workers have a decent life-work balance, the time for leisure activities for the general public is guaranteed to a certain degree. The price factor is the primary reason for many fans to watch mediated sports (Larkin et al., 2015). Unlike watching mediated sport, attending games asks fans
for more time, energy, and sometimes sitting in the extreme weather, in addition to the associated high cost. All of those hints at the desirability of game attendance suggest that sport fans may not only display their sport identity but something else about themselves that are different from what they can obtain from watching games at home, such as wealth.

From a symbolic value perspective (Levy, 1963, 1980), like many consumers in other categories tend to use conspicuous consumption to display some aspects of themselves, sport fans can take conspicuous spectating consumption to communicate who they are as a group member (between group comparison) and as an individual (within group comparison). Attending games is usually considered a prototypical sport fan behavior, so its conspicuousness compared to mediated sport consumption may be overlooked, at least not discussed in the literature. The difference between different forms of spectator sport consumption lies in how marketing scholars categorize brands/products into conspicuous and inconspicuous categories (Flynn & Eastman, 1996; Phillips & Back, 2011) based on price (scarcity) and visibility. It may be true that marketers tend to categorize attending games as more conspicuous than watching mediated sports. The interesting part is whether sport fans hold the same idea as researchers and marketers do.

**Dimensions of Conspicuous Sport Consumption**

Allowing the reference groups to know their game attendance is important to status seekers. Equally important is what they want to convey to others by their public display. Drawing on theories in semiology, economics, marketing, and social psychology, Marcoux et al. (1995) focused on the country of origin as an image variable and identified five dimensions (18 items) of conspicuous consumption using Polish
consumers in the context of choosing Western-made products like jeans, sports shoes, perfume, deodorant, and watch. The five dimensions are interpersonal mediation, materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, social status demonstration, and ostentation.

**Interpersonal Mediation** refers to conscious consumption that can influence social relations with reference groups in a social context. O’Cass (2001) stated that consumers’ desire for conspicuous goods is largely determined by their social networks, which sets standards of taste and quality that influence others’ demand for socially conspicuous products. Status-conscious consumers are more socially aware and more interested in social relationships that determine their social status in a group (Kilsheimer, 1993). In sport consumption, consumers concerned about their self-image are more likely to attend the game because it is highly valued in their (sub)culture to gain respect and popularity from other sport consumers.

**Materialistic Hedonism** refers to bringing together information acquisition and pleasure aspects of consumption. Traditionally, hedonism within consumer culture generates a bad impression, but many scholars argue that it is nowadays a way of life characterized by openness to pleasurable experience through consumption (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy, 2002; Subawa et al., 2020; Veenhoven, 2003). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) specifically stated that hedonic consumption is related to multisensory (e.g., tastes, sounds, scents, and visual images), fantasy (new experience), and emotion (e.g., joy, jealousy, fear, rage, and rap) aspects of product usage experience, resulting in happiness. In sport consumption, highly regarded sporting events usually provide consumers with a better spectating experience.
Communication of Belonging suggests that individuals purchase products to associate or dissociate with social groups such as demographic, socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural groups. This dimension is particularly relevant and salient in sport. Sport fans consume conspicuous sport consumption to reflect not only their sport identity but also community identities.

Social Status Demonstration signals success, wealth, and prestige in social groups. These variables are widely regarded as the core of conspicuous consumption in nature. The invested resources (i.e., economics and time) in consumption can be used to symbolize one’s social class (Bellezza et al., 2017).

Ostentation relates to purchasing well-known expensive products, or others know the price of the product. The premise of conspicuous consumption is that the product/brand is premium and luxury. People tend to use price to evaluate the product/brand to infer the owner’s financial capability. Generally, sport consumers are familiar with their sport’s brands, so they know which brand is more expensive than others.

The scale by Marcoux et al. (1995,1997) was widely considered the first and only existing scale for measuring conspicuous consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Chen et al., 2008; Phillips & Back, 2011). Following Marcoux et al.’ work, O’Cass and McEwen (2004) delineated a two-factor model of conspicuous consumption in fashion brands, which was interpreted by Bronner and de Hoog (2019) as one is related to material status like wealth, success, and achievement that are discussed within the economic capital and the other one is related to culture capital like the perceived self-image, respect, and popularity (Bourdieu, 1984). Chen et al. (2008) echoed the finding of
O’Cass and McEwen (2004) and emphasized that seeking both direct material-based and indirect self-image status is equally important in conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, when applying the scale of Marcoux et al. (1997) to experiential products like tourism destination choice, researchers found four dimensions (interpersonal mediation, status demonstration, materialistic hedonism, and communication of belonging, excluding ostentations due to low reliability) instead of five dimensions, using college faculty and staff at an American university (Phillips & Back, 2011) and musicians and reporters (compared with ordinary people) in Portugal (Correia et al., 2016). However, these studies do not diminish the validity and reliability of Marcoux et al.’s work (1997), as Bronner and de Hoog suggested (2019) that context, product types, population, and periods are important in discussing the dimensions of conspicuous consumption. This study is to apply Marcoux et al.’s work to examine the dimensions of conspicuous sport consumption in the context of spectator sports.

Therefore, status seekers are more likely to attend games to experience the game in a different way (materialistic hedonism), gain admiration and respect from peer fans (interpersonal mediation), join others who have attended games, or be unique because others have not attended the game (communication of belonging), demonstrate financial status, career success, education qualities (social status demonstration), and ostentatiously display luxurious lifestyle (ostentation).

Based on the above literature review, the study came up with the following question and hypotheses:

**RQ4:** Which dimensions of conspicuous consumption in the literature are relevant for sport fans’ motivation for attending expensive major sport games (e.g., the NFL)?
\textbf{H2:} Conspicuous consumption will be positively related to attending major sports (e.g., NFL).

\textbf{H3:} Conspicuous consumption will interact with identity fusion to affect sport fans on their intention for future game attendance.

\textbf{Conspicuous Consumption and Demographics}

People of all walks of life can practice conspicuous consumption, but it varies dependent on potential demographic antecedents. The present study focuses on some of the most important demographics in the literature: income, gender, race, education, and age.

