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## **MOTIVATORS OF COLLEGIATE SPORT ATTENDANCE: A COMPARISON ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS**

Robin L. Snipes\*, Rhea Ingram\*\*

### **Abstract**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the motivators for collegiate sport fans across three different sports and to understand demographic variables that may impact these motivators. Collegiate sports depend not only on students, faculty and staff, but alumni and the community as well. Therefore, demographic variables would seem to play an important role in determining which motivators have the greatest impact on game attendance. The results of this study suggest that demographics do affect the importance of different marketing motivators. From a managerial standpoint, this means that marketers should consider their potential target(s) for sporting events to develop cost-efficient marketing strategies.

**Key words:** Sport Marketing, Fan Motivations, Consumer Demographics, Sports Consumption Behavior.

### **Introduction**

Sport is one of America's favorite leisure activities, whether we actively participate or simply attend as a spectator. However, with the increasing competition for disposable income, increasing attendance at sporting events can be a daunting task. Fan attendance is one goal all sport organizations have in common, because without fans the atmosphere of the event is little to none. This charge is more difficult for some organizations than others, for example major league vs. minor league baseball. Determining what factors motivate fans to attend sporting events is essential to developing an effective and cost-efficient marketing strategy.

Many collegiate sport teams struggle to find ways to increase their fan base and game attendance, especially in non-revenue sports. One strategy being increasingly utilized is promotions, such as tournament contests (e.g., fantasy on-line play, three-point shoot-outs, and "best dressed fan" contest), discounted ticket sales to local organizations (e.g., Boys/Girls Scouts, church groups, etc.), scholarship drawings, product giveaways, and event tie-ins (e.g., Beach Day or Fan Appreciation Night). James and Ross (2004) argue that non-revenue sports can cross-promote their games to be more efficient. However their study did not take into consideration any demographic variables.

Collegiate sports depend not only on students, faculty and staff, but alumni and community as well. Therefore, demographic variables would seem to play an important role in determining which motivators have the greatest impact on attendance. While existing fan motivation research has provided considerable insight, one area that remains unexplored is an investigation of the variations of perceived value and the effectiveness of different marketing motivators among various demographic groups, especially across collegiate sports. The purpose of this paper is to identify the motivators for collegiate sport fans across three different sports and to understand demographic variables that may impact the various motivators.

### **Literature Review**

Factors affecting sport consumption decisions have long been an interest of practitioners and academics alike. Many collegiate sports teams today are struggling to find ways to increase their fan base and game attendance. Research examining the demand of different sports has primarily cen-

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tered on game attractiveness (e.g., individual skill, star player preference, win-loss record), economic factors, demographic factors, promotional factors, and residual preferences (e.g., venues, scheduling), and more recently intrapersonal factors (e.g., entertainment, drama, aesthetics) (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Hansen and Gauthier, 1989).

Mumford, Kane, and Maina (2004) recommended six strategies to increase sporting event attendance: (1) increase the value of the event; (2) increase student involvement with the sports program; (3) increase the event publicity and exposure through media strategies; (4) broaden the target market to include the community (not just those within the school); (5) increase the "fun" factor of the event by including things such as a team mascot, cheering and dance squads, bands, and crowd participation games; and (6) increase promotional activities to including contests, prizes, and giveaways. Many other marketers have suggested that adding value to the sporting event is a good way to increase event attendance. There are several ways to emphasize the perceived value of a sporting event, including lowering the admission price or food price. For example, some researchers have recommended that the sport marketer should focus on providing an entertaining experience for the game attendees (Wakefield and Sloan, 1995; Wann 1995). As pointed out by Gladden and Funk (2001), while winning may not be a significant predictor of sport event attendance among highly committed fans, the ability of a team to entertain is critical.

