

**The Role of Mass Participant Sport Events in Psychological Involvement and Quality of Life: A Longitudinal Approach**

*Mikihiro Sato, Temple University*

*Jeremy Jordan (Advisor), Temple University*

*Daniel Funk (Advisor), Temple University*

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**(Ballroom)**

Participation in mass participant sport events (MPSE) has increased over the last decade. Despite the slowed economy, the estimated number of U.S. road race finishers in 2011 was a record 13.9 million, representing a 7% increase from 2010 (Running USA, 2012). MPSEs represent a population-based intervention that has the capacity to increase physical activity, which plays an integral role in enhancing quality of life (QOL). Accordingly, MPSEs may serve as a catalyst to improve QOL for the growing event participants. Despite this assertion, an empirical investigation about whether participation in MPSEs contributes to an individual's QOL has been largely ignored.

As a population-based physical activity intervention, an implicit assumption of an MPSE among governments and practitioners is to provide health-related benefits by motivating people to promote their level of physical activity to participate in the event (Funk et al., 2011). Although researchers have examined benefits of an MPSE through participants' behavioral change, a logical conclusion that an MPSE by itself could produce the sufficient level of physical activity for health-related benefits has been an area of much debate (Bauman et al., 2009; Murphy & Bauman, 2007). Alternatively, a more reasonable view is that an MPSE could produce positive attitude change toward physical activity over time, which would augment traditional behavioral-based assessment about the role of the sport event (Funk et al., 2011).

Given the potential benefits of physically active leisure in daily life, sport managers as well as sport management researchers should consider how MPSEs could contribute to change in behaviors and attitudes toward physical activity (Funk et al., 2011; Henderson, 2009). In seeking to answer this call, the purpose of this study was to examine if an MPSE has the capacity to influence participants' QOL by assessing pre-event attitudes toward physical activity and how these attitudes change after the event. Specifically, the current research investigated the trajectory of change across time in an individual's psychological involvement with running and its relationship with QOL. A mass participant running event was the particular focus of the study because of its growing popularity as a physically active leisure option.

Past research has taken an ecological approach to examine what factors can change levels of physically active leisure (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). A key assumption of the ecological perspective is that human health and well-being are influenced by individual characteristics, social and physical environments available in an area, and their interactions (Sallis et al., 2006; Stokols, 1992). Community-based MPSEs such as running events can serve as social and physical environmental resources that influence the level of physical activity as well as attitude formation toward physical activity among the least active participants (Funk et al., 2011). Accordingly, MPSEs could influence participants' behaviors and attitudes during event preparation, event participation, and postevent reflection (Bowles et al., 2006).

To investigate the impact of attitude change through event preparation and subsequent activity, the construct of psychological involvement that comprises the facets of pleasure, centrality, and sign was used. QOL has been operationalized by measuring overall life satisfaction, which is a common subjective indicator of QOL (Diener, 2000; Heller et al., 2004). Collectively, the current study developed the following three key hypotheses:

H1. Participating in an MPSE will have a positive impact on psychological involvement with running.  
H2. Participating in an MPSE will have a positive impact on overall life satisfaction.  
H3. Change in participants' psychological involvement with running will be positively associated with change in overall life satisfaction.

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The study recruited participants through a survey panel from a 10-mile running event held in the Northeastern portion of the United States. The online survey was sent to all panel members with valid email addresses four times over a five-month period: one month before the event (Time1), one day after the event (Time2), two months after the event (Time3), and four months after the event (Time4). The survey link was sent to 4,175 panel members. The final respondents across the four data points were 211 for a response rate of 4.4%. Demographic analysis revealed that participants were affluent, middle-aged, well-educated, and predominantly Caucasian. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were female and 55% were married. No significant differences on income, age, gender, and marital status were identified between the original panel members and the 211 participants ( $p > .05$ ). Overall life satisfaction among event participants was assessed with the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Running involvement was assessed by each of the involvement facets of pleasure, centrality, and sign (Beaton et al., 2011).

To analyze change in psychological involvement and overall life satisfaction, the study employed a latent growth modeling approach (LGM). LGM analyses revealed that pleasure and sign reached the highest values immediately after the event and decreased following the event ( $p < .05$ ); however, centrality was relatively stable before the event but increased after the event, indicating that H1 was partially supported. Participants' overall life satisfaction peaked immediately after the event and decreased following the event ( $p < .01$ ), supporting H2. In the relationship between psychological involvement with running and overall life satisfaction, a positive significant association was found between change in pleasure and change in overall life satisfaction ( $p = .03$ ). Conversely, change in centrality and change in sign were not associated with change in overall life satisfaction ( $p > .05$ ). These findings provided partial support for H3.

Overall, findings of the study provide empirical support for extant literature that a MPSE can serve as a population-based intervention to enhance participants' attitudes toward physical activity. By providing positive experiences through event preparation and participation, the event contributes to the development of psychological involvement with running and overall life satisfaction. Managerially, our findings highlight potential non-economic benefits for hosting MPSEs through enhancing participants' QOL. From the perspective of event impact, the majority of research has focused on the economic benefits of hosting sport events; however, researchers have suggested more investigation is needed on the non-economic benefits of events, such as social, physical, or environmental aspects and their interrelationships (Chalip, 2006; Dickinson & Shipway, 2007). Our results indicate that positive event experiences can promote QOL for participants, which could complement the economic value of events.

The findings from this study suggest that the effect of an event experience on participants' QOL is temporary and likely to decline over time. Therefore, it is critical to develop ancillary activities that best leverage community events such as MPSEs (Chalip, 2006). Our results indicate that pleasure with running is likely to influence overall life satisfaction. Given the growing popularity of MPSEs, event organizers and host cities should highlight the aspects of the event that directly relate to positive experience to enhance participants' QOL before, during, and after the event.