\textbf{Income.} Conspicuous consumption and income are inherently tied as Veblen’s idea of using consumption to signal wealth was inspired by the ostentatious parties during La Belle Epoque in France between the 1870s -1914 (the end of World War I). At the earlier time, only the elite class could be engaged in conspicuous consumption. Nowadays, the middle class and working class are also major forces behind conspicuous consumption, which has been well stated in the trick-down consumption pattern (Trigg, 2001). For example, many Chinese migrant workers, who belong to the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy, are actively engaged in name-product consumption to enhance their self-image by getting rid of being “marginal men” (Huang & Wang, 2018). College students who suffer economic disadvantages in the UK would take more jobs and work more hours to make money for travelling (Carr, 2005). The motivation for conspicuous consumption intrigues certain consumers to purchase serious counterfeit products to be perceived as rich by others (Rahpeima et al., 2014) in both developed and developing countries (My Pham & Nasir, 2016; Rahpeima et al., 2014; Souiden et al., 2018). In
terms of spectator sports, live major sports primarily target middle- and up-class status, but mediated sports are offered to accommodate fans of all social classes.

**Gender.** There is strong evidence that gender differences impact conspicuous consumption. Segal and Podoshen (2013) found that overall, males have a higher tendency for conspicuous consumption and materialism than females in the United States. In terms of the bandwagon effect and snob effect, males of the millennial generation score higher on both patterns than their female counterparts in Latin America (Verdugo & Ponce, 2020). However, females are more likely to conduct impulse buying, while males are more likely to possess more goods for happiness (Segal & Podoshen, 2013). Conspicuous consumption can moderate interpersonal relationships differently for males and females. Males can use conspicuous consumption for short-term relationships (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Sundie et al., 2011), while females may flaunt luxury products to signal their strong relationship with their male patterns to deter female rivals (Wang & Griskevicius, 2014). In fashion consumption, females are more likely to be engaged in fashion involvement and purchase fashion products for self-expression than males (Cass, 2001). In sport, male fans tend to know more sport knowledge than females. Also, males are more likely to consider playing sport to be a true sport fan, and females consider watching sport can be enough to be a fan (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000).

**Race.** Conspicuous consumption patterns vary dependent on race. Charles et al. (2009) used nationally representative data on consumption and found that Blacks and Hispanics allocate larger shares of their income to conspicuous goods than Whites in the United States. The differences are relatively constant among all subpopulations, which Charles et al. (2009) argued that it could be related to income disparity. Similar patterns
were found in South Africa, where Blacks spend more proportion of their income on conspicuous products than Whites, but each racial group has its own ways of expressing their relative position within society (Kaus, 2013). Furthermore, if cultural difference is considered in racial differences, the results can also be interesting. In a cross-cultural study between China and United States, Podoshen et al. (2011) found that Chinese young adults displayed a higher tendency for materialism and conspicuous consumption than their American counterparts. However, in another cross-cultural study between Canada and Tunisia, Souiden et al. (2018) found that Canadian consumers (individualists) showed a higher tendency for conspicuous products than Tunisians (collectivists), which is different from the results in Podeosen et al. (2011). The findings of the two cross-cultural studies may suggest that the cultural differences between collectivistic countries may also influence the tendency for conspicuous consumption.

**Education.** Socioeconomic variables such as income and education are usually positively correlated. As discussed above, consumers with different incomes can take on conspicuous consumption (trick-down effect), but in Yoon and Seok’s (1996) study, education is positively correlated with the intention of conspicuous consumption among urban Korean families. Correia et al. (2016) found that the well-educated elite class chooses conspicuous tourist destinations to subtly match their social or self-representations to differentiate themselves from ordinary people. One possible reason is that consumers obtain taste through education.

**Age.** Lastly, age is an important factor behind conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption can start at a young age, even at six years old. As they become older (4th grade vs 6th grade), they hold a stronger desire for conspicuous consumption (R.
Belk et al., 1984). Young teenagers (aged 12-13) and older teenagers (aged 15-17) tend to use clothing for their desired self-image. Young adults are also a major force behind conspicuous consumption, which can be impacted by their personalities and traits (Barrera & Ponce, 2021). Shukla (2008) found that middle-aged consumers (40-60 years old) consume noticeable products to gain respect, obtain prestige, display identity, show off wealth and achievement, and enhance their image, which is largely moderated by brand knowledge and the fit between the brand and self. Therefore, the study came up with the following hypothesis:

**H3:** Consumers with different demographics have different perceived levels of conspicuous consumption in spectating sports (e.g., the NFL).

**Summary**

Extant literature stated that people are motivated to use products and services to display their wealth-based social status to enhance their image and self-esteem. Sport fans are no exception. Despite the fact that they can watch mediated sports at home, they are willing to pay a lot of money to attend games and share their experience with others so as to impress others. However, the underlying meanings of conspicuous spectating consumption are still unclear. Given the significance of public displaying spectating sport consumption, it is imperative to delve into the meanings of this consumer behavior.

Marcoux et al. (1995, 1997) identified five dimensions of conspicuous consumption using Polish consumers: materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, social status demonstration, interpersonal mediation, and ostentation. The dimensions cannot directly be used to explain American sport fans’ motivation for social status through attending major sports because there are many differences between the two studies, such
as the populations, periods of time, products, economic conditions, and cultures. Therefore, specifying the dimensions of conspicuous spectating consumption in the United States is an important step.

The study is exploratory in nature, so it would also explore the influence of demographics on the perceived meaning of conspicuous spectating sport consumption. In addition, this study would also consider sport fans’ previous game attendance experience. However, motivation for social status may not be adequate to explain why sport fans attend games because spectating sport consumption is driven by sport identity. This study adopted identity fusion theory (Swann Jr et al., 2009) to conceptualize the relationship between fans and the sport team. From an identity fusion perspective, sport fans pay a lot of money to watch the game as a means of their commitment and sacrifice to the team. Intrinsic motivation has been barely discussed and tested in an empirical study.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Background about the NFL

The National Football League (NFL) is a professional American football league with 32 teams in 22 states, divided into two conferences: the American Football Conference and the National Football League. The NFL is one of the four major leagues in North America and the highest level of American football. Each NFL team plays 17 games during the regular season. Seven teams of each conference would make the playoffs, and a single-elimination tournament would culminate in the Super Bowl between the champions from the two conferences. In total, the NFL only plays 272 games in its whole season, compared to the NBA’s 1230 games during the regular season and MLB’s 2430 games during the regular season.

Despite fewer games, the NFL is the most popular sport in the United States and the most profitable league in the world. In 2021, the NFL received a total revenue of $17.19 billion, in which the Dallas Cowboys led the league with a total of $1,087 million, and the Detroit Lion with the lowest, $452 million. In terms of the ticket price, the average ticket price of the Las Vegas Raiders was $153.47, the highest in the league and average ticket price of the Los Angeles Chargers was $80.38, the cheapest in the league (Gough, 2022). In addition, NFL games are always leading TV ratings in North America, with NBC’s NFL Sunday Night Football watched by 18 million viewers during the season in 2021-22 (Porter, 2022).

