

Do Intentions To Try A Sport After Watching Elite Competitions Lead To Participation? Exploring The Moderating Role Of Event Leveraging Initiatives

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Introduction and background

'Demonstration effects' refer to a process by which people are inspired by elite sport, sports people, or sports events to participate themselves (Weed, 2009). To date, such effects remain largely anecdotal and atheoretical. Indeed, several researchers have observed little or no behavioural effect, while others have concluded that the mega-sport events tend to only influence people's intention to participate in sport (Bauman, Armstrong & Davies, 2003). In response, researchers (e.g., Misener, Taks, Chalip & Green, 2015) have suggested the mega-sport events must be leveraged if they are to have any participatory effect. Event leveraging is based on the premise that increased participation levels are more likely to result from the combined influence of staging an event, and the implementation of interventions designed to promote sport opportunities. Indeed, the efficacy of leveraging initiatives have received limited empirical attention for researchers. Thus, two questions were of interest to the study: Q1: Does exposure to a leveraging initiative (informational or financial) increase the probability of participation? Q2: Does the influence of the initiative on probability of participation differ between those with low or high pre-initiative intentions to participate?

Methodology

Spectators leaving track cycling events at the 2015 Pan American Games indicated their intention to track cycle at the event facility following the event (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Participants were screened to ensure they had never track cycled before and then were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. In the *control condition* ($n = 103$), participants received five dollars for their participation. In the *information leverage condition* ($n = 80$), participants received payment for their participation and received information about how to try track cycling at the event facility in the form of a program brochure. In the *financial leverage condition* ($n = 198$), participants received a voucher to try track cycling at the event facility free of charge. Participants were required to leave names and contact information so participation data could be tracked post-event. Track cycling participation data was collected from staff at the event facility six months after the event had concluded (0 = did not participate, 1 = did participate). A moderated binary logistic regression model was tested to assess the conditional and interaction effects of intentions and condition on track cycling participation (see Hayes & Matthes, 2009; Hayes & Montoya, 2017).

Results and discussion

Only 43 (11.2%) participants eventually track cycled. Of those who did track cycle, 77% had been in the voucher condition and 23% had been in the control condition — no one from the information condition track cycled. Age, sex, and income were not significantly associated with track cycling participation. Intention to track cycle was significantly and positively associated with track cycling behaviour, $B = .72$, $p < .01$. The effect of the information condition was not effective at any level of intention. However, relative to the control condition, the effect of the voucher condition on track cycling behaviour was significant, $B = 3.36$, $p < .05$. The omnibus interaction effect of the voucher condition and intention to try track cycling on track cycling behaviour approached significance ($p = .05$). Inspection of conditional effects of the voucher at levels of intention to track cycle revealed that the voucher, relative to the control, was effective at increasing the likelihood of track cycling for those at low (control = 1% likelihood, voucher = 9% likelihood, $p < .05$) and neutral intentions (control = 3% likelihood, voucher = 14% likelihood) but not for those with already high intentions (control = 15% likelihood, voucher = 19% likelihood). Consistent with previous research (Ajzen, 1991), these results demonstrate that intention to participate is important for understanding participatory responses to event spectatorship. Most importantly, our results suggest that financial leveraging initiatives are effective at increasing the likelihood of participation, particularly for those who do not intend to participate after witnessing an elite sport event.

Our study provides empirical evidence about the efficacy of leveraging initiatives tied to elite sport events. Based on our results, we advance the theoretical position that exposure to particular leveraging initiatives may play a critical role in encouraging actual participatory behavior post-event. Thus, future research should continue to explore the influence of leveraging initiatives on actual participation when modelling demonstration effects. In practice, our findings support the deployment of financial-based leveraging initiatives

(i.e., voucher/free trial programs) over other informational-based initiatives (e.g., distributing program brochures about sport offerings available at a facility) when attempting to maximize demonstration effects.

References

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