The Primary Motives of College Athletic Donors: Developing and Testing a Model

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In the highly competitive college sports environment, many programs have independent financial systems from those of the academic side of the university. These programs function on multi-million dollar budgets generated from ticket sales, licensed merchandise, and television rights. However, donations from alumni and boosters account for the most substantial portion of many athletic departments' budgets. Much of the extant research on university fund-raising (and donations) has focused primarily on the relationship between winning and donations (Clotfelter, 2002; Monks, 2003; Staurowsky, Parkhouse, & Sachs, 1996; Tucker, 2004). However, this myopic view has hindered research progression because scholars have yet to provide a comprehensive explanation of the motivating factors that guide donor decision-making.

This article seeks to fill this gap by presenting an integrated model of college donor motivations and testing the psychometric properties of the research model. For the purposes of the current study, the researchers developed and tested a research model that incorporated Alderfer's (1969) ERG Theory which categorized human needs into three core areas (i.e., Existence, Relatedness, and Growth). Such systematic and empirical analysis has not been done in the context of donors in sport organizations. Therefore, this study gives theoretical contributions to the sport management literature and managerial implications to the sport managers.

The authors conducted a focus group after an extensive literature review on the topic to develop an initial model. Twelve doctoral students (Male = 7, Female = 5) in a sport management program at a large university participated in the focus group (Mage = 26). The participants responded to one primary question: Why would people give money to a collegiate athletic department? There are several donor motivation dimensions repeatedly mentioned. Based on these results, the previously identified donor motivation dimensions were retained. They are: (a) Growth needs – Philanthropy, Vicarious Achievement, and Demonstration of Commitment, (b) Relatedness needs – Affiliation and Social Facilitation, and (c) Existence needs – Public Recognition, Power, and Tangible Benefits.

The target population of this study was donors of college athletics in a NCAA Division I-A university. An email invitation to an online survey was sent to all donors of an athletic department. A total of 816 donors responded and 532 usable surveys were included in data analyses. The average age of the participants was 55 years old, ranging from 24 to 82 years old. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were male and 24% were female. Most of the participants were White (78%), followed by Hispanic (21%), African-American (.9%), and Asian (.4%).

Measures for each factor were adapted from existing scales or newly developed. For example, Philanthropy and Commitment measures were selected from Gladden, Mahony and Apostlepolous's (2005) and Strode's (2006) studies. Vicarious Achievement items were modified and adapted from Strode's (2006) study. Selected items in Strode's (2006) scale were used to measure Affiliation. Verner, Hecht, and Fansler's (1998) scale was modified and used to measure Social Facilitation, Public Recognition and Power. The response format for all of the items was a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

In data analysis procedures, first, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement properties of the selected measures using the AMOS 18 software. The final measurement model included 26 items representing 8 factors. As indicated by \( \chi^2/df = 795.47/247 = 3.221 \), RMSEA = .065, CFI = .933, SRMR = .05, the measurement model achieved good fit for the data. All factor loadings were greater than .50, ranging from .53 to .94. AVE values ranged from .68 for Tangible Benefits to .92 for Demonstration of Commitment. Reliability coefficients ranged from .76 for Tangible Benefits to .94 for Commitment. Correlations among research variables ranged from .23 to .68 except one case, which indicates discriminant validity of measure (Kline, 2005). The correlation between Affiliation and Social Facilitation was .93, which is considered high. Additionally, AVE values for all constructs are greater than the corresponding squared inter-factor correlations (Fornell & Larker, 1981). Taken all together, the results render strong support for the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2005).

The second order CFA model achieved good fit for the data (S-B \( \chi^2/df = 868.405/264 = 3.289 \), RMSEA = .08, CFI = .926, and SRMR = .06). The correlations among three ERG dimensions were reasonably high, ranging from .45 to .77. Finally, a full
model including overall motivation and behavioral intention also achieved good fit for the data ($S-B \chi^2/df = 957.306/338 = 2.832$, RMSEA = .059, CFI = .939, and SRMR = .075). The direct path from overall motivation to behavioral intention was significant (standardized $\beta = .35$). The path from motivation to the three dimensions were all significant (standardized $\beta = .89$ for Growth, standardized $\beta = .86$ for Relatedness, and standardized $\beta = .53$ for Existence). The standardized paths from the ERG dimensions to their sub-dimensions were significant, ranging from .52 to .99. Taken all together, the results render strong support for the psychometric properties of the proposed model of donor motivation.

We believe that this proposed model will contribute to the body of knowledge of CSR and donor behavior. As of yet, the mediator role of trust has not been investigated in the context of donor behavior. Consequently, theoretical understanding of CSR and donor behavior will make both scientific and practical contributions. In this presentation, we will discuss research and practical implications.