Pre-test
The study was submitted to the Office of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of New Mexico for approval. Upon approval by IRB, a pretest was conducted to examine conspicuousness of major sports (e.g., the NFL) in the United States.

*Procedures*

This study was to explore conspicuous consumption in spectating sports. Due to the exploratory nature of the present study, the first task was to validate whether major sports are conspicuous product brands in the eyes of American sport fans (*RQ1* and *RQ2*). To specify the research context, the NFL was used due to its popularity and the cost of attending games. In pre-test, price factor (luxury) was not primed.

Pre-test was conducted to generate opinions toward the level of conspicuousness of the NFL. Survey was adopted for this study. The survey questions were developed using Qualtrics. Participants were recruited using MTurk because of its convenience and low cost (Burnham et al., 2018). Despite that some researchers question the external validity of the inferences made drawing upon its samples, MTurk has surged in popularity in experimental and survey-based social science research (Huff & Tingley, 2015; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Burnham et al. (2018) found that demographic background of MTurk population is close to US population in terms of gender and race. In political science research, Bersinsky et al. (2012) found that respondents on MTurk are often more representative of the US-population than in-person convenience samples but are less representative than subjects in Internet-based panels or national probability samples. Huff and Tingley (2015) found that using the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) as a benchmark, MTurk attracts more young Hispanic females.
and young Asian males and females. On average, the estimated difference between CCES and MTurk on education and political behaviors decreased when the data were subset to younger individuals. In terms of location, both MTurk and CCES draw approximately 90% of their respondents from urban areas on the rural–urban continuum. To the best knowledge of the researcher, how representative of sport respondents on MTurk to actual sport consumers in the US is unknown, yet it is quite popular in sport management research as many articles using MTurk for data collection have been published on top journals in sport management field, such as Sport Management Review, Journal of Sport Management, and European Sport Management Quarterly (e.g., Asada & Ko, 2016; Dwyer et al., 2016; Jang et al., 2021; Na et al., 2020). MTurk is suitable for data collection because the NFL is a national sport that is watched by people of all works of life. Also, the study examined fans’ attitude toward conspicuous consumption behind attending game, so they did not necessarily attend the game before the study. This study paid each participant for $.45 as an incentive, compared to the average pay of $.25 for a 2-4 minute survey in 2012 (Berinsky et al., 2012). Only participants with age of 18 and older in the United States were recruited.

Demographics questions were first asked to collect data for age, gender, income, education, and race. Following demographics questions, participants chose one from two categories—have attended major sports at least once and have never attended major sport games—to identify their past game attendance experience. A quality control item about whether they are Americans was added in the middle of the survey. Then, they were asked to answer three questions using 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, and 7=strongly agree). The first question is how much you agree or disagree that American
major sports like the NFL are conspicuous sport products. Four synonyms of conspicuous were provided to help participants fully understand the meaning of conspicuous (Phillips & Back, 2011). The four synonyms provided in the questions are “prestigious”, “noticeable”, “ostentatious”, and “pretentious” (Phillips & Back, 2011). The other two questions asked whether participants perceive watching mediated major games and attending games conspicuous. All questions in pretest are provided in the Appendix A.

**Participants.** The pre-test included 80 participants on MTurk. After examining the survey quality control question, all the recruited 80 participants were remained for further analysis, of which 52 (65%) were males and 28 were females. Participants between age of 26-35 were the most (65%) with 52. In terms of annual household income, about 70% (56) participants were between $30,001 to 70,000. Only 2 participants (2.5%) had not attended college. Whites (63 or 78%) were the most in the racial groups. Most of the participants (73 or 91%) had attended at least one game of the major sports before the survey. Demographics were detailed in Table 1.
Table 1.

Descriptive Data of Respondents for Pre-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 and older</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual household income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30000 or lower</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30001-50000</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50001-70000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70001-90000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900001-110000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110001 or higher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td>NO.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school or lower</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor' degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>78.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending game experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>91.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main Study

The purpose of the main study was three folded: (1) to apply conspicuous consumption motivation scale by Marcoux et al. (1997) to sport fans consumption behavior to explore the factor structure of American sport fans’ motivation for conspicuous consumption in attending major games, (2) to find the interaction of conspicuous consumption (extrinsic motivation) and identity fusion (intrinsic motivation) on sport fans’ intention to attend future major sports games, and (3) to explore the influence of demographic information on the level of conspicuous consumption. In the main study, the NFL was used as the context for data collection. Survey was created on Qualtrics and posted on MTurk to recruit participants for a $0.45. In the main study, price factor was primed as the researcher provided a short introduction of the cost of attending NFL games to participants.
Instrument Development

The survey consisted of six sections: demographic information, intention for public display, quality check question, identity fusion with the team, conspicuous consumption, and intention for future game attendance.

Demographics. Demographic information was first collected. Information of age, race, gender, income, marital status, and education questions were collected to understand the participants. In addition, this study asked participants to indicate whether they attended any NFL games in the past five years to understand their game attendance behavior.

Quality control question. A control question was added to ensure the quality of the answers. The question control is “What is the name of your favorite football team”.

Public Display. For RQ3, two questions were asked about whether they share their experience of attending major sport games (e.g., NFL) with others. 7-point Likert scale was used (1=most unlikely and 7=most likely). The two questions were “I will likely talk about going to NFL games with friends, colleagues, and relatives” and “I will likely share my visit to NFL games on social media”.

Identity Fusion. Fan-team identity fusion was measured using the 7-item, 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) (α=.89) developed by Gómez et al., (2011) in the context of individual’s identity fusion with country. This study adapted the scale by changing the wording to fit sport settings and marketing research. Items are “I am one with my favorite NFL team”, “I feel immersed in my favorite NFL team”, “I have a deep emotional bond with my favorite NFL team”, and “I’ll support my favorite NFL team more than any of the other fans would do”.
**Conspicuous Consumption.** The motivation for social status in choosing attending games was measured using the scale by Marcoux et al. (1997). The original scale has 18 items using 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree) ($\alpha=.95$). This study adapted the scale by changing the wording to fit sport settings and marketing research. Some sample items are “Attending the NFL game would enhance my image”, “Attending NFL games is for uniqueness, having the experience others do not have”, “Attending the NFL game would make me to be a true fan” and “I attend the NFL game because my friends and colleagues do so”.

**Purchase Intention.** The dependent variable of the study is sport fans’ intention of attending future NFL games, which was measured using the 3-item, 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly unlike, and 7=strongly likely) by Dodds et al. (1991). This scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha=.92$) and has been widely used in marketing and sport marketing research (e.g., Kwon et al., 2007). Item examples include “I will attend NFL games in the near future” and “I will attend NFL games even if it costs more than watching at home.”

