

BENEFITS OF MASS PARTICIPANT SPORT EVENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT MANAGERS

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Abstract

Aim

Anecdotal evidence suggests mass participant sport events (MPSE) have the capacity to increase population-based physical activity. MPSEs motivate individuals to increase physical activity levels in order to participate in the event (Bowles, Rissel, & Bauman, 2006). However, the net benefits of MPSEs remain questionable (Bauman, Murphy, & Lane, 2009). First, is the physical activity level increase sustained after the event? Second, do MPSE's increase physical activity among less active individuals or merely allow already active individuals to sustain activity levels? Third, can MPSEs produce required frequency and intensity levels of physical activity to produce health-related benefits? The current research provides empirical evidence to evaluate the potential capacity of MPSEs for increasing physical activity.

Theoretical Background

Theoretically, MPSEs have the capacity to serve as important social correlates of physical activity. Physical activity represents an individual's pursuit of physically active leisure, which incorporates concepts of leisure and physical activity. The development of physically active leisure generally progresses from initial adoption to subsequent commitment (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011). Theory and empirical research supports a positive correlation between the development of physical activity involvement and behavioural outcomes (Funk, Beaton, & Pritchard, 2011). Hence, MPSE's have the capacity to promote physical activity by incrementally increasing and maintaining attitudes toward the activity and exercising after the event (Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, & Kaplanidou, 2011).

Research Question

MPSEs attract a broad range of individuals from novice to expert, with different activity interest, fitness levels, motives, and constraints that could influence the event's impact on attitudes toward the activity and exercise. Therefore, this research investigates how individual characteristics determine the extent to which a MPSE increases activity commitment and future exercise intentions.

Methodology

Data were collected via an online survey from 2,764 US marathon participants three months after the event. The survey included questions to measure individual characteristics: 12 Sport Event Participation motives; Negotiation Efficacy, Race Distance Type, Prior Events Completed, Prior Physical Activity, and outcomes of Activity Commitment, and Increasing Future Exercise because of the event. Mean scores and inferential analysis were used to examine motives across all individuals. Multivariate multiple linear regression was employed to examine the predictive ability of the individual characteristics on Activity Commitment and Increasing Future Exercise.

Results

Results indicate the running event satisfied 11 of 12 motives $p < 0.05$. Four motives of Challenge, Enjoyment, Strength/Endurance, and Positive Health were important for 95% of the sample, while 75% ascribed six motives of Competition, Weight Management, Ill-Health Avoidance, Social Affiliation, Physical Appearance, and Stress Management as important. Multivariate results revealed that 45% of the variance in Activity Commitment was explained by Event Satisfaction, Negotiation Efficacy, Prior Events, Race Distance, Physical Activity Level, and seven motives were positive predictors $F(17,2746)=132.74$. Results revealed that 31% of the variance in Increasing Future Exercise was explained by Event Satisfaction, Negotiation Efficacy, and eight motives were positive predictors with Prior Events and Physical Activity Level being negative predictors $F(17,2763)=73.97$.

Discussion

These findings suggest a running event has a two-tiered motivational capacity that can both sustain and increase attitudes toward physical activity leisure. The event can motivate individuals to engage in exercise to receive a range of benefits. These benefits, when combined with a positive event experience and enhanced feeling of success for negotiating obstacles to running can increase running commitment. However, previously active individuals are less likely to increase exercise after the event because they already operate at a higher physical activity threshold, and are likely already receiving exercise benefits. In contrast, individuals who participated in fewer prior events and were less active before the event are now more positive toward increasing exercise frequency. Hence, the event promoted more positive attitudes toward increasing exercise among the least active and inexperienced runners, which is an important physical activity segment to target.

Conclusion

The theoretical potential of a MPSE to promote population-based physical activity is attractive for many community stakeholders. However, the event's ability to create health-related exercise benefits as a standalone intervention may be unrealistic. Alternatively, a more reasonable

expectation is that MPSEs can produce incremental changes to physical activity over time by promoting stronger activity interest for all participants, while inducing more positive attitudes toward exercising among the least active participants. The results also highlight the vital role event management has on developing positive attitudes toward physical activity after the event. Sport managers and educators should focus on providing quality event experiences for participants and more importantly, develop and implement post event activity programs for participants to capitalize upon this incremental positive attitude shift.

References:

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