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## I AM BOLDER: MOTIVATIONS AND BEHAVIORS OF ROAD RACE PARTICIPANTS

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Synopsis:

With over 52,000 participants, BolderBOULDER is the third largest running race in the U.S. and seventh largest in the world. Through analysis of narratives from race participants, we sought to understand motives and behaviors associated with repeat race participation.

Abstract:

Aim

Kim, Smith, and James (2010) stated that sport participants have an economic value up to four times higher in the sport industry than that of sport spectators in the United States. One participatory sport that has experienced tremendous growth in participation numbers since the mid-1990s is road racing. With over 15 million road race participants and over 26,000 road races taking place in the U.S. in 2012, it is evident that road race events compete with each other to attract participants. Understanding what motivates individuals to participate in such events is a key factor for sport managers and marketers in differentiating their road race from competitors, growing their events' participation numbers, and establishing a stronger brand presence in an ever-expanding marketplace. Previous research on road race participants' motivations has largely utilized quantitative surveys and questionnaires. Such studies uncovered many different motivations for runners including physical fitness, self-esteem, competition, personal goal achievement, psychological coping, life meaning, health orientation, weight concern, recognition, and affiliation (Eagleman & Hack, 2011). Future research on sport participants in specific events is warranted, has been encouraged as this could reveal knowledge findings to assist sport managers toward increasing participation in their events. Utilizing the Social Cognitive Theory, this study sought to qualitatively gain a better understanding of the motivations and behaviours associated with running the BolderBOULDER from those participants who submitted videos or stories. By understanding motivations, organizers will be better able to craft marketing strategies to differentiate their event in this increasingly competitive

environment. The purpose of this study was to exam narratives from race participants in the BolderBOULDER 10K to understand their motives for running the race.

#### Theoretical background

The Social Cognitive theory introduced by Bandura served as a framework to organize the themes that address the connections between the study participants and the sport event. According to Bandura (2004), there are five core determinants of the SCT. These core determinants are 1) knowledge, 2) self-efficacy, 3) outcome expectations, 4) goals, 5) social and/or structural facilitators (supports) and/or barriers in a person's environment (A. Bandura, 2004).

#### Methodology

In 2013, race organizers hosted an online competition titled, "I AM BOLDER" in which participants were asked to upload a video or written story to the BolderBOULDER Facebook page about their experiences with the race. Utilizing qualitative methods, this study sought to examine contest entries to gain a better understanding of the motivations for running the BolderBOULDER. In total, 45 participants uploaded either a video or written story. Of these, five were video stories and 40 were written stories. Men comprised 16 of the stories and women accounted for the remaining 29. Demographic information such as age, education, or occupation was not available. Using qualitative document analysis (QDA) methodology (Altheide et al., 2008), three researchers independently watched and read the user-submitted videos and stories and noted keywords, phrases, and direct quotes from each video and story in order to determine the overall themes from the submissions. Throughout the coding process, constant comparison method was used. This involved the coded data being constantly compared to the previously coded data to assist in better identifying emerging themes. The present study was unique due to its qualitative examination of participants' own stories and narratives about their motivations for taking part in a specific race. The authors recognize the potential for selection bias among those who participated in the competition.

#### METHODS

One race that has experienced great success in its 35-year existence and continues to grow each year is the BolderBOULDER 10K, which takes place in Boulder, Colorado every Memorial Day. With over 52,000 participants, it is the third largest running race in the U.S. and the seventh largest in the world. Professional athletes from around the world compete in the event for one of the largest non-marathon prize purses in road racing. Furthermore, BolderBOULDER was one deemed successful within the road race management community, evidenced by Runner's World magazine honoring it with the title of "Best 10K" race.

To celebrate the race's 35th year in 2013, race organizers hosted an online competition titled, "I AM BOLDER" in which participants were asked to upload a video or written story to the BolderBOULDER Facebook page about their experiences with the race. Utilizing qualitative methods, this study sought to examine the contest entries to gain a better understanding of the motivations for running the BolderBOULDER. The present study was unique in its qualitative examination of participants' own stories and narratives about their

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## RESULTS

Four major themes were present within the "I AM BOULDER" contest submissions: family, health, the 'event' experience, and empowerment. Several sub-themes emerged within each of these main themes. For example, under the family theme, sub-themes included tradition, in memory of, friendly competition, and bonding. An overarching frame for nearly every submission to the contest was the concept of loyalty, which was defined by Park and Kim (2000) as having two dimensions: behavioral, described as "the degree to which a participant purchases a service or program repeatedly" (p. 198), and attitudinal, which they described as "the process of attaching psychologically to a selected recreational sport program" (p. 198).

## DISCUSSION

The Social Cognitive theory introduced by Bandura served as a framework to organize the themes that address the connections between the study participants and the sport event. The findings suggested that a participatory sporting event's ability to develop a sense of loyalty amongst its participants can be vital to the event's success. Furthermore, the themes and sub-themes discovered in this study revealed components that assist in building such participant loyalty. While some themes were consistent with previous findings, the themes of family and the 'event' experience differed from previous studies. These findings hold implications for both sport management and marketing practitioners and researchers. From a practitioner standpoint, the results of this study can assist road race managers in developing their events in ways that foster loyalty. From a research standpoint, the results add to the limited body of literature on participatory sport motivations and offer a foundation from which future qualitative and participatory event-specific research can be conducted.

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