The Influence of Perceived Social Impacts of the Sport Event on Volunteers’ Behavioral Intent

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Volunteers are a critical aspect of hosting a sport event and event organizers, whether for small scale (e.g., 5k road races) or mega sport events (e.g., FIFA World Cup), seek to recruit highly motivated, dedicated, and committed individuals (Kim, Trail, Lim, & Kim, 2009). Irrespective of size, sport events can have economic and social impacts for the host community and for those directly involved in the events (Chalip, 2006; Delamere, Wankel, & Hinch, 2001; Howard & Crompton, 2004). Specifically, sport events derive both positive social impacts (e.g., increasing sociability, image enhancement, etc.) and negative social impacts (e.g., traffic congestion, higher real estate costs, etc.) to the host community and its residents. Thus, exploring the social impacts associated with hosting sport events is a key aspect of delivering the event to garner public support and involvement from community residents.

Sport organizations continually strive to fully understand who potential volunteers are and why they contribute time and effort to the event (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). Thus, understanding volunteer motivations and appreciating different motivational styles can lead to more effective volunteer recruitment, placement, supervision, and retention (Bang & Ross, 2009). Studies on volunteer motivation have focused on why people become actively involved in sport events and contributing to society at large (Kim, Trail, Lim, & Kim, 2009). Despite a consistent history of volunteer research, volunteer motives are still relatively complex and should be viewed through a multi-dimensional lens. For example, research has shown that volunteers participate in sport events based on personal motivations, social motivations, and the interplay of each (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, et al., 1998; Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006; Kim, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2009). More recent studies have been increasingly focused on exploring volunteers’ multi-dimensional motivational factors (e.g., perceived social impacts) as well as investigating volunteers’ behavioral intent (e.g., retention of volunteers) and satisfaction (e.g., Bang & Ross, 2009; Finkelstein, 2008).

Based on the preceding commentary, the purpose of this study was three-fold: (1) explore the perceived social impacts of hosting a sport event and motivations to volunteer, (2) examine the influence of volunteers’ positive and negative perceived social impacts on the intention to volunteer for the future events, and (3) explore the volunteer motives as a mediating variable between the perceived social impacts and intentions to volunteer.

A questionnaire was administered to volunteers (N=287) of the 2011 Formula One Korean Grand Prix (F1 Korean GP) in Yeongam, Korea. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) perceived social impacts, (2) volunteer motivations, (3) intention to continue volunteering, and (4) demographic information. Volunteers’ perceived social impacts were assessed using modified Social Impacts Scale (Kim & Petrick, 2005) with 17 items for positive social impacts under five factors: sport-tourism resource development and urban revitalization, image enhancement and consolidation, economic benefits, interest in foreign countries and cultures, and tourism infrastructure development. Negative social impacts were examined with 9 items under three factors: negative economic perspective, disorder and conflicts, and traffic problem and congestion. A modified volunteer functions inventory (Bang & Ross, 2009; Clary et al., 1998; Kim, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2009) was used and consisted of 25 items under seven factors: enhancement, value, social, career, protective, community involvement, and love of sport. Lastly 2 items from the volunteerism study by Bang and Ross (2009) were used to measure the volunteers’ intention to continue volunteering.

Data analyses proceeded in a series of steps. First, preliminary analyses revealed Cronbach’s alpha scores ranging from .72 to .90 illustrating sound internal consistency of the study measures. Second, to better understand the
perceived social impacts and motivations of volunteers, basic descriptive and frequency statistics were used. Finally, a path analysis using linear regression was conducted to identify how volunteers’ perceived social impacts influence to their motivations and intention to continue volunteering.

The descriptive statistics showed that, 52.3% of respondents were male, 78.7% were aged 20-29, 65.5% were students, 63.8% were in college, 61.7% made less than US$900 per month, and 81.9% lived in South Jeolla Province (i.e., the host community of the F1 Korean GP). Overall, positive social impacts were rated higher (M=3.81) than negative social impacts (M=3.51). Tourism infrastructure development was the highest positive impact factor (M=3.88), while traffic problem and congestion was the highest negative impact factor (M=3.81). In terms of volunteer motivations, people primarily volunteered for love of sport (M=3.93), followed by career enhancement (M=3.73) and value (M=3.73). On the other hand, participants rated protective (M=3.45) as the lowest motivational factor to volunteer. Path coefficients from volunteer motivations to intention to continue volunteering revealed that one significant path from volunteers’ perceived positive social impacts to intention to continue volunteering (β=.18, p<.01). In terms of mediation, volunteer motivation was a significant mediator in the path model since the indirect path from perceived positive social impacts to the intention to continue volunteering (β=.27, p<.001) was stronger than the direct effect of social impacts on intention volunteer in the future.

In sum, respondents rated positive social impacts higher than negative social impacts. In addition, the respondents rated tourism infrastructure development as the most positive social impact and traffic problem and congestion as the most negative social impact of hosting the 2011 F1 Korean GP. The examination of path coefficients supported that volunteers’ perceived positive social impacts significantly influence on the intention to continue volunteering. However, volunteers’ perceived negative social impacts showed no statistically significant influence on the intention to continue volunteering. Lastly, volunteer motivations had mediated the positive social impact intention to continue volunteering relationship.

According to Kim and Petrick (2005), it is essential for event organizers to understand that not all community members support event hosting decisions. These feelings could be tied to both negative and positive social impacts derived from the event. The results of this research illuminate this phenomenon and show that event organizers should develop plans for fostering positive social impacts since these impacts were the main predictors of motivation. We show that positive impacts can influence the motives of volunteers and their subsequent future intentions. Since volunteers are crucial to the effective operation of sport events (Ingerson, 2001), this research underpins the influence of social impact factors on the motives and intentions of volunteers. Further theoretical and practical implications and future directions for research will be presented.