

Road cycling event preferences for racing cyclists

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Abstract 262**

Over 35 million Americans participate in bicycling and nearly 5 million of them do so more than 110 days out of a year (National Sporting Goods Association, 2007). Additionally, retail sales in the US bicycle industry have consistently been estimated at over 5 billion dollars annually in recent years (Bicycle Retailer, 2007). Cyclists ride on roads, off road, as well as on purpose built facilities such as velodromes and BMX tracks. The overall enthusiasm and frequent participation spills naturally into substantial competitive bicycling pursuits. The most popular form of cycling competition is road racing. In 2007 there were over 31,000 licensed road racing cyclists and over 2,500 competitive road cycling events in the US alone (USACycling, 2007). A vast majority of these events are at a local "grass roots" level and rely extensively on the revenue generated by participant fees for survival and profit. Additionally, the attraction of participants on increasing scales allows for the effective sale of sponsorship properties to bolster event revenue. Because of this compounded importance of attendance to event revenue, it is critical that the promoters of cycling events maximize the attractiveness of their event(s) to their potential bicycle race participants.

Cycling event promoters very often have control over a variety of event attributes that can help them tailor their event product to participant preferences. In order to determine the most desirable mix of attribute levels, we conducted a conjoint analysis using salient event characteristics for racing cyclists. While conjoint analysis has frequently been used to study consumer decision-making and improve product marketing (Green & Srinivasan, 1978), and to uncover recreation and leisure preferences (e.g., McFarlane, 2004), to date it has rarely been used in a competitive sporting event or bicycling context (Morey, Buchanan, & Waldman, 2002; Oh, Ditton, & Riechers, 2005).

In addition to uncovering which event characteristics are most important to cycling event participants generally, the current study also examined the relationship between racing cyclists' recreational specialization to the various event attribute preferences. Recent recreational participation studies have established that participants self reported level of involvement, recreational specialization, is related to consumption patterns, decision making, and activity preferences (Stebbins, 2001; McFarlane, 2004; Thapa, Graefe, & Meyer 2006).

In sum, this study was to (a) investigate the relative importance of cycling event attributes using conjoint analysis to identify the ideal cycling event profile, (b) identify market segments based on cycling event attributes, and (c) explore the effects of recreation specialization in cycling on prioritized cycling event attributes.

Data (N = 160) was collected at two cycling events in the southeastern US. The event selection was reviewed by the panel of cycling experts (N = 4) to ensure the events were of typical size and scope. There were no significant group differences between the two events. Of the 160 respondents, 146 were male (91.2%) and 136 were White/Caucasian (85%). The average respondent's age was about 36 years old (SD = 11.2).

Study participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included 11 demographic inquiries, and 9 recreational specialization items, as well as ratings of 16 cycling event alternatives that differ on the following attributes: travel distance, entry fee, overall prize purse offered, course type, and series affiliation. These five important attributes were established using the feedback of the panel of expert cyclists, each with 10 or more year of competitive cycling experience (N = 4). Using these five event attributes, 16 event scenarios with varying levels of each were generated for the respondents to rate on an 11 point scale from 0 (not at all likely to attend) to 10 (very likely to attend). Each attribute had three possible levels associated with it: travel distance (1, 4, 7 hour driving distance), entry fee (\$20, \$35, \$50), prize purse (\$1,500, \$7,500, \$13,500), course type (urban, rural/residential, industrial/corporate), and series affiliation (national, local/state, none) which were also generated under the guidance of the expert cyclists.

The conjoint results of all responses revealed that travel distance (48.1%) was regarded as the most important road racing event attribute followed by prize purse (16.9%), entry fee (14.0%), series affiliation (12.0%), and course type (9.1%). Among the attribute levels examined in this study, the idealistic cycling event would be a race that is located in 1-hour driving distance, requires an entry fee of \$20, is held in residential or rural area, is affiliated with local or state point series, and offers a total prize purse of \$13,500.

K-means cluster analysis was conducted to segment cyclists who had similar attribute preference patterns and it revealed two

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clusters with different ideal event profiles. For both segment 1 and 2, the most important attribute was travel distance. However, for segment 1 ($n = 67$), the importance of travel distance was extremely greater than the summated importance scores of the other four event attributes, as the importance score of travel distance was twice that of the summated importance scores for all of other four attributes (69.5% vs. 30.5%). Thus, cluster 1 was named 'distance-bounded.' For segment 2 ($n = 93$), the summated importance of prize purse, entry fees, series affiliations, and racing location was relatively greater as the summated importance scores of these four attributes was greater than that of travel distance alone (68.8% vs. 31.2%). Since cluster 2 cyclists placed greater importance on prize purse and entry fees, this cluster was named 'value-sensitive.'

In order to examine the effects of recreation specialization on the prioritized event attributes, a cluster analysis was conducted on individual scores of behavioral, cognitive, and affective involvement in cycling (i.e., recreation specialization) and the results suggested three clusters: (a) highly specialized ($n = 67$), (b) non-behaviorally specialized ($n = 56$), and (c) less specialized ($n = 37$). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of recreation specialization on travel distance, $F(2, 157) = 7.37$ at $p < .001$, and prize purse, $F(2, 157) = 10.94$ at $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons revealed that 'non-behaviorally specialized' and 'less specialized' groups rated travel distance more importantly than did highly specialized group while highly specialized group rated the importance of prize purse significantly higher than did other two groups.

The results of this study highlight the event attributes that matter most to competitive cyclists and establishes differential preferences based on recreational specialization. The recreational specialization results here reiterate past findings that point to significant differences among recreation participants based on their levels of cognitive, affective and behavioral involvement. Additionally, the cluster analysis which established 'distance-bounded' and 'value-sensitive' groups, offers a new avenue of investigation and creates a potential market segment for practitioners to target.