An extensive amount of research has examined individual differences among fans in their motivations to attend games. For example, gender differences have been explored in fan motivation (e.g., Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; James and Ross, 2004) indicating that men focus more on the athletic/skill and competitive nature of sport while women are more motivated by the social aspects of the event. Even educational and occupational backgrounds have been shown to influence game attendance (Zhang et al., 1995). Other research has investigated differences in motivation across various types of sport and at different levels of the game. James and Ross (2004) examined motivation factors across three collegiate sports finding differences on seven of the nine motives, however factors associated with the sport in general generated the most interest. In comparing the setting of the sport (minor league vs. collegiate baseball), one study found that minor league fans consider value and added entertainment more important than collegiate, and collegiate fans value items related to the baseball game itself more important (Bernthal and Graham, 2003).

Controllable variables used by marketers of sport can impact game attendance. For example, one primary tool used by many sport organizations is that of promotion. Promotions have consistently been found to be positively related to attendance (Bird, 1982; Hansen and Gauthier, 1989; Hill et al., 1982). Examples of the types of promotions currently being used include tournament contests, three-point shoot-outs, and "best dressed fan" contests. If funds are an issue, many college sports teams have looked to different companies to sponsor promotional prizes and events. Research has indicated that sales promotion seems to influence attendance to college baseball games (Branvold and Bowers, 1992), while others recommend providing an entertaining experience (Gladden and Funk, 2001; Wakefield and Sloan, 1995; Wann, 1995). However scant research to date has examined the effectiveness of promotional tools based on the type of sport and various demographic factors. For example, one study found game promotion to be negatively related to age and economic status (Zhang et al., 1995). With collegiate sports attempting to attract various demographic segments, this critical area of study is needed in order to determine the most cost-efficient and effective marketing strategy.

This paper explores the differences in marketing motivators for collegiate sport fans. Prior research has addressed many other topics within the area of fan motivation, yet none have examined the variation in the perceived value and effectiveness of different marketing motivators on different demographic groups. The current study examines the extent to which fans of different demographic groups can be differentially motivated in terms of attendance at college sporting events. Therefore, based on the existing literature and previous research in this area, the following two hypotheses are advanced and tested:

**Hypothesis #1:** The importance of different marketing motivators on fan attendance will differ significantly across different college sports.

**Hypothesis #2:** There will be a difference in the importance of each motivator between different demographic groups.

## Research Methodology

### *Questionnaire Design*

The questionnaire was developed in three stages. The first stage involved a thorough literature review to identify possible instruments to measure the study constructs. We then developed survey questions based on the research objectives of the study and on the information derived from the literature review. The full survey included questions to help identify target audiences and awareness levels, and to provide recommendations on appropriate promotional vehicles, motivational techniques to increase fan attendance, and pricing strategies. A focus group consisting of college students then reviewed the full survey and made recommendations for revisions to the survey to make it more clear, concise and attractive to the reader.

The third stage of the survey development involved pilot-testing the revised survey on a group of people in our target population. The purpose of the pilot test was two-fold: (1) to find ways to improve the survey (i.e., make it more concise and clear), and (2) to test the length of the survey by determining the amount of time it took respondents to complete it. During the pilot test phase, the class distributed the survey to about 100 people within our target population (i.e., CSU faculty/staff/students, alumni, high school students, and/or others within the Columbus community). Based on the information gained from the pilot test, several changes were made to the survey. Examples of the changes made to the survey include changes in wording or adding/deleting survey questions.

The final draft of the survey included items measuring respondent demographics, sporting game attendance, and the importance placed on several marketing factors, such as admission price, special prizes and giveaways, and halftime entertainment. A copy of the survey items used in this study is included in the Appendix.

### *Motivation Items*

Fan motivators were generated through the literature review and then through the focus groups and survey pilot test. These tasks resulted in the inclusion of 13 items: admission price, concession food quality, food prices, special prizes/giveaways, spectator participation games, corporate sponsorships, school spirit activities, cheering, school bands, halftime entertainment, team winning record, convenience of game schedule, and facility quality. Using a 5-point Likert scale for each item, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of these 13 items in their decision to attend a sporting event (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important).

