

Returning and First-Time Volunteers at the Sony Ericsson: Theory of Planned Behavior

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Volunteer workforce is one of the most valuable assets of service organizations. Sporting event organizations especially rely extensively on volunteer support for producing and operating their sporting events. Thus, volunteer recruitment and retention have become major issues with which most sporting event organizations and managers are concerned (Costa, 2007; Cuskelly, 2004). To improve volunteer recruitment and retention, understanding the intentions and behaviors of individuals in volunteering for sporting events is significant. Various studies in volunteerism (e.g., Greenslade & White, 2005; Okun & Sloane, 2002; Warburton, 2000) have examined volunteer decision making to predict the individuals' intentions and volunteer activities from the theory of planned behavior (TPB) perspective. The TPB proposed by Ajzen (1985), as an extension of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the individuals' intention or behavior. In the TPB model, individuals' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) predict intention and behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991).

Applying the TPB to the context of sporting event volunteers, (a) an individual's evaluation of volunteering at a certain sporting event, (b) the individual's assessment of the opinions of significant others on volunteering for the sporting event, and/or (c) the individual's perception of the ease or difficulty in providing volunteer services, may influence their intention to return to volunteer at the sporting event. In addition to three determinants of the TPB, volunteers' previous experience may play an important role in influencing the volunteers' intention to return to a sporting event.

Numerous studies in consumer behavior (e.g., Klein, 1998; Liang & Huang, 1998; Weber & Roehl, 1999) indicate that previous experience can influence behavioral intention and actual behavior. This is likely because previous experience gives individuals confidence in their attitude and decision to volunteer at a sporting event. As such, individuals' previous volunteer experience may incorporate the three determinants of the TPB in predicting their intention to continue volunteering. Although considerable research, in general, has been conducted relating to volunteer intention and behavior by applying the TPB, there has been less attention given to individuals' intention to volunteer for sporting events and its relation with previous volunteer experience. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to examine the usage of the TBA in predicting the volunteers' intention to return to a special sporting event, namely the Sony Ericsson Open. In addition, it was posited that there are differences between returning volunteers (returners) and those who volunteered for the first time (first-timers). Thus, the differences between two groups of volunteers were also examined.

Data were collected from a sample of 202 event volunteers who offered their services at the 2008 Sony Ericsson Open. Of the 202 respondents, 108 were female (53.5%) and 94 were male (46.5%). The majority of the respondents were white ($n = 131$; 64.9%) and African-Americans ($n = 38$; 18.8%). In terms of their marital status, 93 were married (46.0%), 68 were single (33.7%) and 41 were either divorced or widowed (20.3%). The average age was 49 years old ($SD = 18.11$). A two thirds of the respondents were returning volunteers ($n = 134$; 66.3%) while 68 respondents volunteered at the event for the first time (33.7%). To investigate the effect of the TPB variables on volunteering intention, after accounting for the respondents' demographic information, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in which intention was the dependent variable. In the equation, participants' age and gender were entered in the first regression step while attitude toward volunteering at the event, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control were entered in the second regression step.

The regression model for the respondents was significant, $R\text{-square} = .44$, $F(5, 186) = 29.58$, $p < .001$. Among demographic control variables, participants' age had a significant effect on intention to return. The two demographic variables jointly explained about 9% of the variance in retention intention. After controlling for demographic variables, subjects' attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) jointly explained a significant amount of the variance in intention, $R\text{-square change} = .36$, $F(3, 186) = 39.64$, $p < .001$. Intention was predicted by PBC ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$), subjective norm ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$), and attitude ($\beta = .13$, $p > .05$). In order to examine the group difference between returners and first-timers, two additional hierarchical multiple regression analyses were also employed for both returners and first-timers. Consistently, demographic variables were entered in the first step while three TPB variables entered in the second step. For both groups, three TPB variables jointly explained a significant amount of the variance in intention to return ($R\text{-square change} = .38$, $p < .001$) and first-timers ($R\text{-square change} = .39$, $p < .001$) after controlling for demographic variables. For returning volunteers ($n = 134$), PBC ($\beta = .56$, $p < .001$) and subjective norm ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$) had significant effects on intention to return while attitude does not have any effect. For the first-timers ($n = 68$), PBC ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$) and attitude ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$) had

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significant effects on intention to return while subjective norm does not have any effect on intention. In sum, attitude-intention relations were stronger for first-timers while subjective norm;intention relations were stronger for returning volunteers.

Overall, all three PBC variables, namely attitude, subjective norm, and PCB, had effects on intention to return. Consistent with previous studies in other disciplines (Armitage & Conner, 2001), the current study found that PBC was a stronger predictor of behavioral intention in comparison to attitude and subjective norm, which held true for both returning volunteers and first-timers. Since volunteering can be considered as one type of leisure activities (Stebbin & Graham, 2004), the importance of PBC on volunteer retention can be further studied with the concept;leisure constraints' (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Jackson, 1997). By doing so, volunteer mangers in sport can develop better volunteer recruitment and retention strategies.

The results revealed that a unit change in subjective norm was associated with greater change in intention in the returning group than in the first-timer group. Meanwhile, a unit change in attitude was associated with greater change in intention of first-timers in comparison to returning volunteers. Thus, event volunteer managers should develop recruitment and retention strategies accordingly. For example, event managers should utilize social networks and reference group members of current volunteers (or those who volunteered at the event before) in order to increase the retention rate. For potential volunteers who have never volunteered for the event, event mangers should communicate better with potential volunteers with regards to the benefit of the events. Further practical implications for sporting event managers will be addressed.