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The Rivalry Effect

The Potential to Foster (Lapsed) Donor Giving

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Abstract

Prior sport rivalry researchers have failed to examine the effects of rivalry utilizing a multidimensional approach to team identification as well as the effects of rivalries in relation to the behavioral outcomes of lapsed donors. The authors worked with the official booster club of a large public university to create three distinct email campaigns targeting lapsed donors to test the effects of framing donation requests with rivalry-themed communications. The results of this study highlight the variations in these distinct identification dimensions due to the presence of a rivalry as well as the behavioral effects a rivalry has on these lapsed donors.

Keywords: *Rivalry, team identification, behavioral outcomes, lapsed donors*

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Alumni giving to American colleges and universities increased by 14.5% in 2017 according to an annual survey conducted by the Council for Aid to Education (2018), totaling an estimated \$11.37 billion and approximately 26% of voluntary support to both public and private universities. It seems many alumni are inspired to give back to their alma maters in the form of monetary donations, which has helped universities meet financial challenges as state legislators continue to cut back the money allocated to higher education institutions (Ma, Baum, & Welch, 2017). However, the recent increase in total giving is not representative of the number of total donations, which has been on the decline for several years (McDearmon, 2013). It should also be noted that the recent tax law changes that removed tax deductions for alumni contributions is likely to lower, slow, or completely eliminate many donors' future contributions (Smith, 2017).

Given this threat to college athletic department donations, schools must increase the number of individual donors to ensure there is no negative financial impact from the loss of a donor. Lapsed donors, a term referring to individuals who have previously given to a university but have not done so for at least one year (Aldrich, 2000), are a source of lost potential revenue for universities. It is estimated that even successful fund-raising campaigns lose about half of their monetary supporters after the first donation (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2014; Sargeant & Shang, 2011). These lapsed donors once found it personally important to give to their alma maters but, for various reasons, have ceased giving. Some lapsed donors cited family needs, a feeling of not making a difference through their donations, lack of reciprocity, and spite as some of the reasons for discontinuing donations to a school, among others, all of which accumulates to thousands, if not millions, of lost donations (Sargeant & Shang, 2011). What universities were once able to count as secured funding is now being allocated elsewhere, making the amount of funding a school receives less than it could be.

It is becoming more difficult for organizations such as U.S. colleges and universities to acquire new donors as the loss of lapsed donors and the inability to find replacements for these lost sources of donations have resulted in the overall reduction in the U.S. donor population (Rhine & Flannery, 2015). New donor recruitment is one of the single-biggest expenditure items for many organizations (Aldrich, 2000), which makes it costly to attempt to attract individuals with no previous experience donating. Importantly, lapsed donors may be more willing to donate again due to their past behavior (Feng, 2014), making lapsed donors a cost-effective target market for donation campaigns; more so than individuals with no previous record of donating.

A unique way to decrease donor defection and encourage stronger maintenance of donation behaviors toward American colleges and universities is through loyalty to a school's sports teams (Bass, Gordon, & Achen, 2015). Donors tend to be extremely proud of their universities, and college sports teams are an easy way to express pride in alumni and fan connections to a university (Havard, Wann, & Ryan, 2013). Alumni giving has also shown to significantly increase when an alma

mater's sport teams do well (Koo & Dittmore, 2014), highlighting the importance of fans' connections to their schools' sport teams on desired behavioral outcomes such as monetary donations. When presented with a game that means more than other games in the form of a school rivalry, individuals may be more inclined to engage in actions supporting the school such as making a monetary donation. Research is needed to verify a rivalry effect will indeed influence lapsed donors to contribute again and to demonstrate universities and sport programs can utilize a rivalry effect to bring lapsed donors back into the fold. Accordingly, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the effects of rivalry games on lapsed donor giving, and whether rivalries can significantly affect both intentions and actual giving behaviors of lapsed donors, particularly in comparison to non-rivalries.