A complete list of all questions and modified scales was provided in Appendix B.

**Participants.** A total of 664 participants took the survey for a little fee. Among the scale items was a control question that asked participants to write down the name of their favorite NFL team. Those who provided any answer other than an NFL team were excluded from data analysis. Eventually, 535 (80.6%) responses were valid for further analysis. There were 346 males (67.6%) and 187 females, and 2 people did not want to disclose, with 189 participants (35.3%) were between 30-39 years old, followed by 179 participants between 18-29 years old (33.5%). There were 460 married participants.
(86.0%), 184 (34.4%) had an annual household/family income between $30,000 - 59,999, followed by 131 (24.5%) with an income between 60,000 - $89,000. There were 273 participants (51%) had bachelor’s degree and 98 with graduate/professional degree (18.3%). White participants were the most (366, 87.3%). There were 474 participants (99.6%) reported that they attended at least one NFL game in the past five years. Detailed descriptive data were provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Data of Respondents for Main Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>High school or lower</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-identified</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>Bachelor’ degree</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate/professional degree</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 or older</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual family income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29,999 or lower</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000-59,999</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60,000-89,999</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>Separated/Divorced/Widowed</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90,000 or higher</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>Attending game in past years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

Data analysis of pre-test and main study of the present study was conducted using R program.

Pre-test

Descriptive statistics were first conducted to obtain basic information about the participants. The pre-test was to examine the conspicuousness of major sports in the eyes
of American sport fans. In addition, this study also examined if there is any difference in the level of the conspicuousness between game attendance, watching mediated sports, and the sport itself (as a baseline). Therefore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) would be used to compare the scores of the three self-reporting questions. T-test was conducted on the impact of demographics on the level of conspicuousness of game attendance, watching mediated sports, and the major sport itself.

**Main Study**

Descriptive statistics were first conducted to obtain basic information of the participants. This study was to apply the conspicuous consumption scale by Marcoux et al. (1997) to understand seeking status behind American sport fans’ preference for attending major sports games. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to discover the factor structure of the measurement and to examine its internal reliability (P. Kline, 2014; R. B. Kline, 2015).

**Exploratory Factor Analysis.** There are a few considerations and techniques need to be briefly addressed. Sample size is important in factor analysis. Generally, researchers agree that 300 participants are good for factor analysis (Comrey & Lee, 2013; Tabachnick et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2010). Larger sample size is better. This study had 535 participants. In EFA, the researcher of this present study had no expectations of the number of the factors that could be identified using the existing scale due to its exploratory nature (Williams et al., 2010). Item analysis was conducted to test the overall correlation and the inter-item correlation of the 18 items that were adapted from the original that was developed in Poland using several types of consumer goods, which was different from the present study that was based in the United States in studying spectator
sport consumption. Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha$) would be measured. Ideally, $\alpha$ should be more than .70.

Kaiser-Myer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity will be conducted. KMO examines the strength of the partial correlation between variables or how suited data is for factor analysis. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity tests null hypotheses that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which means the variables are unrelated and not ideal for factor analysis. It was suggested that the value of KMO should exceed the cutoff value of .50 and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity should be significant ($p<.05$) (Kaiser & Rice, 1974; Tabachnick et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2010). Kaiser’ criteria was adopted to determine the number of extracted factors (Williams et al., 2010). Kaiser’s criteria required eigenvalue to be calculated. An eigenvalue is an index that indicates how good a component is as a summary of the data. The study determined the number of factors using that eigenvalue is equal to or greater than one (Kaiser, 1960; Williams et al., 2010).

In EFA, rotation methods are either orthogonal or oblique (Corner, 2009). Orthogonal rotation methods, such as varimax and equamax, assume that the factors in the analysis are uncorrelated. In contrast, oblique rotation methods, such as direct oblimin and promax, assume that factors in the analysis are correlated (Corner, 2009; Rummel, 1988). Marcoux et al.’s (1997) conspicuous consumption scale identified five underlying factors of conspicuous consumption; therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the five factors should be correlated (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Williams et al., 2010). Because the sample size was not very large, oblimin was chosen for data analysis. Factor loading, high cross-loading, and low communalities were checked to ensure that each factor
identified by EFA had only one dimension and that each item loaded on only one factor. The cutoff value for low factor loading should be more than .40, high cross-loading should be more than .40, and low communalities should be less than .30. Based on this process, factors would be determined, interpreted and labelled according to the researcher’s discretion to reflect the theoretical and conceptual intent (Williams et al., 2010).

Scale’s internal reliability and unidimensionality were also tested using Cronbach’s alpha (α) and average variance extracted (AVE). Ideally, α should be higher than .70, and AVE should be higher than .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010).

**Multiple linear regression.** Regression was conducted to examine the relation between (1) the motivation of conspicuous consumption on intention of future game attendance and (2) identity fusion on intention of future game attendance, and (3) the interaction between the motivation of conspicuous consumption and identity fusion on intention of future game attendance.

Lastly, ANOVA was conducted to examine the influence of demographics on the perceived level of conspicuous consumption.
Chapter 4

Results

Pre-test.

A total of 80 participants filled out the survey on MTurk. The mean score of participants’ opinion toward the conspicuousness of the major sports in the United States is 5.6 ($SD=1.39$), the mean of the conspicuousness of attending major sports is 5.45 ($SD=1.56$), and the mean of watching mediated major sports is 5.15 ($SD=1.76$). All means of the answers to the three questions related to the conspicuousness of major sports and how they are consumed in the United States are higher than 4, the mid-point. Answer distribution is provided in Table 3.
Table 3

*Distribution of answers to conspicuousness of major sports as a product, attending sport and watching mediated major sports*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Sport</td>
<td>Very disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game Attendance</td>
<td>Very disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Mediated Sport</td>
<td>Very disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-way ANOVA was conducted using R program. There was no significant difference (alpha level of .05) between their attitudes toward the conspicuousness of the major sports and the way they consume it, $F(2, 237)=1.68, p=.188$. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that participants considered the major sports like the NFL in the United States conspicuous sport products, no matter how major sport games are consumed. It is noted that in the survey, no price factor was primed so participants answered the three questions based on their existing evaluation. It is interesting to know that participants did not differentiate the level of conspicuousness of watching mediated sport and attending games, even though that luxury is the precondition of conspicuous
consumption. A possible reason is that sport identity display plays a decisive role of determining the conspicuousness of the three items, and the price factor was not salient.