### *Sample*

To obtain a representative sample of the target population, a type of quota sampling was used to collect the data. Quota sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that provides for a more representative sample by ensuring adequate representation of various subgroups within a population. The data were collected from respondents living within a 30-mile radius of a medium-size university located in the southeastern United States. Five segments were identified from the target population: (1) college students, (2) faculty and staff; (3) college alumni; (4) local area high school students (juniors and seniors); and (5) families/citizens of the local community. To achieve adequate representation of each segment, several survey distribution techniques were used. Survey data were collected using phone interviews, campus intercepts, e-mail and direct mail. A total of 2,515 surveys were distributed and 1,098 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of about 44%. The breakdown of data collection methods by target subgroup is listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Data Collection by Subgroup

Target Subgroup	Sampling Strategy	Surveys Distributed	Surveys Returned	% of Sample
College students	Campus Intercepts	198	198	18%
College faculty/staff	Interoffice Mail Surveys	400	141	13%
College alumni	E-Mail Survey	452	154	19%
	Random Phone Survey	300	60	
High School Students	Convenience Sample from three High Schools	340	310	28%

### *Respondent Demographics*

Several demographic variables were included on the survey. Table 2 below shows the demographic diversity of the sample. The sample consisted of 51.5% males (566) and 49.5% (532) females. Over 28% of the respondents were non-Caucasian. Respondent age ranged from 14 to 80 (mean = 29). About 35% of the respondents had completed an Associate's Degree or higher, and about 27% had not completed high school (some were high school students).

Table 2

Respondent Demographics

	Frequency	% of Total
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	566	51.5
Female	532	49.5
<b>Age</b>		
Under 18	245	22.3
18-25	355	32.4
26-29	80	7.3
30-34	93	8.5
35-39	79	7.2
40-44	61	5.6
45-49	55	5.0
50-54	60	5.4
Over 54	70	6.3
<b>Race</b>		
American Indian	11	1.0
Asian	30	2.7
African American	258	24.0
Caucasian	671	61.0
Hispanic	61	5.5
Multi-Racial	54	4.8
Other	14	1.0
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Part-Time	259	23.5
Full-Time	574	52.3
Retired	22	2.0
Unemployed	243	22.1
<b>Education Level</b>		
Some High School	304	27.8
High School Graduate	140	12.8
Some College	265	24.1
Associate's Degree	69	6.3
Bachelor's Degree	226	20.6
Graduate Degree	94	8.5

Three college sports were included in the study: baseball, basketball, and soccer. Respondents were asked their sport preference and their sporting event attendance frequency. About 34% indicated that they were very infrequent attendees (less than once a year) and about 6% indicated that they were very frequent attendees (more than 10 games a year). Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of different game and marketing factors on their sporting event attendance and enjoyment on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = not important and 5 = very important.

## Data Analysis and Results

### *Differences in Fan Motivation Across Different Sports*

A t-test of the means revealed some significant differences existed in fan motivation across the three college sports included in the study (baseball, basketball, and soccer), which supports hypothesis #1. A look at the data (in Table 3) shows that there are slight differences in the importance of different marketing motivators. Specifically, soccer fans appear to be less interested in the team winning record ( $t=-3.91, p=.001$ ), food quality ( $t=-2.84, p=.005$ ), and food price ( $t=-2.69, p=.008$ ) than either baseball or basketball fans. Compared to baseball and soccer fans, basketball fans appear to be more interested in school spirit activities ( $t=3.78, p=.001$ ), the school band ( $t=2.31, p=.022$ ), halftime entertainment ( $t=3.20, p=.001$ ), and the team winning record ( $t=2.93, p=.004$ ). It should be noted, however, that while certain fan attendance motivation factors may be more important to one target group than another, this does not indicate that the factor is necessarily important in either setting. Respondents consistently rated the *schedule* and the *facility* as the top motivators for sport event attendance across all three sports. Other important factors were the admission price and the overall team record. The least important factors across all three sports were corporate sponsorships, special prizes and giveaways, and the school band (see Table 3 below).