Hypothesis Development

Rivalries

Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schaffer (2013) defined rivalry as “a fluctuating adversarial relationship existing between two teams, players, or groups of fans, gaining significance through on-field competition, on-field or off-field incidences, proximity, demographic makeup, and/or historical occurrence(s)” (p. 51). From the previous literature on rivalries within sport, we find that the presence of a rival can influence the likelihood of, and frequency with which fans follow their favorite team publicly (Tyler & Cobbs, 2015), and can enhance identification with the team and fellow team supporters (Smith & Schwartz, 2003), increasing group cohesion and in-group bias (Berendt & Urich, 2016).

Sport fans have the ability to identify multiple teams as rivals to their favorite team (Wann et al., 2016), and the importance of each of those rivals varies between individuals based on the level of importance each fan places on those rivals (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017). This means one person may believe the University of Michigan's primary rival is Michigan State, while another person may believe Michigan's primary rival is The Ohio State University. While it may not be easy to establish a clear primary rival for all colleges and universities, researchers to date have not shown having multiple potential rivals negatively affects fan affect or relations with the favorite school or team (Wann et al., 2016). Secondary rivals, which are perceived rivalries of slightly less importance and that elicit fewer emotions, or at least less intense emotional reactions, than a primary rivalry (Havard & Hutchinson, 2017; Havard & Reams, 2018), may also affect fans' emotions and behaviors similarly to primary rivals due to the existence of the same (or similar) out-group bias toward the secondary rival. To test the relationship and effect of primary versus secondary rivals on alumni giving while also comparing these rivalries to a non-rivalry (control) condition, the authors pose the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}: Monetary donation intentions will be significantly greater for the primary rival than for a secondary rival or non-rival.

It also must be noted that prior researchers have focused on the research participants' prediction of their future behaviors identified by questions posed within surveys or interviews (Havard, Grey, et al., 2013; Stinson & Howard, 2010). While behavioral intentions tend to correlate, researchers have shown actual behaviors may not always be accurately predicted (Zaharia, Biscaia, Gray, & Stotlar, 2016). When possible, researchers must provide a way to measure actual behaviors instead of relying solely on biased self-predictions. The current study utilized survey questions to record participant behavioral intentions while also using actual donation data to exemplify participant behaviors. Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

H_{1b}: Actual monetary donations will be significantly greater for the primary rival than for the secondary or non-rival.

Multidimensionality of Team Identification and Rivalry Effects

Team identification, defined by Gwinner and Swanson (2003) as a sport fan's perceived connectedness to a sport team and the tendency to view the team's successes and failures as one's own, is a well-studied concept within sport management known to affect many aspects of a fan's relationship to his/her favorite sport team. When examining identification research related to rivalries, Havard, Shapiro et al. (2016) found that highly identified fans were more likely to attend a game, watch a game on television or the Internet, read about their favorite team, and purchase their favorite team's merchandise when the favorite team plays a rival. Havard, Shapiro et al. (2016) also found that fans with higher team identification levels had stronger and more negative perceptions of a rival team than fans with lower team identification levels, exemplifying not only the effects of team identification on out-group perceptions but also the ability for rivalries to threaten highly identified fans' psychological connection to their favorite team. Fans with high team identification levels tend to have a high sense of interdependence and high level of interconnection of self, two dimensions of team identification (Heere & James, 2007, Heere, James, Yoshida, & Scremin, 2011). Rivalries threaten these dimensions of one's team identity (i.e., sense of interdependence and interconnection of self with the team), potentially threatening one's own esteem. The threat to one's esteem may cause rivalries to decrease the significance of these dimensions of team identification in favor of esteem preservation (Berendt & Urich, 2016).

Berendt and Urich (2016) found that, although rivalries threaten fans' identity through lower public esteem from rival team supporters, rivalries also enhance fans' team identity by creating higher esteem in the eyes of fans not involved in the rivalry, as well as increasing in-group distinctiveness and cohesion. Smith and Schwartz (2003) found the presence of a sport rival can actually influence individuals to self-categorize as fans more often, which is a core component of team identification (Heere & James, 2007; Heere, James et al., 2011). This signifies team identification may increase when an individual is primed with a sport rivalry, particularly for the private evaluation dimension of team identification meant to measure the attitude an individual has personally toward the favored team.