**Influence of Demographics on Conspicuousness**

T-test was conducted on demographics on the perceived conspicuousness of major sports, attending games, and watching mediated sport. Age (below or 35 vs above 35), gender (male vs female), education (below college vs college and above), income (Under or 50,000 vs above 50,000), and race (white vs non-white) had no significant effect on the perceived level of conspicuousness of each item.

**Summary.** It is reasonable to say that in the United States, major sports are widely considered as conspicuous products. Therefore, RQ1 was answered. However, in a natural environment, participants, regardless their key demographic backgrounds, did not differential the level of conspicuousness between attending NFL games and watching NFL games, which means that flaunting sport identity is conspicuous. Therefore, H1 was not supported.

**Main Study**

The pre-test results suggested that major sports in the United States are conspicuous, and consuming major sports, whether watching mediated sport or attending games, is conspicuous in the eyes of many participants. In the main study, the NFL was used for data collection to further understand the motivation for conspicuous consumption in spectator sport, particularly attending major sport games.

**Public Display Intention.** The precondition of conspicuous consumption is public displaying their consumption. Thus, it is important to know the extent to which participants were willing to share their experience before, during, and/or after their game
attendance (RQ3). Among 535 participants, only 39 (7.2%) expressed that they were somewhat unlikely, unlikely, or most unlikely to talk about their visit to a game in front of others, and 494 (92.3%) participants said they somewhat likely, likely, or most likely to communicate about their game attendance when meeting with others. There were 76 (14.2%) participants indicated that they were somewhat unlikely, unlikely, or most unlikely to share their experience on social media; in contrast, 459 (85.8%) were somewhat likely, likely or most likely to share their experience on social media. The mean score for “talk about their game experience when meeting with others” is 5.58, $SD=1.40$, and the mean score for “share their experience on social media” is 5.31, $SD=1.61$, both are higher than the mid-point, 4. The results suggested that public display their games attendance is very common among sport fans. Detailed results about communicating game experience in person and on social media were provided in Table 4.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intention to Share Game Attendance Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influence of Conspicuous Consumption on Game Attendance

To validate the model by Marcoux et al. (1997) and generate new model for conspicuous consumption in attending major sports games (RQ4), a series of tests on the measurement items and on the scale’s psychometric properties were conducted. Item analysis, exploratory factor analysis, scale reliability, unidimensionality, and convergent and discernment validity were examined in steps.

**Item analysis.** Item analysis was checked for item correlations. The overall Cronbach’s alpha for conspicuous consumption scale adapted from Marcoux et al. (1997) was .97, and average inter-item correlations was ranged from .63-.67, indicating the excellent reliability and internal consistency among items (Field, 2013; P. Kline, 2013). Therefore, all 18 items were remained for further analysis.

**Exploratory Factor Analysis.** EFA was conducted on the 18 items to identify the underlying factors in conspicuous spectating consumption. The result of the overall Kaiser-Myer-Olkin (KMO) value was .97, exceeding the cutoff value of .60, so the sample size (535 participants) was adequate for factor analysis. The result of Bartlett’s test of sphericity was 169.51, p<.001, indicating that the data were appropriate for factor analysis. This study used eigenvalue that is equal or higher than one to determine the number of factors (Kaiser, 1960). EFA generated two eigenvalues more than one, which are 10.18 and 2.12; therefore, two factors were sufficient, a significant drop from the original five factors. After checking factor loading (.40 or higher), cross-loading (.40 or higher), and communalities (.30 or higher), two items from the original Materialistic Hedonism were dropped from the study due to cross-loading and low loading. There are “Attending the NFL game would enhance my image” and “Attending the NFL game is
for uniqueness and the experience that some others do not have”. Factor One includes (a) two items of original Materialistic Hedonism, “By attending NFL games, I intend to please others” and “Attending the NFL game would make me feel more important”; (b) three items from the original Communication of Belonging to/Dissociation from Group, “I want to attend NFL games because my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances attend the games”, “I want to attend NFL games because my social media friends attend the games”, and “I want to attend NFL games to show off, to be noted”; (c) three items from the original Social Status Demonstration, “Attending NFL games is a social status symbol for me”, “Attending the NFL games is a symbol of success and prestige”, and “Attending the NFL games means wealth”, (d) four (all) items from the original Interpersonal Mediation, “Attending NFL games would increase my value from the point of view of others”, “Attending the NFL game would make me more attractive than others”, “Attending the NFL games would make me popular among my friends and colleagues”, and “Attending the NFL game would induce respect from others”; (e) and one item from the original Ostentation, “I want to attend NFL games because it costs more than watching games at home”. Because most items came from original Interpersonal Mediation (four items) and Social Status Demonstration (three items), Factor One was named *Social Status Demonstration for Interpersonal Mediation*.

Factor Two includes one item from original Materialistic Hedonism, “Attending NFL games is cool”, one item from the original Communication of Belonging to/Dissociation from Group, “I want to attend NFL games because all NFL fans want to”, and one item from original Ostentation, “If I could afford it, I would attend more NFL games”. Because the three items focus on the benefits associated with the characteristics
of watching NFL games at the stadium, the popularity of the experience and its associated price, Factor Two was named as *Materialistic Hedonism*.

Factor One explained 57% of the variance and Factor Two explained 12%, and together the two factors explained 69% of total variance in the motivation of conspicuous consumption in attending NFL games. Reliability of Factor One is excellent with .98, and Factor Two’s reliability was .78. AVEs were .71 and .51 for Factor One and Factor Two, respectively. Both exceeded the cut-off value of .50, indicating good convergent validity.

In addition, AVEs were compared with the squared correlation between the two factors, which is considered a rigorous way to test discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The correlation between the two factors was .54, so its squared correlation was .29, lower than both AVEs, indicating good discriminant validity. Details of EFA were provided in Table 5.
The study identified a two-factor model of conspicuous spectating sport:

Interpersonal Mediation through Social Status Demonstration and Materialistic Hedonism. In this section, multiple regression was conducted to investigate the effect of conspicuous consumption and identity fusion on participants’ purchase intention of future expensive spectating sport attendance (e.g., NFL). Multicollinearity was checked on VIF (variance inflation factors). All VIFs (range from 1.98-2.72) met the criterion value of (less than) 5 (Gareth et al., 2013).
Social Status and Identity Fusion on Future Attendance. Multiple regression was conducted on identity fusion and social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation. Interaction between identity fusion and the motivation for social status display for interpersonal mediation was checked. The results suggested that the intention of attending games is positively influenced by the level of fans’ identity fusion with the team and the level of their motivation for social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation, p<.01. H1 and H2(factor one) were supported. A negative interaction between the variables was detected, p<.05. Specifically, those who are lowly fused with the team more likely to be influenced by their motivation for social status and better interpersonal relation to attend games, while for those who are highly fused with team, social status demonstration for better interpersonal relation is less important on their intention for attending game. The results suggest a ceiling effect of social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation on their intention for attending NFL games. Regression results were provided in Table 6. Interaction was illustrated in Figure 2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>95% CI [LL, UL]</th>
<th>$sr^2$</th>
<th>95% CI [LL, UL]</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>0.92*</td>
<td>[0.18, 1.66]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion</td>
<td>0.77**</td>
<td>[0.62, 0.93]</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>[.05, .12]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>[0.16, 0.61]</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>[-.00, .02]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion:Status</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>[-0.09, -0.01]</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>[-.00, .02]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2 = .501^{**}$
95% CI[.44,.55]

Note. A significant $b$-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. $b$ represents unstandardized regression weights. $sr^2$ represents the semi-partial correlation squared. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
* indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$.

Figure 2
*Interaction between Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation and identity fusion*
Materialistic Hedonism and Identity Fusion on Future Attendance. Multiple regression was conducted on identity fusion and materialistic hedonism was conducted. The results suggested that the intention of attending future games is positively influenced by the level of fans’ identity fusion with the team and materialistic hedonism. Sport fans who have a higher level of identity fusion with the team are more likely to attend future game and sport fans who have a higher need for materialistic hedonism are more likely to attend future games. H1 and H2 (Factor Two) were supported. An interaction between identity fusion and materialistic hedonism through spectating sport was also detected. The results suggested that the moderating effect of materialistic hedonism decreases as
their identity fusion increase. In other words, the intention of attending games of lowly fused fans can be influenced by the level of their extrinsic motivation of better experience, which may be less likely on highly fused sport fans because they attend the games out of their intrinsic motivation for supporting the team. The importance of materialistic hedonism is more important to lowly fused fans than highly fused fans because the latter will attend games, anyway, suggesting a ceiling effect of materialistic hedonism in attending expensive sport games. Results were provided in Table 8 and Interaction was illustrated in Figure 3

Table 7

Regression results using Purchase as the criterion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>sr²</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>[-1.36, 0.33]</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>[.01, .04]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>[0.43, 0.88]</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>[.01, .04]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>0.71**</td>
<td>[0.54, 0.88]</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>[.03, .08]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion:Hedonism</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>[-0.08, -0.01]</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>[-.00, .01]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A significant b-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. sr² represents the semi-partial correlation squared. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
* indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01.
Multiple regression was conducted on both factors of the identified conspicuous spectating sport and identity fusion (3 factors). The regression results indicate that identity fusion and materialistic hedonism significantly influence participants’ intention for future game attendance. NFL fans are intrinsically to watch the NFL games, controlling for other variables. The more NFL fans believe that NFL games provide materialistic hedonism, the more likely they will attend games. Also, a ceiling effect materialistic hedonism was detected.

Interestingly, the motivation of social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation does not have significant influence in the 3-factors regression model. The
interaction between social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation and identity fusion was not detected, which means that in a more complicated model, controlling for materialistic hedonism, social status demonstration for interpersonal mediation does not predict sport fans’ future game attendance well. Results were provided in Table 7.

Table 7

Regression results using intention of future game attendance as the criterion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>sr^2</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Intercept)</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>[-1.47, 0.23]</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>[.01, .04]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion</td>
<td>0.65**</td>
<td>[0.42, 0.87]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonism</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>[0.49, 0.95]</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>[.01, .05]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>[-0.19, 0.33]</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>[-.00, .00]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion:Hedonism</td>
<td>-0.05*</td>
<td>[-0.11, -0.00]</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>[-.00, .01]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusion:Status</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>[-0.05, 0.05]</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>[-.00, .00]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R^2 = .592**
95% CI [.54, .63]

Note. A significant b-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. sr^2 represents the semi-partial correlation squared. LL and UL indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively.
* indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01.

Demographics on Conspicuous Spectator Consumption

ANOVA was conducted to test the difference of demographic variables, which are age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income, marriage status and game attendance experience, on the perceived level of the identified two factors. A post hoc analysis was conducted using Tukey HSD test to uncover the specific differences between three or more groups.
For the effect of gender on the perceived level of motivation for conspicuous consumption, the comparison revealed that females were more likely to be motivated to seek more materialistic hedonism than males to attend games, $F(1, 534)= 8.552, p<.01$, but there is no difference on seeking Social Status for Interpersonal Mediation through Attending spectating Sport.

For the effect of age on the perceived level of motivation of conspicuous consumption, overall, age plays a significant role in affecting sport fans’ motivation for Materialistic Hedonism through Spectating Sport, $F(1,532)=12.7, p<001$, and Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation through Spectating Sport, $F(1,532)=38.41, p<.001$. Specifically, those who are under 30 cares about more social status than between 30-39 group and 40-or-older group, and between 30-39 group reported higher score than the 40-or-older group. In terms of materialistic hedonism, under 30 group reported higher score than both between 30-39 group and 40 or older group, but there were no significant differences between between 30-39 group and 40-or-older group.

For the effect of income on the perceived level of Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation through Spectating Sport, there was a significant difference $F(1,531)=9.136, p<.001$. Specifically, all the three groups reported higher score than the 90,001 or higher group. But there were no significant differences between the three groups, 30,000 or lower, 30001-70,000, and 70,001-90,000.

For the effect of education on the perceived level of Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation through Spectating Sport, those who had an undergraduate degree reported higher score than both those did not go college or had a graduate/professional degree, $F(1,532)=10.27, p<.001$, but there was no difference
between those who did not go college and those with a graduate/professional degree. In terms of Materialistic Hedonism through Spectating Sport, those who had an undergraduate degree reported higher score than those did not go to college. No difference existed between (a) those who did not go to college and whose who had graduate/professional degree and (b) those who had undergraduate degree and those who had graduate/professional degree.

Marital status played a role in both two factors. In terms of Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation through Spectating Sport, $F(1,532)=41.94$, $p<.001$, married participants reports highest score, those who were in other marital status (excluding had never been married) reported the lowest. In terms of Materialistic Hedonism through Spectating Sport, $F(1,532)=24.12$, $p<.001$, married participants reports highest score, those who were in other marital status (excluding had never been married) reported the lowest.

