

The Direct and Indirect Effects of Sport Event Reputation on Volunteer Commitment

Hyejin Bang, University of Minnesota

Stephen D. Ross and Mary Jo Kane, University of Minnesota (Advisors)

**Session 26: Management/Leadership
Presentation (25-minute)**

Saturday, June 2, 2007

11:00 AM - 11:25 AM

The essence of successful sport events is volunteer contribution. The importance of volunteers as a resource is emphasized in larger sport events that require a massive number of individuals for delivering the sport service. This suggests that volunteers are key stakeholders with an interest in producing successful sport events. Considering the significant influence of volunteers on the event programs and services, developing effective recruitment and retention strategies is a cardinal task for many sporting event managers (Cleave & Doherty, 2005; Cuskelly & Auld, 2000). Various volunteer studies suggest that motivational factors have influence upon actual volunteer participation (Bang & Chelladurai, 2003; Clary, 2004). Depending on the extent to which the volunteering experience fulfills these motivations, volunteers satisfy their volunteer motivations. The satisfaction, in turn, would lead to greater intentions to continue to volunteer in the future. In addition to motivational and satisfaction factors, the event reputation might serve as a predictor of volunteer commitment to the event. Research relating to brand management provides support for a strong link between brand reputation (i.e., event reputation) and volunteer commitment to that event. Many organizations have paid special attention to their brand reputation to achieve business goals and stay competitive (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004). According to Selnes's (1993) study, brand reputation and customer satisfaction (determined by perceived quality) have a consistent and strong effect on customer loyalty. This implies that reputation of the organization or product attracts people and influences participation. Even in the non-profit sector, a strong brand is helpful for potential donors, volunteers, and staff when deciding to join a recognized organization; thus increasing the likelihood of attracting scarce resources (Ritchie, Swami, & Weinberg, 1999). That is, when the brand helps volunteers meet personal objectives and expectations, the individuals would be satisfied with the activity, and potentially influence their commitment.

In order to extend volunteer engagement in any type of sporting event, understanding the impact of the sporting event reputation on volunteer commitment is important. However, little research has viewed sport events as service products of sport organizations and tends to focus on the brand reputation as the influential factor on volunteer commitment. Moreover, assessing indirect effects of any potential factor seems to be generally overlooked in most empirical volunteer research. Without proper attention on the indirect effect, the relationship between two variables may have limitations to be fully considered (Raykov & Marcoulides, 2000). Thus, the present study attempts to examine a proposed model, integrating both direct and indirect effects of brand reputation in volunteer commitment in an annual special event - the 2006 Life Time Fitness Triathlon held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For the study, two hypotheses were tested: H1: brand reputation has a direct relation on volunteer commitment, and H2: brand reputation has an indirect relation through volunteer satisfaction on volunteer commitment.

The sample of participants included 205 individuals (females=132; males=73) who volunteered at the 2006 Life Time Fitness Triathlon. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire via a post event web-based survey. The questionnaire contained 30 items consisting of four parts: (1) demographic information, (2) volunteer commitment, (3) volunteer satisfaction, and (4) sport event brand reputation. To measure volunteer commitment to the event, a 9-item short-form version of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) developed and validated by Mowday et al. (1982) was used. Volunteer satisfaction was assessed with 6 items covering satisfactions with overall volunteer experiences, overall performance and success of the event, communication with other volunteers, and received volunteer recognition. Responses to all of the volunteer commitment and satisfaction items were rated using a seven-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). Sporting event reputation was measured by 2 brand reputation items used in Selnes's (1993) study on a seven-point Likert-type scale from Very Negative (1) to Very Positive (7). All items were adjusted to the sporting event context.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using LISREL 8.7 to build a measurement model and to verify the appropriateness of the scales used in the sport event context. The measurement model including 17 items with the 3 constructs of volunteer commitment, volunteer satisfaction, and brand reputation indicated that all items for each construct significantly loaded on their corresponding construct. Results from CFA revealed that the chi-square test was significant ($\chi^2 = 378.68$, $df = 116$, $p < .01$), which would indicate an unacceptable fit. However, the chi-square test of absolute model fit is sensitive to large sample size and non-normality in the underlying distribution of the input variables (Kline, 1998). Thus, the alternative fit indices indicated that the measurement model had an acceptable fit of the data: CFI = .96, NFI = .94, TLI = .95, IFI = .96, and RMR = .058 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hair, Tatham, & Black, 1998) as shown the fit indices (CFI, NFI, TLI, and IFI) exceeding a

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

cutoff value of .90 with RMR value below .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kelloway, 1998; Kline, 1998). The reliability test of the scales with Cronbach's alpha exhibited reliability with alpha values ranging from .87 to .91, meeting the minimum level (.70) recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Then, the proposed model with the hypothesized relationships was tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results indicate that although the χ^2 value with 116 degrees of freedom was significant at $p < .01$, other fit indices indicated that the proposed model achieved a satisfactory fit with the data (CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.95, IFI = 0.96, and RMR = 0.058). That is, as hypothesized, brand reputation had a significant positive relation with volunteer commitment to the event and positive relation to volunteer satisfaction. Volunteer satisfaction had a significant positive relation with volunteer commitment. However, although all the direct and indirect relations were significant, the beta coefficient value of the direct relation from brand reputation to volunteer commitment was lower than the values of the indirect relation of those through volunteer satisfaction. That is, it appears that the role of brand reputation is demonstrated as being more indirect.

Overall, the present study increases the understanding of the role of sporting event reputation in volunteer commitment. The value and the meaning of the sporting event as a brand is essential given that high quality or well-known sporting events is likely to create more attention from people for the volunteer service than unidentified sporting events. The study also provides a unique extension to the literature by demonstrating how the sporting event itself needs to be modified not only to meet expectation and needs of participants, but also to satisfy motivations of volunteers. Furthermore, given that sport services are simultaneously produced and consumed, event organizations must realize that quality service experienced at the event could affect reputation and help predict volunteer's future consumption. Volunteers may begin to demand a similar sporting service as they have come to expect as participants.