While some researchers have examined how rivalries can enhance behaviors associated with highly identified fans (see Havard, Eddy et al., 2016), very few have looked at how team identification levels, particularly specific dimensions that make up team identification, are affected by varying levels or types of rivalries (Kilduff et al., 2010; Tyler & Cobbs, 2015). Havard, Eddy et al. (2016), for example, highlighted that stronger identification resulted in heightened negative perceptions of a rival, but they did not examine how these perceptions change when comparing a primary rival to a secondary rival. Wann and his colleagues (2016) found that having multiple reported rivals did not lower overall team identification levels for fans, but they did not directly examine whether a more heated rivalry resulted in higher team identification levels than a less-prominent rivalry. Considering secondary rivals tend to prompt less prominent emotional and behavioral responses than primary rivals, the authors pose the following hypotheses:

H_{2a}: Overall team identification scores will be significantly higher when presented with a primary rival compared to team identification levels when presented with a secondary or non-rival.

H_{2b}: The individual dimension scores contributing to team identification will vary based on the type of rivalry (primary, secondary, or non-rival)

H_{2c}: In the presence of a rival, regardless of rivalry type, the team identification dimension of private evaluation will be rated significantly higher than the dimensions of interconnection of self and sense of interdependence.

Multidimensionality of University Identification and Rivalry Effects

Trail, Robinson, Dick, and Gillentine (2003) posited that the university a sport team represents (e.g., the Seminoles football team represents Florida State University) was a point of attachment for individuals in the formation of their team identities. This means that the university and the university's sport teams are separate entities, although part of the same larger university system. While it is clear from previous research that team identification significantly affects university identification and vice versa (see Heere, James et al., 2011 for a review), it has not been explored whether university identification would change specifically due to the presence of a rival or based on the level of rivalry. It is also unknown if the various dimensions making up university identification are affected differently by rivalry.

Both Interconnection of Self and Sense of Interdependence with one's university were unaffected over a three-year longitudinal study of identification after a school added a new football program (Katz & Heere, 2016). In another study, Heere, Walker et al. (2011) found similar inconsistencies in importance of these dimensions relating to universities with established football programs, showing a possible lack of importance of these constructs to one's university identification. Considering these two constructs have the closest relationship to rivalry's effects on team identification, it is likely university identification will not be significantly

affected overall by the presence of a rival, regardless of types (i.e., primary or secondary rivals).

Katz and Heere (2016) did report the dimensions of Behavioral Involvement, Cognitive Awareness, Private Evaluation, and Public Evaluation (for university identification) were all positively affected by the presence of the football team. The presence of a rival, which enhances in-group out-group comparisons (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016), should increase the effects of these dimensions for the team with which one identifies. Given that the remaining two dimensions of Interconnection of Self and Sense of Interdependence were insignificant in Katz and Heere's (2016) study, it is likely the same results would apply regardless of the designation of the competitor as a rival (either primary or secondary). Therefore, the authors hypothesize the following:

H_{3a}: University identification will not significantly differ based on the presence of a rival.

H_{3b}: The university identification dimensions of Interconnection of Self and Sense of Interdependence will not be significantly affected by the presence of a rival.

H_{3c}: The university identification dimensions of Behavioral Involvement, Cognitive Awareness, Private Evaluation, and Public Evaluation will be significantly and positively affected by the presence of a rival.

Methods

Design and Participants

To test the research hypotheses, email surveys were sent to lapsed donors of a large southeastern state university. The official university alumni booster club provided an email database of 3,649 lapsed donors. The university keeps track of active donors and moves donors to an inactive (or lapsed) donor list if they do not donate to any campaigns sent out in one calendar year. Individuals on the lapsed donor list were sent one email campaign each calendar year by the official university alumni booster club, with the last email campaign sent completed six months before this study began. Thus, all participants included in the email campaign created for this study had not had previous email contact from the booster club for at least six months.