However, income, race, and NFL game attendance experience did not play a role in affecting the perceived level of Social Status Display for Interpersonal Mediation through spectating Sport. Details were provided in Table 8.
Table 8
*ANOVA of the Effect of Demographics on the level of Conspicuous Spectating Sport*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Hedonism</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.295</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>8.552</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
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Chapter 5

Discussion

Spectator sport consumption is an identity-driven, highly visible leisure activity in the United States and the rest of the world. Sport fans do not only consume spectator sport, but also share it with others in their conversation and/or on social media, especially when they attend games. However, attending games, especially nowadays attending major sports in the United States like the NFL, is not cheap at all. It is true that sport fans want to express their sport identity when they share their game attendance with others; however, it can be also true that some status seekers want to display their personal success, wealth, and related social status in front of others through their game-attending experience. Drawing on self-determination theory, this study explored the extrinsic motivation behind fans’ game attendance using the concept of conspicuous consumption (e.g., R. S. Mason, 1981; Trigg, 2001; Veblen, 2007) to shed light on conspicuous spectating consumption in the United States. Meanwhile, the study incorporated identity fusion theory to explain the psychological connection between sport fans and the team so as to understand the intrinsic motivation for attending games. Therefore, from a broader perspective, the theoretical contribution of this study is two-folded: one for conspicuous consumption and the other for identity fusion in sport management and marketing.

**Contribution to Conspicuous Consumption**

First, through extensive literature review in related fields, pre-test, and main study using MTurk data, this study found evidence to answer *RQ1* (Do American sport fans consider consuming major sport games (e.g., NFL) conspicuous?) and *RQ2* (Do American sport fans consider attending major sport games (e.g., NFL) more conspicuous?
than watching mediated games at home?). In the United States, not surprisingly, most
sport fans consider major sports (e.g., the NFL) as conspicuous regardless of how they
consume them (i.e., attending games and watching mediated sport). It is interesting that
sport fans think of watching mediated sports conspicuous even the cost is much less. A
possible reason is that sport fans perceive sport identity display as conspicuous.
According to Johnson et al. (2018), identity-driven consumption, such as pro-social
consumption, can be a status symbol because status seekers tend to use part of their self-
concept to distinguish them from others, which is less relevant to the price tag. Similarly,
people can easily decode sport identity in sport identity-driven consumption and
automatically categorize people into different groups. Therefore, sport consumption itself
is conspicuous in nature.

It is safe to say that public displaying game attendance is conspicuous; to what
extent people practice conspicuous spectating consumption can be vital. In answering
RQ3: Do sport fans share their experience of attending major sport games (e.g., NFL)
when (3a) talking to others and (3b) on social media, the present study found that at least
the majority of the participants (MTurk workers) of the study expressed that they likely
share their experience either in person-to-person conversation or on social media.
According to Mason (1981), many Americans may be less likely to display how much
money they have contentiously because of social and religious value, but sports provide
such a vehicle to express their consumption choice without drawing too many critics.

While letting everyone know how much an individual spend is important, equally
important is the meaning of conspicuous spectating sport consumption. Based on the
work of Marcoux et al. (1997), who identified 18-item five factors in Polish consumers’
desire for conspicuous products from Western countries: interpersonal mediation, materialistic hedonism, communication of belonging, social status demonstration, and ostentation, this study extracted a 16-item, two-factor model to explain the dimensions of conspicuous consumption in attending major sports games in the United States (RQ4). The finding is consistent with existing literature that studies generated different dimensions of conspicuous consumption in different conditions, such as countries, populations, products, and even periods (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018).

Possibly influenced by their “friends, colleagues, and acquaintances” and “social media friends”, many sport fans are willing to pay for a hefty price to attend game so they can display that they belong to the same group as their “friends, colleagues, and acquaintances” and “social media friends”. For many fans, attending major sports game “costs more than watching at home”, so it means “wealth” and is “a social status symbol” and “a symbol of success and prestige”. By publicly displaying their game attendance, they can please other and be “noted” by others, which make them feel increased “value from others”, “more important”, “more attractive”, “more popular”, and “induce respect”. This would be the meaning of attending expensive games rather than watching mediated sports under the motivation of social status display for interpersonal mediation.

Status seekers also care about the better spectating experience associated with the price they must pay for the tickets. While watching mediated sports at home is less expensive and comfortable, attending games is “cool” and nearly “all fans want to” attend game, be part of co-creating the event, practice fans’ public rituals, and witness history. Attending games satisfy their wants for coolness and the experience. NFL fans are willing to “attend more games if they afford it” for a better experience. Such motivation
for materialism in service products like spectating sport is consistent with materialism in possessing tangible goods, but in different forms (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018).

Conspicuous spectating consumption is moderated by some demographics. This study revealed that females care more about materialistic hedonism than males when deciding to go to games and both genders have a similar amount of motivation for social status demonstration for better interpersonal relationship. Younger fans care more about social status display and materialistic hedonism in their game-attending experience than older fans. People with bachelor’s degree generally pay more attention to social status and materialistic hedonism in watching sports than those who do not have a college degree and those with graduate and professional degrees. Married participants put more value on materialistic hedonism to provide the best experience for the family, but they do not care more about social status than those who are not married.

**Contribution to Identity Fusion Theory**

However, not every fan who publicly displays their costly spectating consumption means to flaunt social status or display materialistic hedonism, at least intentionally. Attending sport games is an identity-driven consumption. From the identity fusion theoretical perspective, while some sport fans are displaying their social status from their financial capability by attending expensive games, highly fused fans are displaying their commitment and loyalty to the team and associated social entities such as the city. Sport fans publicly display their spectating consumption not only for themselves but also for the team. Driven by their personal agency and sport and related social identity, sport fans build a bonding relationship with the team, so they are intrinsically motivated to attend sport games as a means of supporting the team as if they support their family members.
whole-heartedly. Through their financial support (autonomy) and co-creation (competency) when watching the game at the stadium, fused sport fans may feel they have done their part of being fans and help the team win games. The commitment and financial sacrifice that separate status seekers from others, making them true fans (relatedness).

To the best knowledge of the author, it was the first attempt to use identity fusion theory in sport management and marketing literature to underpin the mechanism of sport fans conducting fan consumption. Existing literature on identity fusion theory in sport research focuses on extreme behavior like sport violence. The present study attempts to expand the scope of identity fusion theory to common fan consumption behavior. Attending major sports and other high-profile sporting events can be expensive, but fused fans are intrinsically motivated to pay for the price.

Identity fusion does not conflict with the motivation of conspicuous consumption. On the contrary, the two motivations compensate for each other. Lowly fused fans may want to attend game because of the extrinsic motivation for conspicuous consumption, so sport fans may be more likely to attend games even though they may not be much interested. For highly fused fans, motivation for conspicuous consumption seems less important.

