

LOYALTY IN RUNNING EVENTS PARTICIPATION

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Synopsis:

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INTRODUCTION

Participation in running has been increasing in the Netherlands and Belgium (Hover & Romijn, 2010). As a result, more running events have been organized to attract this type of sport consumer. However, these running events need to be more innovative and create positive experiences for the runners to sustain participation (Vos, Walravens, Hover, Borgers, & Scheerder, 2014). Earlier research focuses on motives and characteristics of participants in running events (Hover & Romijn, 2010), but with increasing competition it is important to gain more insight into why people are loyal to some events. Loyal participants are, in the long run, crucial for the existence of an event and can be influenced by different aspects of service (Wiid & Cant, 2012). Most loyalty research in sports tends to look at spectators of professional team sports. The purpose of this study is to have a first exploration of which service aspects and individual characteristics correlate with the loyalty of participants in running events.

METHOD

Loyalty refers to a deeply held commitment to rebuy a preferred product or service consistently in the future (Oliver, 1999). It has, therefore, a behavioural component as well as an attitude component. As a result, four questions are designed to measure loyalty among running event participants. Two questions focused on the intention of participating (last years and next year) and two focused on the affective attitude towards the event (Kwon & Trail, 2005). In addition, the survey contained seventeen questions (measured on a 5 item Likert scale) about individual characteristics and service aspects of running events. This questionnaire was spread through the online media instruments (Facebook, Twitter, direct email) of five running event organizers in the Netherlands. The sample contained 288 participants of whom 52% were female; an average age of 42 years ($sd = .12,87$) and 44% had a membership of a running club.

RESULTS

Cronbachs Alpha shows a consistency in measuring loyalty ($\alpha = .67$) and was used to make one loyalty index ($m = .3.56$; $sd = .90$). This index had a minor correlation with age ($r = .25$ $p = .000$), hours of training for the event ($r = .329$ $p = .000$), importance of spectators during the race ($r = .202$ $p = .001$), difficulty of the track ($r = .179$ $p = .002$), importance of photos during the race ($r = .204$; $p = .001$) and the importance of innovation used in the event ($r = .175$; $p = .001$).

Three OLS Regression models were tested. Model 1 used all seventeen questions to explain the variation in loyalty including dummy variables for each different event. In this model age, the importance of innovation and the importance of spectators were significant ($p < 0.01$) and explain the variation of loyalty. Model 2 used those three variables and the dummy variables for all events. The last model used only the three variables and found consistent results.

IMPLICATIONS

The effects of the three variables are very small. However, the central value of this research is that it gives a starting point for event organizers to increase loyalty among their participants. Loyal participants find it important that an event continue to innovate and that there are spectators during the event. What kind of innovation and spectators needs to be analyzed in further research. Moreover, the relationship between age and loyalty is also worth further exploration. Turning non-loyal participants into loyal participants will be the main challenge for event organizers to ensure their future existence.

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