

Market segmentation in participatory sport events

Contact details

Name author(s): Jeremy Jordan (1), Anthony A. Beaton (2), Kiki Kaplanidou (3) & Daniel C. Funk (4)

Institution(s) or organisation(s): Temple University (1); Griffith University (2, 4); University of Florida (3)

City and country: Philadelphia, USA (1); Gold Coast, Australia (2, 4); Florida, USA (3)

Email address for correspondence: a.beaton@griffith.edu.au

Aim of paper and research questions

Participatory sport events are a significant contributor to the globally expanding sport industry and play an important role in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle. However, research attempting to understand participation in sport events able to assist managers and marketers of participatory sport events is limited. This research provides a contribution to knowledge in an extension of the Theory of Participation (TOP) (Beaton, Funk & Alexandris, 2009) and a contribution to practice in a simple and meaningful segmentation tool for participatory events.

Literature review

The recently operationalised TOP builds on the work of Funk and James (2006) and Beaton and Funk (2008) to provide a theoretically sound and practically relevant framework for understanding participation in sport and exercise. The central tenets of the theory are that the psychological connection an individual has to participating in a given sport or event, can be identified as belonging to one of four stages: Awareness, Attraction, Attachment, and Allegiance. Each stage has separate inputs, processes and outcomes. The TOP was operationalised using a staging algorithm and involvement profiles derived from the multi-faceted leisure involvement construct (Kyle & Mowen, 2005) in the context of recreational skiing and competitive rugby limited by small sample sizes. The current research provides an extension of the TOP in the context of a marathon event using a large sample, as well as investigating a range of demographic, behavioural and cognitive variables.

Research design and data analysis

An online survey was used to collect data from a census sample of participants in the ING Miami Marathon event. This event included a marathon, half marathon and a 5K run. The survey collected data on involvement facets, demographic, running related behaviours, and cognitive variables such as sponsor recognition and product use and satisfaction. Using race registration data provided by the race organizers, the survey was sent two weeks after the completion of the ING Miami Marathon event to a census sample of 13,193 participants. There were 3305 returned surveys representing a response rate of 25%. Due to missing data points of interest, a number of surveys were removed from the analysis, resulting in 3117 usable surveys. The multi-faceted nature of involvement was supported in terms of construct reliability, discriminant and convergent validity, and confirmatory factor analysis using six fit indices demonstrating a good fit to the data. Prior to applying the staging algorithm a series of ANOVA analyses revealed no significant differences on demographic measures.

Results

Application of the staging algorithm resulted in a frequency distribution of participants; 219 (7%) in Attraction, 1433 (46%) in Attachment, and 1465 (47%) in Allegiance. Cross tab

analysis revealed no interpretable differences among demographic measures by stage. For the behavioural measures, significant differences by stage were found for race run (marathon, half marathon, 5k) ($p < .05$) and race club membership ($p < .05$). For cognitive measures, significant differences by stage were found for wanting to find out more about sponsors and intent to begin using sponsors products.

Discussion and conclusion

Results extend earlier research (Beaton, Funk & Alexandris, 2009) and suggest runners with increasingly stronger psychological connections to the activity are more likely to engage in more running related behaviours (e.g., frequency, breadth and depth of activities). These findings are consistent with notions of serious leisure and recreational specialization. In addition, sport involvement provides sport managers with the ability to understand the social value and importance of the social worlds built through running involvement (Chalip, 2006). From a community perspective, the implications of a strong connection would be to enhance social engagement through running and related activities that bind in-group members together but also help bridge other areas of involvement (e.g., vocational, educational, political, theological and familial).

A better understanding of factors that influence involvement and the psychological connection with running may help race directors to develop more effective marketing materials. Additionally, this increased understanding may also allow race directors to develop running based programs ancillary to a specific event that would aid in the movement of individuals through the stages of the PCM. Based on these results, rather than segmenting a market based on demographics, race directors should focus on meeting needs and wants of potential participants and develop ancillary programs for an event based on the levels of psychological connection illustrated in the PCM (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004).

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