Determinants of Tourists' Expenditures in Mass Participant Sport Events: A 5-Year Analysis

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As a component of the larger tourism industry, sport tourism, has shown rapid growth in recent decades (Weed, 2008). Particularly, participation in mass participant sport events (MPSE) continues a strong trend of leisure travel in the United States despite the slowed economy. For instance, the number of marathon finishers in the United States in 2010 increased 8.6% from 2009 and the number of half-marathon finishers has grown by 10% or more each of the past 5 years (Running USA, 2011). Although few studies have examined the relationship between the economy and sport tourism behaviors, Quick (2009) proposed that leisure travel associated with sport may remain strong during economic downturns because sport based travel satisfies dual needs of individuals: passion for sport and travel. Event managers as well as destination marketers would benefit from a better understanding of core characteristics of travel behaviors among sport event participants in order to appeal to their dual interests of sport and tourism.

The purpose of this research is to examine how socio-demographic, psychographic, and sport-related characteristics correlate with tourists' expenditures for mass participant sport events after controlling for year-specific effects. Past research has examined the impact of events and tourism through the triple bottom line approach that considers economic, social, and environmental factors (Sherwood, 2007). Although there are limited studies which have examined MPSEs through this concept, Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, and Kaplanidou (2011) suggest that MPSEs have the capacity to serve as important environmental and social correlates of physical activity through producing positive attitude change among event participants. The current study extends the work of Funk and colleagues by examining the economic aspects of MPSEs.

A review of literature indicates that various socio-demographic factors, such as age, income, gender, marital status, and residence type, can correlate with tourists' expenditures. However, there is no consensus regarding the relationship between socio-demographics and spending patterns across studies. For instance, some studies suggest that gender correlates positively with tourists' expenditures (Fredman, 2008), while others found no relationship (Wang, Rompf, Severt, & Peerapatdi, 2006). Further, although travel spending patterns may differ by ethnicity, most studies conclude that there is no significant difference based on ethnicity (Agrawal & Yochum, 1999; Cannon & Ford, 2002). In contrast to socio-demographics, researchers have also acknowledged the importance of understanding the impact of psychographic elements and have concluded that this knowledge might have more practical value in assessing tourists' spending patterns (Wang et al., 2006). However, few studies have provided empirical evidence supporting the influence of psychographic factors on tourists' expenditures considering sport-related characteristics.

Previous research has examined the impact of involvement and intention on sport tourists' behaviors. McGehee, Yoon, and Cardenas (2003) found that runners with high levels of involvement with road races spent more on running related goods than runners with medium levels of involvement. Casper (2007) also discussed that intention stimulates a positive attitude toward service and experience, which may lead to the willingness to spend more money. Using similar rationale, involvement and intention may explain tourists' expenditure patterns. Thus, this study investigated the determinants of socio-demographic, psychographic, and sport-related characteristics which correlate with tourist' expenditures in mass participant sport events.

The current study was part of a larger project that examined the community benefits and participant experience at a running event held in the Southeastern portion of the United States. The event included a marathon, half marathon and a 5K run. Data used for the present study were collected from event participants over a five year period between 2007 and 2011. This longitudinal approach allows us to control single-year spending patterns, which can be affected by economic conditions. Across the five years, 9,910 non-local participants completed surveys with specific year samples ranging from a low of 1,152 (2010) to a high of 2,483 (2011). In accordance with Stynes and White (2006)'s
suggestions, total expenditures were determined by summing across six key expenditure categories. Items in the survey measured socio-demographic, psychographic, and sport-related characteristics. Psychographic factors were assessed by physically active involvement, travel intention, and event intention. Sport-related characteristics were assessed by race type and previous participation in each distance event. A series of travel-related characteristics that could be correlates of tourists’ expenditures were also measured.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine tourists’ expenditures by socio-demographic characteristics. The results indicated that there were significant differences by ethnicity, income, level of education, gender, marital status, age, and residence (domestic v non-domestic) at p<.01. Multiple regression analyses were next employed to analyze how socio-demographic, psychographic, and sport-related characteristics correlate with expenditure patterns. The current study performs two types of multiple regressions. One model includes all participants (Tourist Model), and the other model was separated by participants’ reason for traveling to the destination - event (Event-Motivated Model) or multi-purposes (Multi-Motivated Model) - in order to assess whether differences based on travel motivation could affect spending patterns. After controlling year-specific effects and travel-related characteristics, adjusted R-square values for each model were .59 (Tourist Model), .62 (Event-Motivated Model), and .45 (Multi-Motivated Model) respectively. In Tourist Model, income, ethnicity, age, non-domestic residence were significant socio-demographic factors that correlated with tourists’ expenditures (p<.01), while travel intention (p<.01), physically active involvement (p<.01), and event intention (p<.05) were significant psychographic factors. Although income, ethnicity, age, and non-domestic residence had significant relationships with travel expenditures in Event-Motivated Model and Multi-Motivated Model (p<.01), gender (p<.01) and marital status (p<.05) were significant only in Multi-Motivated Model. As for psychographic factors, travel intention, event intention, and physical activity involvement were significant in Event-Motivated Model and Multi-Motivated Model (p<.05). Race type was a significant element only in Event-Motivated Model (p<.01), while the number of past marathon event participation was significant only in Multi-Motivated Model (p<.05).

This study reveals that age, income, and non-domestic residence were key socio-demographic correlates with tourists’ expenditures across all three models, while gender was significant only in Tourist Model and Multi-Motivated Model. One of the most interesting findings of the current study is the difference of spending pattern by ethnicity. Multiple regression analysis revealed that Hispanic participants spent significantly more compared to non-Hispanic participants regardless of income, age, or other potential factors in regression. This study also represents initial empirical evidence between psychographics and tourists’ expenditures considering sport-related characteristics. In other words, the higher the level of physically active involvement, event intention, or travel intention, the more money was spent during the event. These results suggest that better understanding of psychographic as well as socio-demographic factors would be important for event organizers and destination cities in developing their marketing strategies. Other implications and future suggestions for research will be provided at the presentation.