Charity Sport Events: Examining the Differences between Cause-related Events Using Sport and Sport-related Events Using a Cause

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Charities often use sport events to raise awareness and funds for their cause (Wood, Snelgrove & Danylchuk, 2010). Sport organizations also find partnering with charities advantageous because these partnerships can attract more attention for the sport organization, increase attendance at events, and generate a more positive image of the sport organization (Walker & Kent, 2009). Motivations to participate in these events have been well documented (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Filo, Funk & O’Brien, 2008; Taylor & Shank, 2008). Many researchers have also examined post-event behaviors and attitudes relating to the event (Walker & Kent, 2009; Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2010). However, few studies have examined the causes of these outcomes. It is important, then, to examine the effects of the event elements on consumers’ attitudes and behaviors toward both the charity and the sport. It is also important to examine the perspective of both sport-focused and cause-focused consumers as they are likely to differ in experiences at the event and outcomes from the event (Wood, Snelgrove, & Danylchuk, 2010).

Sport managers have some control over the event elements and can craft them to attract consumers, but also to impact post-event behaviors and attitudes of consumers. Inspiration is one tool for psychological transcendence (c.f., Thrash & Elliot, 2003) that can help facilitate consumers’ positive behavioral outcomes. By positioning the elements as inspirational, the cause marketers can impact post-event behaviors and attitudes (Lim, Rundio, & Green, 2011). Indeed, inspiration plays a crucial role in empowering consumers to take action beyond the event (Lim, Ogura, Green & Chalip, 2010). Cause-related sport events might therefore inspire consumers to become more involved in both the sport and the cause.

The purpose of this study was to understand the differences between consumers at spectator and participatory cause-related sport events. The study focused on examining the differences between these consumers in regards to the role of event elements in inspiring consumers to take sport-related or cause-related actions.

The study used a survey design to test the effects of inspiration on key sport-related and cause-related outcomes at both two cause-related events. Four hundred surveys were randomly distributed to attendees of a Volley for the Cure event between the second and third sets of a volleyball match at a large Southwestern University. Two hundred nineteen were returned by respondents age 18 and older. Four hundred surveys were also distributed to participants upon completion of a Race for the Cure event in Austin, TX. Of these surveys, 378 were completed by respondents age 18 and older and were used for analysis.

The survey measured eight key constructs: cause- and sport-related motivation to attend the event, the degree to which respondents were inspired by cause- or sport-related elements at the event, general inspiration, likelihood of cause- or sport-related outcomes, and brand reputation of the organization hosting the event. Cause-related motives to attend the event were measured by six items and sport-related motives to attend were measured by two items both using a six-point agree/disagree scale. General inspiration was measured using the average of four items on a six-point agree/disagree scale to determine overall inspiration found at the event. Fifteen items were factor analyzed, producing two dimensions: inspiration derived from sport-related elements and inspiration derived from cause-related event elements. These items were measured on a six-point scale (1=not at all inspiring; 6=deeply inspiring), but factor scores were used in the analysis. Eleven key consumer outcomes were measured on a six-point scale (1=not at all likely, 6=highly likely). These items were factor analyzed, producing two dimensions: likelihood of obtaining sport-related outcomes and of obtaining cause-related outcomes. Reputation of the host organization was measured using an average of three reputation items (Walker, 2007). Data were analyzed via MANOVA to determine whether attendees at cause-related sport spectator events differ from participants in cause-related participant sport events.
Participants at the two events were significantly different from one another, $F(534, 6) = 21.04; p<.001$. Univariate tests found that the groups differed significantly on 4 of the 8 variables: general inspiration, brand reputation, motivation to attend for sport, and motivation to attend for the cause. As one would expect, those participating in the Race for the Cure were more motivated by the cause and those attending the Volley for the Cure were more motivated by the sport. Race for the Cure participants were generally more inspired by their event than were Volley for the Cure attendees. Both groups reported high perceptions of the brand, but Volley for the Cure attendees reported slightly higher levels than did Race for the Cure participants.

The Volley for the Cure was only one cause-related event in the midst of an entire season of non-cause events, while the Race for the Cure is a series of walks and runs devoted to the cause. Also, Volley for the Cure was an event in which a sport organization leveraging the cause to enhance the sporting event and organization while Race for the Cure was an event in which a charity used sport to raise awareness and funds for the cause. These two fundamental differences can help explain why motivations to attend for sport and cause were apparent between the two events. Sport practitioners should then identify the primary motivations of those already attending as either cause or sport, and include elements that attract these participants.

General inspiration at the events was not specific to sport- or cause-related event elements. Race for the Cure is a participatory event, which may have an effect on general inspiration as consumers are more likely to choose the event for the cause, with the sport element more peripheral. The spectator event, on the other hand, could have attendees that came to the game with no expectation that there would be cause-related elements. Consequently, the high degree of inspiration experienced by both groups is even more impressive for the spectator group. Finally, brand reputation was higher for the sport organization honoring the cause than for the charity using sport to raise awareness and funds. These differences could be due to the greater number of potential interactions that spectators may have with the host brand. For example, it is possible to attend more than 10 volleyball matches hosted by the event organization within a 10 week period. The participation event occurs on an annual basis, leaving less opportunity for interacting with the brand. The lack of differences in outcomes between spectator and participatory sport event consumers suggests that both the cause and sport organizations benefit from partnering with each other, regardless of type of event used. Cause-related sport events then are a beneficial method of raising awareness and funds for the organization.