Table 3

Marketing Influences by Sport Preference  
(1=Least Important; 5=Most Important)

Motivator	Baseball		Basketball		Soccer	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Schedule	4.10	1.00	4.26	.90	4.04	1.10
Facility Quality	3.98	1.07	4.13	1.00	3.97	1.20
Admission Price	3.90	1.13	3.71	1.30	3.77	1.33
Winning Record	3.80	1.07	4.00	1.08	3.34	1.26
Food Price	3.74	1.28	3.73	1.30	3.30	1.37
Food Quality	3.52	1.24	3.56	1.23	3.19	1.39
Halftime Entertainment	3.49	1.15	3.76	1.18	3.48	1.23
Cheerleading Squad	3.22	1.33	3.34	1.18	3.25	1.39
School Spirit	3.07	1.35	3.44	1.32	3.34	1.42
Fan Participation Games	3.01	1.25	3.34	1.29	2.99	1.33
Special Prizes/Giveaways	2.94	1.32	3.12	1.37	2.83	1.37
Corporate Sponsorships	2.89	1.34	3.00	1.40	2.88	1.30
School Band Performance	2.82	1.30	3.14	1.34	2.92	1.35

### *Differences in Fan Motivation Across Demographic groups*

#### *High and Low Attendees*

One demographic to be examined is the frequency of fans attendance. Some attendees indicated that they were very loyal game attendees (approximately 6%), but many of the respondents indicated that they attended games less frequently or none at all. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed perceptual differences between those who frequently attend college sports games (more

than 10 times a year) and infrequent game attendees (those who attend less than one game a year). Consistent with hypothesis #2, the analysis suggests that infrequent attendees might place a different value on certain marketing motivators than frequent attendees (see Table 4 below). Specifically, infrequent game attendees appear to be more affected by the admission price than frequent attendees ( $F=3.58$ ,  $p=.014$ ). Conversely, compared to infrequent game attendees, frequent game attendees (those who attend more than 10 games a year) might place a higher value on other marketing activities such as participation games, corporate sponsorships, and school spirit activities. Table 4 shows the significant differences in the perceived value of marketing motivators between infrequent and frequent game attendees.

Table 4

## ANOVA

Motivator	Low Attendance Mean	High Attendance Mean	Difference	F	Sig.
Participation Games	3.08	3.52	0.44	3.52	0.015
Corporate Sponsorships	2.76	3.48	0.72	6.25	0.0001
School Spirit	3.15	3.64	0.49	3.32	0.019
Admission Price	3.92	3.48	0.44	3.58	0.014
Winning Team Record	3.67	4.29	0.62	9.52	0.0001
Game Schedule	4.10	4.51	0.41	5.58	0.001
Quality of Facility	4.04	4.40	0.36	2.65	0.048

Table Showing Perceived Value of Marketing Motivators (By Low/High Game Attendance).

It should be noted, however, that while certain fan attendance motivation factors may be more important to one target group than another, this does not indicate that the factor is necessarily important in either setting. As indicated in Table 4 above, the most important factors for both low attendees and high attendees were the quality of the facility and the game schedule. However, compared to low attendees, high attendees place a higher value on the team winning record. Conversely, compared to high attendees, low attendees place a higher value on the admission price.

Regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between attendee demographics and the value attached to each marketing motivators. The effects of six different demographic factors were investigated: frequency of event attendance, gender, age, race, education level, employment status, and affiliation with the college (i.e., student, faculty/staff, alumnus, or no affiliation). A separate regression equation was developed for each marketing motivator. For each equation, the six demographic variables were the independent variables and the motivator was the dependent variable. Therefore, a total of 13 separate regression equations were developed. In order to evaluate the models, an F test of model significance was used, which focused on the significance of the whole demographic domain. A statistically significant result would mean that demographics may affect the perceived importance of the factor being studied. Next, the individual demographic variables that comprised the domain were investigated. Consistent with hypothesis #2, the results of these regression analyses reveal that demographic differences do exist in the perceived value of certain marketing motivators.