The email campaign for this study consisted of three groups: A control group, a secondary rival group, and a primary rival group. In the control group, a message was sent from an official university booster club email address to lapsed donors merely asking them to donate to the university after taking a survey. In the secondary rival group (chosen based on booster club suggestion), the email advertised an upcoming football game against a tenured in-conference, geographically close university. Although the booster club self-identified who they felt was the

primary and secondary rival for the university, the researchers determined the secondary rival university was a competitor but not a primary rival to the focal university by ensuring the secondary rival was an in-conference university but not identified as the school's biggest rival by participants. To verify secondary rival status, each participant was asked to name the school they felt was the biggest rival of their university. One university was unanimously named as the school's biggest rival, and a close in-conference university was included as the secondary rival for the experiment. Previous researchers have shown geographical closeness, conference affiliation, and a history of competition (see Havard, 2016; Kilduff et al., 2010) all have significant impacts on the formation and maintenance of a rival, making this team (and university) a likely candidate for a rivalry.

The message for the secondary rival group included information about a drawing for a free one-night hotel stay the night of the game being advertised. This hotel stay was used as an incentive for people to complete the survey and to garner more excitement for the game in question. The researchers purposely chose a valuable incentive to better entice the lapsed donors to respond, considering their lack of desire to do so in the recent past. Park, Ko, Kim, Sagas, and Ed-dosary (2016) noted that tangible benefits and opportunities to socialize with others are predictors of giving intentions for low-contributing and high-contributing donors, respectively, which made the offering of a hotel stay for two appealing to donors at all monetary donation levels.

The email for the primary rival group also included advertising for an upcoming football game with a one-night hotel stay incentive for survey participation, but the game advertised was for a longstanding in-state rival team (university) located less than 150 miles away. The closer geographic location and the longer athletic history between the primary rival and the school with which the authors worked compared to the secondary rival made the primary rival a more likely candidate for inducing stronger rivalry effects from participants.

Of the 3,649 emails sent out to lapsed donors, 1,266 emails were sent to the control group, 1,192 emails to the secondary rival group, and 1,191 emails were sent to the primary rival group. All emails included a link where the participants could access the online survey. Considering the sample consisted of individuals who had already indicated a lack of desire to communicate with the university based on lack of participation in previous email campaigns, it was expected the response (i.e., survey completion) rate would be lower than if the emails had been sent to active donors who were more inclined to engage with the university and the team. In total, 60 individuals completed the control group survey (4.74% response rate), 44 completed the secondary rival group survey (3.69% response rate), and 73 completed the primary rival group survey (6.13% response rate). After cleaning the data through list-wise deletion, there were 49 usable surveys for the control condition, 38 usable surveys for the secondary rival group, and 60 usable surveys for the primary rival group.

Instrument and Measures

The authors prepared an online survey using Qualtrics, which included the group identification scale and the adaptation of this scale to measure university identity by Heere, James et al. (2011) (See Appendix). To ensure the primary and secondary rivals were perceived as primary and secondary rivals, respectively, the authors included an open-ended question asking the participants to identify the school's biggest sport rival and then included a forced-response question directly asking if the primary rival (for the primary rival format) or the secondary rival (for the secondary rival format) was personally considered a rival for the participant. All primary and secondary rival responses were included in data analysis since 91% (89 of 98) of respondents identified the primary rival as the school's biggest sport rival. Within the secondary rival surveygroup, 37% (13 of 35) of respondents believed the secondary rival to be the school's primary rival, confirming the perception of the team's secondary rival status. All surveys in the secondary rival group were included for data analysis. This question was not included for the control group, as there was no rival involved in the formatting of the email to this group.

At the end of each survey, the individuals were asked if they would be interested in donating to the booster club. Entry into the drawing for the hotel stay was not contingent on a participant's answer to this question. This question marked the behavioral intention of participants. The final question asked participants to provide their personal email address required for entry into the drawing for the hotel stay. Completion of the survey then redirected all participants to the booster club website where all participants would have the opportunity to actually donate to the booster club for the university. A booster club employee checked the list of donations with the list of provided email addresses one week after the surveys closed and one month after the surveys closed to see if any participants from the lapsed donor email campaign donated to the booster club. The booster club employee was used to extract this information to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Results

In determining H_{1a} , if monetary donation intentions will be greater for the primary rival than for the secondary or non-rival, findings show 10.5% of respondents in the primary condition would donate, 8.8% in the secondary condition would donate, and 7.8% of participants in the non-rival condition would donate, thus confirming H_{1a} . A second analysis addressing H_{1b} , if actual monetary donations will be significantly greater for the primary rival than for the secondary or non-rival, revealed only 1.8% of participants in the primary condition actually donated to the booster club, and no one donated in the secondary or control conditions .

