

Volunteering In Major Sport Events: Is The Introduction Of Technology Changing Management Practices?

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Aim of the research

This postmodern ethnography of the processes and procedures of volunteering at Rio 2016 intends to focus on how these have increasingly become more technological. Conveyance of sport related products to consumers and stakeholders via technology, including co-production of consumers and products, has been identified by researchers as increasingly significant in sport business (O'Beirne & River, 2012). However, the relevance of technology in 'managing the workforce of an event' (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013, p. 244) has received scant attention in sport management scholarship. The place of technology is increasingly and directly embedded in a volunteer's journey from the point of the initial application to be a volunteer, through to the post-event recognition of a volunteer's contribution through awarding of certificates. Based on the volunteer experience of Rio 2016 of the principal author, the authors describe and analyse how the increased role of technology shapes the volunteer journey, and how management protocols and HR procedures might be improved or modified to enhance this experience.

Theoretical background or literature review

Previous studies have mainly addressed the individual/human aspects of volunteering, considering volunteers' motivation, expectations, intentions, motivation and expectations in volunteering (Giannoulakis, Wang, & Gray, 2008). Beyond psychological aspects of volunteering, research on managing volunteers and volunteer retention have highlighted the people management dimensions of these relationships (Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006). Besides, research with a multi-level perspective, which explores different aspects of volunteering, is scant (Wicker, 2017). This has meant that 'de facto' that technological progress has been largely uncharted, and perspectives that are not human-centric ignored. As technology mediates human relationships and it is progressively doing so, this study extends our understanding beyond the human elements. The research provides a basis for better appreciating the ways in which a different nature of the relationships in place between volunteers and organizing committees can be fostered or hampered through the 'enrolment' of technology. This study addresses the relationships between technology and humans by adopting a socio-material approach and investigating the different components through the lens of Actor-Network Theory (ANT; Latour, 2005).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The approach taken to study the intersection of the volunteer journey and technology is qualitative in nature. It explores how the increased use of technology may influence management, protocols and practices in major sport events through an examination of the interface of the volunteer and technology. The setting for the research is the Rio 2016 volunteer program. Data were collected during all phases of the volunteer journey of one of the authors, commencing at the point of applying to be a volunteer through to post-Games context, through documentation, blogs, volunteer portal, training, and through participating observation and researcher diary. Data were analysed through an initial phase of manual thematic analysis followed by NVivo.

Discussion/implications/conclusions

Rapid technological change brings complexity into the experiences of major event volunteers and makes it difficult to appreciate changes in operations. However, as technology is becoming more entwined in the management processes of sport events, research shedding light on how this occurs and the implications for the organizers are needed. This current study demonstrates the importance of considerations on the enrolment of technology, and its impact on the volunteer experience. The detailed tracking of the volunteer journey, from the first point of contact through technology until the conferment of the certificate at the end of the volunteer experience, suggest that these moments should be considered as heterogeneous interactions. The research found that technology not only supports but also hampers volunteers' progress during their journey and their experience of volunteering is shaped through these interactions. We will present the research and practitioner implications for volunteer management and Major Sport Events.

References

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