

# Think Green: Spectators Thoughts to Improve Recycling Programs

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## Motivations

Sport organizations have been challenged to decrease their overhead costs in all areas within their organization. One such way to reduce costs and improve their image is by way of environmental initiatives like recycling and composting. The San Francisco Giants implemented such a program, which saved the organization nearly \$200,000 in 2005 (Williams & Sherman, 2005). Despite the potential of these environmental programs some sport organizations unknowingly introduce programs without understanding spectator recycling behaviors. Decreasing the organization's impact on the environment and their bottom line is in the hands of the spectator. To further understand sport spectator recycling behaviors, this study examines the obstacles and suggestions of season ticket holders to increase sport spectator recycling while attending large scale sporting events.

## Methods

The interview guide was formulated based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991). Based on the recommendations of Ajzen (1991) and Stake (2000), three groups of sport spectators were identified that attended PCU's (school pseudonym) home football games. These groups were identified to be sets of spectators that would provide the richest data. Participants were chosen based on three criteria: willingness to participate in the study, regular attendance of PCU home football games (3 or more home games attended in the previous season) and awareness of PCU's recycling program. In total, 16 participants were interviewed until data saturation (6 students, 5 non-student adults without luxury seats, and 5 non-students with luxury seats). Further, 6 women and 10 men participated in the study, with an age range from 20 to 69 years ( $M = 37.44$ ).

## Analysis

Participants engaged in semi-structured interviews where they were asked to recall and recreate their own experiences while tailgating and attending PCU home football games. Participants were asked about their experiences with recycling and were asked to provide their recommendations to the athletic department on how to increase spectator recycling. Throughout the study a constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm was used. The raw data were analyzed, broken down into emerging themes, and categorized respectively. Additionally, steps were taken to increase trustworthiness and credibility through the use of peer debriefers and member checks, respectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1995).

## Results

Three themes emerged from the data collected from the participants that can be used to increase spectator recycling; norm transmissions, behavioral prompts, and improved image. Participants commonly referred to norm transmission (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). These norms can originate from "anyone in one's social-sphere, including children,

partners, family, friends, coworkers, strangers, and the media” (Cialdini & Trost, 1998, p. 154). Having spectators simply see other spectators recycle can increase spectator recycling. Additionally, having spectators see the athletes recycle during the event can encourage further recycling by spectators.

Similarly, the second theme that emerged from the participants was behavioral prompts (see Hopper & Nielsen, 1991). These prompts can come in the form of additional signage showing where recycling receptacles are located and what can be recycled. These signs can reduce confusion among spectators as well as serve as a reminder to recycle. Additionally, in keeping with the first theme, public announcements by significant figures (i.e., popular athletes and coaches) were recommended by the participants in this study to encourage spectators to recycle.

Lastly, the sport organization has the opportunity to improve their image through the promotion of environmentally friendly programs like recycling (McCullough & Cunningham, 2010). As suggested by participants, sport organizations are not necessarily focused on recycling programs, in particular college athletic programs. They are the so-called “Neanderthals” on a college campus. However, athletic departments and professional sport organizations can use their social influence to change the behaviors of spectators while improving their image for engaging in such programs. These three themes can be applied directly to sport organizations as they introduce and even improve recycling programs.

### **Implications**

Sport organizations commonly introduce recycling programs because of the relative ease to implement, manage, and wide visibility to spectators. However, organizations may haphazardly implement these programs without the proper forethought to be used as a tool to reduce solid waste disposal costs. Despite these shortcomings, understanding spectator recycling behaviors can fiscally help the organization as well as provide a richer return from the investment in such programs. As more organizations start their own greening programs, deeper care and attention to the effectiveness of these programs is needed.

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