Understanding Motivations for Participating in Charity Sporting Events

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Non-Profit organizations (NPOs), the lifeblood of our society, have a significant economic and social impact on society (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Benapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996). However, in recent years, soliciting money for charities has been a major challenge for NPOs, and this challenge will become more difficult as government agencies decide to limit the assistance they provide to people in need (Guy & Patton, 1989). Fierce competition with other charities has also made this situation worse (Benapudi, et al., 1996; Schlegelmilch, Diamantopoulos, & Love, 1996). To overcome such a challenging environment, NPOs have attempted to reach prospective donors and contributors by developing diverse fundraising programs. Due to the popularity of sporting events, charity sporting events have become one of the major fundraising programs (e.g., the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation's Race for the Cure, the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life, the Annual Subway Charity Golf Tournament).

In order to reach prospective donors and contributors, it is essential for sport marketers and event managers who are responsible for sport fundraising programs to understand how and why consumers decide to engage in donation activities (Lee, 1993). Guy and Patton (1989) suggested that the motivation and the decision-making process regarding donor behavior might be quite different form those involved in other types of consumer activities, pointing out that, "the marketers of altruistic causes cannot [sell brotherhood] without understanding what needs people satisfy by engaging in brotherhood or how people decide to become brothers" (p. 28). In addition to understanding donor behavior, the practitioners in charge of charity sporting events are required to have insight into sport participation motivation, as these fundraising programs are a form of sporting events combined with donation activities.

A number of studies in the context of sport consumer behavior have focused on sport participation motivation (e.g., Milne & McDonald, 1999; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Petrick, 2001) and donor motivation (e.g., Ellen, Bonnie, & Michael, 1996; Gladden, Mahony, & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Verner, Hecht, & Fansler, 1998). However, there is a paucity of empirical research in our field which attempts to incorporate sport participation motivation and donor motivation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop an instrument to measure the motivations of participants in charitable sporting events.

Data were collected from 211 participants from three Relay For Life events in a Midwestern state. The Relay For Life program is a charity sporting event designed to celebrate cancer survivors and raise funds for the American Cancer Society. More than three million Americans participated in Relay for Life events during the last two decades (American Cancer Society, 2006). Of the 211 participants, 59 percent were female (n = 125) and the majority of the respondents were White/Caucasian (92.9%). The average age of participants was approximately 36 years old.

Based on the literature on sport motivation and donor motivation (Ellen, Bonnie, & Michael, 1996; Gladden, Mahony, & Apostolopoulou, 2005; Milne & McDonald, 1999; Verner, Hecht, & Fansler, 1998) as well as feedbacks from interviews with event participants, 30 items representing 15 motivational dimensions were identified. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

The scale was purified and later reduced to 26 items by checking internal-consistency scores and corrected-item-total correlations as well as removing cross-loading and nonloading items. Factor analytical analyses suggested a five factor solution explained 64.2% of the variance in the data. Five factors comprised of Philanthropy, Social Affiliation/Enjoyment, Benefits, Family Needs, and Group Collaboration. Descriptive statistics showed that Philanthropy (M = 6.16 with 7 being most important) was the most important motivation, followed by Family Needs (M = 4.98), Group Collaboration (M = 4.45), Social Affiliation/Enjoyment (M = 4.26), and Benefits (M = 2.04). Based on internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha), all scales were found to be reliable at .70 or greater (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The results of the correlational analysis indicated that subjects' intentions to participate in future charity sporting events were positively and strongly associated with Philanthropy (r = .43, p < .01), Family Needs (r = .29, p < .01), and Collaboration (r = .17, p < .05). In addition, the amount of donations to the charity was positively associated with Benefits (r = .19, p < .05). A regression analysis was carried out to find the effects of motivations on repeat participation. After controlling age and gender, five motivations jointly explained a significant amount of the variance in repeat participation (R-square change = .15). Among
five motivational dimensions, Philanthropy (beta = .35) and Family Needs (beta = .15) were significant predictor for repeat participation. To determine potential differences related to the gender and age (younger vs. older participants), A MANOVA was performed, which indicated that subjects' motivations were significantly related to gender, Wilk's criterion = .89, F(5, 203) = 4.96, p < .01, as well as to age, Wilk's criterion = .91, F(5, 203) = 3.81, p < .01. Between-subjects tests on individual motivation revealed significant main effects of gender for Philanthropy, F(1, 207) = 16.63, p < .01, and Benefits, F(1, 207) = 7.95, p < .01. Benefits were more important for male than female participants while Philanthropy was more important for females than male participants. A main effect for age emerged for Social Affiliation/Enjoyment, F(1, 207) = 9.26, p < .05. Younger participants' reports were higher for Social Affiliation/Enjoyment.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on donor motivation in the context of sport marketing by incorporating motivation for participating in charity sporting events. In addition, the current study can help sport practitioners involved with fundraising programs have a better understanding of the motivational factors regarding charity sporting events, and thus they can develop more effective sport-related fundraising programs. For example, it is suggested that practitioners should emphasize the benefits of such events to prospective participants (e.g., chances to have time together as a family). It is also suggested that gender and age of participants might be useful segmentation variables. Furthermore, the results from this study would provide sport marketers who work for NPOs with insight into how to develop marketing strategies to retain their donors and contributors.