From motivations to intentional behavior: An application of the theory of planned behavior to sporting event volunteer intention

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Abstract 2012-049

Thursday, May 24, 2012
1:10 PM

Poster (Madison Ballroom)

It has long been recognized that volunteers are one of the most valuable resources at sporting events. In particular, large-scale special sporting events heavily rely on volunteer workforce (Bang & Chelladurai, 2009). Given the efforts of many special sporting event organizations to recruit and maintain volunteers, it is important to understand how individuals’ motivations can be processed until their intention to volunteer for special sporting events. A recent study conducted by Bang and her colleagues (Bang, Alexandris, & Ross, 2009; Bang & Chelladurai, 2009) suggests that volunteer motivations can be grouped into seven factors – Expression of Values, Community Involvement, Interpersonal Contacts, Career Orientation, Personal Growth, Love of Sport, and Extrinsic Rewards, which is called the Volunteer Motivations Scale for International Sporting Events (VMS-ISE). The extent to which the volunteering experiences fulfill these motivations would lead to satisfaction with volunteer activities, thereby causing their greater intentions to continue to volunteer in the future (Bang & Ross, 2009). Although the VMS-ISE was developed for measuring volunteer motivations at international sporting events, it can also be usable in the context of large-scale national-level sporting events through adaptations in item wording (Bang & Ross, 2009). The connections from motivations to individuals’ intention to volunteer for future events may not always be guaranteed: the relationships may be indirect through other factors that are important in their decision-making process.

Theory of planned behavior emphasizes that behavioral intention and actual behavior of individuals are guided by three elements – personal attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Those three elements can play mediating roles in the relationships between volunteers’ motivations and intention to continue volunteering in the future. For example, an individual’s attitude toward volunteering for a special sporting event and/or social pressures by others may explain the relationship between volunteers’ motivations and intention. Although numerous studies have addressed the positive relationships between volunteer motivations and intention, the current research on mediating role of TPB elements in those relationships is scarce. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine the mediating effects of TPB elements on the relationships between volunteers’ motivations and their intention to volunteer for future special sporting events. The following research question provided focus for this study: Among the TPB three elements, Attitudes, Subjective Norm, and PBC, what TPB elements mediate the relationship between motivation factors and volunteer intention?

The study sample included volunteers (male: 74.3%, female: 25.7%) who had registered for volunteering for the 2009 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament held in Miami, Florida. A paper-based survey was conducted at volunteer orientation sessions before the Tournament. The total number of volunteers worked for the tournament was one hundred fifteen. Of those, one hundred ten volunteers participated in the survey (a response rate of 95.7%). However, the final sample for the study consisted of one hundred seven participants because of three incomplete, unacceptable returned surveys. The questionnaire was consisted of three parts: (a) VMS-ISE, (b) TPB, and (c) demographic information. Volunteers’ motivation was measured using Bang and Ross’s (2009) revised version of VMS-ISE including 7 dimensions of volunteer motivation: Expression of Values (5 items), Community Involvement (5 items), Interpersonal Contacts (4 items), Career Orientation (5 items), Personal Growth (4 items), Love of Sport (4 items), and Extrinsic Rewards (3 items). A theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) questionnaire was employed to measure the volunteers’ Attitude (4 items), Subjective Norm (4 items), and PBC (3 items), and volunteer Intention (3 items). All responses to the items ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7) using 7-point Likert-type scale. The questionnaire also included five demographic questions, such as sex, age, ethnicity, education level, and marital status.

Results of the reliability measurements were found to be above the acceptable level, .70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994): the Cronbach’s alpha values for VMS-ISE and TPB factors ranged from .74 to .96. To examine the mediating effects of TPB elements, a four-step regression approach was used: (1) the VMS-ISE variables as predictors and Intention as an outcome variable, (2) each of the VMS-ISE variables that were significant in the first step as a predictor and each of the TPB variable as outcome variables, (3) the TPB variables that are significantly
predicted by the VMS-ISEs in the second step as predictors and Intention as an outcome variable, and (4) each VMS-ISE and TPB Variables as predictors with Intention as dependent variable after controlling for the TPB Variables as mediators, following Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure. If the impact of the predictor variable on the outcome variable is reduced to nonsignificance when the mediating variable is in the regression model, a full mediating effect exists. Moreover, if the impact of the predictor variable on the outcome variable is significant, but reduced, then it is said that the effect of the predictor on the outcome is partially mediated (Judd & Kenny, 1981).

Step 1: Multiple regression analysis was used to model the relationships between VMS-ISEs and Intention, using a backward elimination procedure. The finally selected regression model (F(3, 77)=11.94, p<.001) included three predictors of Love of Sport (β = .46, p < .01), Interpersonal Contacts (β = .51, p < .01), and Career Orientation (β = -.48, p < .01). These predictors accounted for approximately 32% of the unique variance in volunteer intention (R2=.32, Adjusted R2=.29).

Step 2: focusing only on the three VMS-ISE variables (i.e., Love of Sport, Interpersonal Contacts, and Career Orientation) found to be a significant predictor of intention in Step 1, Separate regression analysis was conducted to test the relationship between each VMS-ISE variable and each TPB Variable. The effects significantly found were: Love of Sport on Subjective Norm (F(1, 102)=21.82, p<.001, R2=.18, Adjusted R2=.17, β = .42, p < .001), Interpersonal Contacts on Subjective Norm (F(1, 102)=55.08, p<.001, R2=.35, Adjusted R2=.34, β = .59, p < .001), and Career Orientation on Subjective Norm (F(1, 102)=30.81, p<.001, R2=.23, Adjusted R2=.22, β = .48, p < .001).

Step 3: Given the three VMS-ISE variables appeared to have significant influences on only Subjective Norm, a simple regression analysis was conducted to test the significance of path from the mediator to the outcome variable. The results showed that Subjective Norm has an effect on the participants’ intention (F(1, 79)=51.75, p<.001, R2=.63, Adjusted R2=.40, β = .63, p < .001).

Step 4: the impacts of the three significant predictors on Intention were tested with mediators (i.e., Subjective Norm) controlled. The multiple regression model where Love of Sport and Subjective Norm were added as predictors with Intention as a dependent variable was significant (F(2, 78)=29.80, p<.001, R2=.43, Adjusted R2=.42). The impacts of both Love of Sport (β = .22, p < .05) on Subjective Norm (β = .53, p < .001) were significant, but comparing to the coefficient of Love of Sport (β = .46) found in Step 1, the effect was reduced. The effect of Interpersonal Contacts on Intention when Subjective Norm was included was significant (F(2, 78)=26.31, p<.001, R2=.40, Adjusted R2=.39): Subjective Norm was significantly associated with Intention (β = .57, p < .001) whereas the impact of Interpersonal Contacts was not significant. The regression model including Career Orientation and Subjective Norm as predictors was significant (F(2, 78)=25.83, p<.001, R2=.40, Adjusted R2=.38): the impact of Subjective Norm was significant (β = .65, p < .001), but Career Orientation was not significantly associated with Intention.

Therefore, this study suggests that Subjective Norm fully mediated the relationships between Interpersonal Contacts and between Intention and Career Orientation and Intention, and the influence of Love of Sport on Intention is partially mediated by Subjective Norm. It implies that outside social influences can play a significant role in volunteer intention; thus, sporting event managers could leverage social factors effectively as a recruiting and retention tool.