Using Motivational Theory to Understand Donor Motives for Giving to Intercollegiate Athletics

James P. Strode, Ashland University

Session 6: Marketing Presentation (25-minute) Thursday, May 31, 2007 1:00 PM - 1:25 PM

Academic institutions have experienced an unprecedented decline in funding from state and local governments, and intercollegiate athletic departments are not immune to this trend. Philanthropic giving has increasingly become a necessity for the financial vitality of athletic departments. A thorough understanding of what motivates individuals to donate money is critical for development staffs in order to design marketing campaigns that maximize gift giving. With few studies in sport management literature related to broad, theory-based donor motives, the purpose of this study was to develop a psychometrically sound instrument to explain the impetus to give. Motivational theory developed by McClelland (1961; 1975) and social identity constructs (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) were used as the conceptual framework for this instrument.

Donor motivation has been conceptualized in a multitude of ways in sport. The first study by Billing, Holt, and Smith (1985) centered on four motives-social, philanthropy, success, and benefits-that set the framework of intuitively understanding motivations to give. These motives were extended in further research by Staurowsky, Parkhouse, and Sachs (1996), Verner, Hecht, and Fansler (1998), and Mahony, Gladden, and Funk (2003). While many have studied donor research from various angles, the field lacks a strong conceptual framework that supports individual motives for giving. In addition, past researchers created very specific survey items for giving (e.g. priority seating for football). The present study aimed at creating a psychometrically sound instrument based on theory derived from the fields of psychology and sociology. Additionally, we sought to focus on broad, overarching motives instead of specific motives to allow for a greater range of interpretation for future sample sets.

Using McClelland's theory of needs and the construct of helping behavior, items were generated for a survey related to four motives to explain giving-achievement, affiliation, philanthropy, and power. The survey was tested for reliability and validity through the use of a panel of experts, a field test, and a pilot test. Item-to-total correlations and Cronbach's alphas were used to establish validity. A final instrument, including a three-item scale measuring fan identification from Trail and James (2001), was sent to random sampling of athletic donors at a large public Midwestern institution. One thousand three hundred and thirty four surveys were mailed, with 683 returned for a response rate of 46%.

It was postulated that there would be gender differences in terms of motives for this sample based in part on Staurowsky's (1996) findings that female athletic donors gave based on philanthropic motives. Donors high in identification were hypothesized to have different motives than those that were not highly identified. Specifically, a link between achievement and identification as discussed in Trail and James (2001) and Fink, Trail, and Anderson (2002) was hypothesized. It was also presumed that higher identified donors would give more than their counterparts, as the connection between consumer spending on favorite sport teams has been documented (e.g. Madrigal, 1995; Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Finally, this study hypothesized that different motives would be predictive of different levels of giving. While no motive was postulated to be more predictive of level of giving than another, research has found that a power motive may have a correlation with higher levels of giving (Furnham & Argyle, 1998).

Initial validity (item-to-total) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha's) estimates indicated that the instrument was psychometrically sound. Item-to-total correlations were all above the recommended .50 and all items correlated higher with their own dimension than others. Additionally, Cronbach's alphas were all above .90, indicating excellent internal reliability. This valid and reliable survey allowed us to develop a "profile" of the donors specific to this institution. The results of the study showed that the strongest motives to give was achievement (M = 5.7, SD = 1.1), followed by affiliation (M = 5.5, SD = 1.1), philanthropy (M = 4.4, SD = 1.3), and power (M = 2.9, SD = 1.4).

Using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), no statistical significance was found between gender and the four motives (Wilks' Lambda F = 3.02, (4, 661), p < .02). A t-test indicated no difference between gender and level of fan identification in relation to giving (t = .339, (1, 662), p = .735). A positive correlation was found between the level of fan identification and the achievement motive (r = .530, p < .000), and a t-score (t = 5.01, (2, 662), p < .000) was derived which showed that this correlation was significantly stronger than any other motive to fan identification (t = .530, p < .000). A hierarchical multiple regression indicated level of fan identification was not predictive of the level of giving by the donor. In fact, the four motives developed for this study explained only 1% of the variance in level of donor giving, even when controlling for level of income (F = 2.192, (4, 661), p > .05).
This study elucidated prior research that showed highly invested individuals may experience feelings of achievement vicariously based on the success of an athletic team (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2001). Donating to an athletic department to further ensure athletic success stems from a donor's identification (as evidenced by the significant correlation between the achievement motive and fan identification) and may give him or her feeling that he or she somehow has contributed to the success, thus strengthening the association with the group. While this study did not find that highly identified fans gave more than less identified fans, the mean and standard deviation (M = 6.1, SD = 1.1) on the fan identification measurement indicated incredibly high fan identification. Thus, it appears that high fan identification is a necessity for giving, at least at this institution.

In conclusion, this study's findings provide researchers a psychometrically sound instrument based on theory to assess critical motives associated with philanthropic behavior. This will enable institutions to develop "profiles" of their donor bases. These profiles can then be used by those working in development to generate specific strategies and programs that tap into these motives. However, the finding that motives did not predict significant differences in giving levels suggests that researchers need to look beyond motives to better forecast delineations between those who will give at different levels. Further theoretical and practical applications of the study will be provided in the presentation.