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analyses. The results indicate that there are demographic differences in the perceived importance of the admission price, food quality, food price, special prizes and giveaways, audience participation games, corporate sponsorships, school spirit activities, cheering squads, halftime entertainment, winning record, and the game schedule. Specifically, as shown in Table 5, respondent frequency of attendance affects the perceived influence of admission price on game attendance and enjoyment. Simply put, this means that those who attend sporting events less frequently are more likely to be influenced by the admission price than

those who attend more frequently. This suggests that sport marketers wishing to bring in new game spectators may consider lowering the admission price or offering discounts to certain groups.

Table 5

Regression Results for Demographic Influences on the Perceived Value of Marketing Motivators

Significant Demographic			Independent Variable		
Motivator	Model R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.	Variables	B	Sig.
Admission Price	.037	.003	Attendance Frequency	-.105	.013
Food Quality	.078	.0001	Gender (Male = 1)	.090	.025
			College Affiliation	-.152	.001
			Education	-.137	.013
Food Price	.056	.0001	Education	-.133	.017
			Employment Status	-.084	.039
Special Prizes and Giveaways			Attendance Frequency	.087	.031
			Gender (Male = 1)	.083	.034
			Age	-.249	.001
			Race	-.116	.043
Participation Games	.134	.0001	Attendance Frequency	.093	.020
			Age	-.232	.001
			College Affiliation	.141	.002
			Education	-.120	.024
Sponsorships	.058	.0001	Attendance Frequency	.141	.001
			College Affiliation	.139	.003
			Education	-.144	.010
School Spirit	.094	.0001	Attendance Frequency	.103	.012
			College Affiliation	.189	.001
			Education	-.251	.001
Cheering	.038	.003	Education	-.158	.005
School Ban			<i>Not Significant</i>		
Halftime Entertainment	.122	.0001	Gender	-.099	.012
			Age	-.266	.001
			Race	-.095	.013
Winning Record	.073	.0001	Attendance Frequency	.178	.001
Schedule	.066	.0001	Attendance Frequency	.113	.006
			College Affiliation	.139	.003
Facility			<i>Not Significant</i>		

*Attendee Gender*

Gender also appears to affect the perceived value of different marketing motivators. For example, males are more affected by the food quality (B=.090, P=.025) and special prizes and giveaways (B=.083, P=.034) than females. Conversely, females appear to be more affected by the halftime entertainment (B=-.099, P=.012) than males.

*Attendee Age and Education*

Age and education also seem to affect perceptions regarding the value of certain marketing incentives. For example, those with lower education appear to be more influenced by the value items and the added entertainment items such as food quality and price, participation games, corporate sponsorships, school spirit activities, and cheering. Compared to older game attendees, younger attendees seem to be more affected by the promotional and entertainment items such as special prizes and giveaways, participation games, and halftime entertainment.



*Attendee Affiliation With the College*

The results of the analysis suggest that college affiliation affects perceptions regarding the value of certain marketing motivators. The categories of college affiliation included in the survey were: (1) college students, (2) faculty and staff, (3) college alumni, and (4) no affiliation. Table 6 below shows the breakdown of means and standard deviations for the perceived value of each marketing motivator by college affiliation. Food quality and food price are significantly more important to attendees who are not affiliated with the college. Conversely, compared to others, college students are more interested in the schedule, school spirit activities, participation games, and corporate sponsorships.