**Managerial Implication**

This study has examined how sport fans perceive major sports in conspicuous consumption, which provides managerial implications for sports marketing practitioners. Despite the low cost and convenience of watching mediated sports, many sport fans are willing to pay for the hefty price to attend games to display their financial capability and
loyalty to the team and the community. They likely communicate about their visit to the game when meeting with others and/or on social media. Sport managers need to know that sport fans attend the games not only for its intrinsic fun watch but also for extrinsic rewards, feedback, and reaction. Sport managers need to improve the game experience, such as providing good quality food, entertainment, customer service, and technology to reflect the value of the ticket price so fans can talk about, or post on social media before, during, and/or after their visit. This is particularly meaningful for status seekers because they may be active on social media and need good content to post or they need some good topic for friends gathering or in the office with colleagues.

While many people would like to communicate about their visit to the game, there are also many people may want to be known their experience and loyalty and contribution to the team, but do not want to share it in public because of potential negative feedback; instead, they may want to be publicly honored by the team so others may know what they do. Therefore, the team can enhance their interaction with fans using their social media platforms, fan cameras, and fan club activities to get those fans exposed.

People are subject to conspicuous consumption, such as purchasing premium brand products, regardless their background (Goldsmith et al., 1996). While the wealth class can become season ticket holders and purchase more one-time tickets, the poor groups also want to attend the games. On the other hand, given the rising costs of attending game, it is suggested that sport marketers provide opportunities for the underrepresented groups. Teams may want to enhance their community outreach program and provide opportunities for kids from underserved groups.
Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, this study only focused on major sports, but spectator sports cover a wide range of sports. For example, college sports, national sports, and individual sports can also be conspicuous. Studying each sport product may require a close examination of different group essence. For example, college sports may be more related to displaying education prestige. National teams can be related to patriotism. Therefore, future studies may address other forms of spectator sports.

Second, this study used American population. As Mason (1981) argued that wealthy American consumers are less likely to display their wealth ostentatiously due to social pressure. It is interesting to know whether sport fans from developing countries would place different values on watching mediated sport and attending games in terms of conspicuous consumption. This warrants a future study.

Third, this study is exploratory in nature, using an existing measurement to extract the meanings of conspicuous consumption in attending costly games. Because the measurement was developed in Poland about three decades ago, it may not fully cover the meanings of American sport fans’ conspicuous consumption in spectating sports. Future research may use qualitative research methods to dig in-depth knowledge of sport fans’ extrinsic motivation for attending sport games.

Fourth, this study adopted identity fusion theory to conceptualize the relationship between sport fans and teams. It provides a fresh perspective to explain sport fan behavior. Although that some scholars believe identity fusion theory is a better predictor, it is worth the effort to conduct a study on identity fusion and the popular social identity theory in sport management.
Appendix A

Questionnaire for Pre-test

Default Question Block

What is your age?
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56 and older

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your race?
- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your education?
- High school or lower
- Associate degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- Graduate’s degree

What is your family income?
- 0-30,000 or lower
- 30,001-60,000
○ 50001-70000
○ 70001-90000
○ 90001-110000
○ 110001 or higher

Have you attended any game from the four major leagues (the NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL) in the US?
○ Yes
○ No

Are you an American?
○ Yes
○ No

How much do you agree or disagree that major sports (for example, the NFL and NBA) are conspicuous (or noticeable, prestigious, ostentatious, and pretentious) sport products?
○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree

How much do you agree or disagree that attending live major sports (for example, the NFL and the NBA) is conspicuous (or noticeable, prestigious, ostentatious, and pretentious)?
○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree
### Default Question Block

#### What is your age?
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56 and older

#### What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

#### What is your race?
- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

#### What is your education?
- High school or lower
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate's degree

#### What is your family income?
- 30,000 or lower
- 30,001–50,000
Compared to attending major sports in person, how much do you agree or disagree that watching major sports at home (e.g., the NFL and NBA) is inconspicuous (or noticeable, prestigious, ostentatious, and pretentious)?

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Thank you for your time.
Here is your Mechanical Turk Code

- CC6619C755
Appendix B

Questionnaire for main study

Default Question Block

What is your age?

What is your gender?
○ Male
○ Female
○ Non-binary/third gender
○ Prefer not to say

What is your race/ethnicity?
○ White
○ Black or African American
○ American Indian or Alaska Native
○ Asian
○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
○ Other

What is your family income?

What is your marital status?
○ Never married
○ Separated
○ Divorced
○ Widowed
○ Married

What is your education?
○ Less than high school
Background information

With a total revenue of $18 billion in 2021, the NFL is the most popular major sport in the United States. There were more than 18 million fans attended the NFL games in 2021. The average cost of a family of four attended an NFL regular season game was $487 in 2021, making it the most expensive major sport to attend in the United States.

Have you attended an NFL game in the past five years?
- Yes
- No

What is the name of your favorite NFL team? (You have to write in "Name + Location" format otherwise you will be rejected)

Block 1

I am one with my favorite NFL team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I feel immersed in my favorite NFL team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

I have a deep emotional bond with my favorite NFL team.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

My favorite NFL team is me.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

I'll support my favorite NFL team more than any other fans would do.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

I am strong because of my favorite NFL team.
☐ Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

I make my favorite NFL team more appealing to others.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

Block 2

I will likely talk about going to NFL games with friends, colleagues, and relatives.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

I will likely share my visit to NFL games on social media.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Block 3

Attending NFL games would enhance my image.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Attending NFL games is for uniqueness, having the experience others do not have.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Attending NFL games is cool.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

By attending NFL games, I intend to please others.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
Attending NFL games would make me feel more important.
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I want to attend NFL games because my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances attend the games.
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I want to attend NFL games because my social media friends attend the games.
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I want to attend NFL games because all NFL fans want to.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

I want to attend NFL games to show off, to be noted.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

Attending NFL games is a social status symbol for me.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

Attending NFL games is a symbol of success and prestige.
Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree
Attending NFL games means wealth.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Attending NFL games would increase my value from the point of view of others.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Attending NFL games would make me more attractive than others.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Attending NFL games allows popularity among friends and colleagues.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

Attending NFL games induces respect from others.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

If I could afford it, I would attend more NFL games.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

I want to attend NFL games because it costs more than watching games at home.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Somewhat disagree
☐ Neither agree nor disagree
☐ Somewhat agree
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

I will attend NFL games in the near future.
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
I will attend NFL games even if it costs more than watching at home.

- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The probability that I will attend NFL games in the near future is high.

- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

MTurk code. Thank you for your participation.

- SP490554FT


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