The Primary Motives for Giving to Intercollegiate Athletics: A Case of NCAA Division II University

Yongjae Kim, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Soojin Kim, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania
Yong Jae Ko (Advisor), University of Florida

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With the economic downturn and continued budget cuts at the federal, state, and local level, many athletic programs have become increasingly dependent on financial support from their alumni and boosters. In particular, donor-supported gifts represent one of the main ways that university athletic departments offset budget shortfalls and make capital improvements. Previous studies suggest that a successful donor program requires organizational leadership, favorable tax laws, a culture of philanthropy, and athletic success (Cermak, File, & Prince, 1994; Staurowsky et al., 1996). More importantly, successful fundraising may require a deeper understanding of the motives underlying donor decisions to give (Bennett & Sargeant, 2005).

To date, several attempts have been made to measure donor motivations, however limitations exist in that the numbers of factors in measurement scales have varied depending on the sample under investigation. This has further caused confusion where the literature offers contradictory findings. More importantly, the majority of the athletic fund raising literature have been focused on NCAA Division I schools. In addition, recent studies have investigated motives for giving to intercollegiate athletics without taking into consideration of the environmental influences of university (e.g., size, geographic, location, conference affiliation, mission, etc.) on athletic donor behavior. Obviously, the Division I schools will be able to generate outside resources easier than a small, liberal arts, private institution. Yet there have been surprisingly no attempts to explain why people make donations to NCAA Division II athletic programs.

Accordingly, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for athletic donor motives at a NCAA Division II University. The purpose of this study was to a) uncover hidden dimensions not adequately addressed in prior studies; b) re-examine the factor structure of the original scale of Athletic Donor motivation (Ko, Rhee, Walker, & Lee, 2013), particularly targeted for a NCAA Division II athletic program; and c) propose a valid and reliable scale particularly applicable to a different setting of athletic program.

The target population was potential or actual donors housed in an NCAA Division II university on the East Coast. After receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board and from its Alumni Engagement officer to conduct the study, a self-administered postal mail survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope for ease in returning was sent out to approximately 1000 actual and potential donors. A total of 340 responses were received with a 34% of response rate. A number of cases were deemed unusable due to invalid, blank, or incomplete responses, yielding 265 usable questionnaires. The average age of the participants was 34.86 (SD = 8.88) ranging from 23 to 77 years old, and 70.9% were male. Most of the participants were Caucasian (89.1%), followed by African-American (7.2%), and Asian (3.8%). Overall, 65.3% of the sample reported annual income higher than $55,000.

This study used Ko et al's (2013) 25 items-scale of athletic donor motivation which was developed based on Alderfer's (1972) ERG theory. The scale measures three main dimensions of the ERG theory with a total of eight sub-dimensions: (1) Existence needs, (2) Relatedness needs, and (3) Growth needs. All statistical analyses were conducted by SPSS 18 and AMOS 18.0. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement properties of the Donor Motivation Scale. The results of CFA indicated that the measurement model fits were acceptable: χ²/df = 2.187 (540.176/247); CFI = .95; TLI = .955; and RMSEA = .067. Average variance extracted for each factor exceeded the suggested .50 (ranged from .50 and .87; Hair et al., 2006). Each loading was greater than the suggested value of .70 (Hair et al., 2006). Each squared correlation between constructs is smaller than the average variance extracted. Based on the measurement model test, the scale is found to be valid and reliable.
For the purpose of this study, all cases were categorized into two groups based on their contribution intention levels: The low contribution group \((n = 123)\) consists of donors who have an intention to contribute less than $250. The high contribution group \((n = 142)\) has an intention to donate more than $250. Latent Mean Analysis (LMA) was employed to compare latent means of donation motivation factors. LMA enables to assess accurate mean differences since LMA are measured based on the factor mean itself (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

The results of the comparison between low and high contribution groups were accepted in metric, scalar, and factor invariance models. The first LMA was performed where low contribution group was used as the reference group. When compared to low contribution group, the high contribution group showed significantly higher latent means in Vicarious Achievement (.357), Philanthropy (.304), and Commitment (.345). Based on Cohen’s \(d\) effect size index (Cohen, 1986), Vicarious Achievement \((d = .900)\) has a large effect size while Power \((d = .230)\) has a small effect size. Other computed effect sizes of donor motivation factors were insignificant. Descriptive analysis indicated that, among low contribution group, Vicarious Achievement has the highest mean \((M = 3.6)\), while Recognition has the lowest mean \((M = 2.01)\).

Understanding the motives underpinning donor willingness to give is important to conceptualize and operationalize what drives these individuals to support their athletic program. Knowing that a particular need (or multiple needs) influence individuals to give will enable athletic departments to develop strategies and promotional activities aimed at fostering, maintaining, and reinforcing stronger donor connections. Therefore, this study contributes to sport marketing literature specifically fundraising and donor behavior studies. In addition, the findings of LMA suggest that athletic programs should provide highly customized services to their important customers in returning for their giving based on their contribution levels. Further implications for research and practice will be discussed in the presentation.