Table 6

Means for the Perceived Value of Marketing Motivators by College Affiliation

	Respondent Affiliation									
	No Affiliation		Faculty/Staff		Alumni		Student		Total	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Food Quality	3.86	1.215	3.24	1.237	3.21	1.208	3.41	1.283	3.52	1.265
Food Price	3.91	1.251	3.45	1.418	3.38	1.282	3.71	1.353	3.69	1.323
Special Prizes	3.22	1.402	2.43	1.363	2.74	1.226	3.29	1.269	3.04	1.358
Part. Games	3.30	1.353	2.55	1.331	2.87	1.177	3.54	1.118	3.19	1.293
Sponsorships	2.94	1.388	2.55	1.440	2.86	1.283	3.16	1.295	2.94	1.357
School Spirit	3.28	1.435	3.02	1.289	2.96	1.314	3.63	1.238	3.28	1.362
Cheering	3.22	1.439	3.37	1.247	2.88	1.255	3.53	2.544	3.26	1.786
School Band	2.94	1.433	3.32	1.313	2.91	1.178	3.01	1.349	3.00	1.349
Adm. Price	3.97	1.230	3.47	1.332	3.75	1.112	3.69	1.322	3.79	1.256
Halftime	3.87	1.209	3.25	1.274	3.28	1.021	3.72	1.129	3.63	1.186
Winning Record	3.83	1.173	3.63	1.019	3.83	1.053	4.05	1.070	3.87	1.108
Schedule	3.96	1.108	4.22	.883	4.25	.855	4.36	.790	4.16	.963
Facility	4.07	1.129	4.19	.883	3.83	1.071	4.21	.879	4.07	1.031

**Managerial Implications**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the motivators for collegiate sports fans across three different sports and to understand demographic variables that may impact the various motivators. Collegiate sports depend not only on students, but alumni and community as well. Therefore demographic variables would play an important role in determining which motivators have the greatest impact on attendance. The results of this study suggest that demographics do affect the importance of different marketing motivators. From a managerial standpoint, this means that marketers should consider (1) the type of sport being promoted, and (2) their potential target(s) for the sporting event to develop cost-efficient marketing strategies. It should be noted, however, that while certain fan attendance motivation factors may be more important to one target group than another, respondents consistently rated the *schedule* and the *facility* as the top motivators for sport event attendance across all three sports. Other important factors were the admission price and the overall team record. This suggests to marketers that admission price is one of the most important motivators of fan attendance, especially if the marketer is trying to bring in new fans.

It is also interesting that the least important factors across all three sports were corporate sponsorships, special prizes and giveaways, and the school band. Compared to baseball and soccer fans, basketball fans appear to be more interested in school spirit activities, the school band, and half-time entertainment. Although special prizes and giveaways appear to be more important to the younger, college-age population (compared to older consumers), they are not as important as the quality of the facility or the admission price.

The results indicate that there are demographic differences in the perceived importance of the admission price, food quality, food price, special prizes and giveaways, audience participation games, corporate sponsorships, school spirit activities, cheering squads, halftime entertainment, winning record, and the game schedule. Specifically, marketers targeting males may want to focus more on the food quality and special prizes and giveaways in addition to admission price. Conversely, marketers targeting females may want to consider more entertainment options. Marketers targeting those with lower education may want to focus more on the admission price as well as participation games, corporate sponsorships, school spirit activities, and cheering. Marketers targeting younger attendees (under 25) may focus more on promotional and entertainment items such as special prizes and giveaways, participation games, and halftime entertainment.

While the primary focus of this paper was demographics and motivators, future research should also examine the impact other controllable factors available to marketers have on game attendance. For example, how effective is advertising for collegiate sports? Does it directly impact the attendance of fans or various target market groups? In addition, age seems to be an important demographic variable, but it needs further investigation. Some studies, including the current study, indicate that sales promotion effectiveness decreases as age increases (Zhang et al., 1995). But what other promotions may be more effective at the more-mature age ranges? Future research examining these factors within many different sport settings would prove fruitful.

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## Appendix A: Survey Items

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

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

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

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

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

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