A series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to address the remaining hypotheses. There was no statistical support to show that identification with a university's football program increases due to rivalry condition (H_{2a} not supported). Additional ANOVAs were used to test the effect of rivalry level on the individual dimensions of team identification. The only team identification dimension significantly affected by rivalry level was Public Evaluation ($p = .025$).

For H_{3a} the effect of rivalry level on university identification was significant ($p = .005$) (H_{3a} hypothesis rejected). Post hoc comparisons indicated that the mean score for the primary rival ($M = 5.54$) and the secondary rival ($M = 5.50$) was significantly different than the control condition ($M = 4.93$). The primary and secondary rival levels did not significantly differ from one another in regard to university identification. There is evidence that rivalry may heighten one's identification with a university. An additional ANOVA was conducted to test the effect of rivalry level on the individual dimensions of university identification (H_{3b} and H_{3c}). The university identification dimensions significantly affected by rivalry level were Public Evaluation ($p = .048$), Interconnectedness of Self ($p = .014$), Interdependence ($p = .011$), and Behavioral Involvement ($p = .001$). See Table 2 for university and team identification dimension results.

Table 1*Team and University Identification ANOVA Results*

	ANOVA		Primary Rival		Secondary Rival		Control (No Rival)	
	F	<i>p</i>	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Team*ID	1.909	.153	5.311	.924	5.245	1.035	4.945	.793
Private Evaluation	.066	.936	6.333	1.098	6.265	1.041	6.272	.831
Public Evaluation	3.806	.025*	5.39	1.193	5.128	1.373	4.658	1.258
Interconnectedness	.989	.375	5.269	1.499	5.245	1.532	4.833	1.713
Interdependence	1.874	.158	3.760	1.741	3.628	1.754	3.088	1.569
Behavioral Involvement	2.985	.054	5.211	1.294	5.304	1.347	4.579	1.658
Cognitive Awareness	.355	.702	5.759	1.095	5.735	1.140	5.915	.752
University*ID	5.570	.005*	5.542	.903	5.497	.943	4.931	.941
Private Evaluation	.913	.404	6.450	.765	6.294	1.118	6.193	.973
Public Evaluation	3.113	.048*	5.988	1.008	5.735	1.166	5.404	.1233
Interconnectedness	4.413	.014*	5.170	1.532	5.343	1.425	4.333	1.813
Interdependence	4.661	.011*	4.211	1.848	4.167	1.498	3.184	1.683
Behavioral Involvement	8.070	.001*	5.544	1.144	5.500	1.311	4.491	1.603
Cognitive Awareness	.138	.871	5.807	.932	5.831	1.106	5.787	.988

Note: * indicates *p* value is < .05

The Rivalry Effect

A linear regression was calculated to predict university identity based on rivalry level and team identification. The moderator of rivalry level strengthening the relationship between team identification and university identification was also included but was not statistically significant ($p = .143$) and was removed from the regression. A significant relationship was found ($p < .001$), with an R^2 of .594. University identity increased .761 for each increase in team identity, and decreased -.157 as rivalry level decreased from primary level to control group. Both team identity ($p < .001$) and rivalry level ($p = .017$) were significant predictors of university identity .

Table 2

Regression Effect on University Identity

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	p-value
Team Identification	.761	.000
Rivalry Level	-.157	.017
* $R^2 = .594, p < .000$		

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the presence of a rivalry effect which contributed to an increased university identification but not increased team identification, a finding that furthers current rivalry and identification literature and contradicts previous research on the relationship between team identification and rivalries. This study also shed light on which specific dimensions significantly contributed to this relationship in different level of rivalries. The finding that Public Evaluation of a favored sport team was significantly and positively affected by rivalries was of particular interest, especially when considering the lack of significance for any other dimension of team identification in the study. Public Evaluation represents the perceived attitude of nonmembers toward the favored team (Katz & Heere, 2016), which signifies followers of sport teams feel public opinion of their teams improves when rivalries are present. While we cannot determine why this is the case from our results, it does provide practitioners with valuable information on the effects of rivalry promotion on team appeal. Using a primary rivalry to promote team events may be beneficial to booster clubs hoping to improve their team's appeal to lapsed donors .

The finding that no other dimension of team identification significantly changes with the presence of (any type of) rivalry is also of use to both practitioners and researchers alike. One of the most interesting findings was the lack of significance in behavioral involvement related to the team due to rivalry. This finding was supported by the results of the behavioral intention question in the survey but was contradictory to the actual behaviors observed after the survey concluded. With

the primary rivalry resulting in significantly more actual monetary donations to the team than the secondary rivalry and the condition with no rival, it seems that the Behavioral Involvement dimension of the Team*ID scale used in this study is actually a better determinant of behavioral intentions and not actual behaviors.

For practitioners, this may come as heartening news. It seems that, while fans of teams may distance themselves in their minds in the face of a rival, possibly due to a desire to preserve their self-esteem (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016), their actual behaviors still benefit the team. This may be the most influential finding overall, as the results provide some evidence that rivalries do have a significant positive effect on actual behaviors of sport fans. It is also necessary to note that this effect was only found in the primary rival category, and while statistical differences between groups was not reached, the results mean rivalry type and intensity may change these effects for teams. Practitioners should use only their biggest rival to promote donations, as there is no evidence secondary rivals will result in increased donation behaviors .

The greater effect on university identification is another prominent finding, particularly due to the examination of the six unique identification dimensions. While it was expected that rivalry would affect one's Interconnection of Self and Sense of Interdependence less severely than dimensions like Public Evaluation for team identification, rivalry was not expected to positively affect these dimensions of university identification. Interconnection of Self and Sense of Interdependence with the university, which are used to measure the perceived closeness of one's bond with a university, were found in previous work to be sensitive to protection of one's self-esteem (Berendt & Uhrich, 2016). Rivalries increasing these university identification dimension scores signifies a possible strengthening (instead of distancing) of self-esteem due to the heightened relationship between schools. Practitioners and school administrators should utilize rivalries in marketing efforts to promote the school to potential students, particularly in areas familiar with the two rival schools, to take advantage of the positive effects the rivalry has on esteem of individuals and evaluation of the schools themselves. Practitioners can appeal to the distinction between a primary rival and the beloved university by creating marketing and funding campaigns highlighting the need to donate in order to directly compete with (and outperform) the rival school or team .

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While there are many important findings one can take away from this study, it is not without limitations. One such limitation is the fact that this study focused on very basic framing of an email campaign around rivalry football games appealing to fans' desire to attend games played against rivals with the option to donate included in the email. However, a more direct appeal to donate highlighting the competition between the identified university or team with the rival university or team may be a more effective way to frame the rivalry and encourage donations. When presented with a direct threat to their esteem, individuals react more

intensely (Jensen et al., 2016). Future research should appeal more directly to the rivalry fans find most important through more competitive rivalry framing.

Another limitation of this study is the fact the authors relied heavily on the truthfulness and openness of the booster club employees with which they worked. The authors did not have open access to the post-survey data such as who actually donated and when, which leaves open the possibility of inaccurate reporting of the actual donation behaviors of the sample. Future research should work to gain better access to this information so results are not reliant on data collected from untrained and possibly biased individuals.

Another limitation is that this study was conducted within a single university setting, which makes it difficult to know if these results can be generalized to other universities and their booster clubs. As Heere and colleagues (2011) discovered, relationships to both college sports teams and the overarching university are dependent on the relationships individuals have with many different groups such as the city and state with which the primary group associates. Future studies should look to include a number of universities and college teams to determine if the effects of rivalry are generalizable.

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