Integrating Event Image, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention: Small-Scale Marathon Event

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Hosting a sport event is recognized as one of the best ways to stimulate a community’s economy, provide local entertainment, enhance community pride, and increase future inbound travel (Dimanche, 2003). While mega events (e.g., the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup) substantially contribute to marketing appeal and local economic development, a small-scale event (e.g., local marathon, Senior Games, etc.) can yield benefits because they operate within an existing infrastructure, require a smaller budget, create a more manageable level of crowd congestion, and have high-impact regional effects on the community (Higham, 1999). Despite the positive effects and the prevalence of small-scale events, very few studies have identified the important determinants of post-decision behaviors, limiting the development of effective marketing strategies for small-scale event organizers. Furthermore, research in this area might reveal new relationships between possible antecedents (e.g., event image and satisfaction) that determine post-decision making behaviors. Though satisfaction has been incorporated as either a consequence of event image or an antecedent of behavioral intention (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010), no empirical work has been conducted to examine the mediating role of satisfaction in the relationship between event image and behavioral intention. To fill these voids, the purpose of this study was to investigate event image and participants’ satisfaction with the event and their respective relationships with behavioral intention (i.e., intention to revisit and recommend the event to others) at a small-scale marathon event. The specific objectives of the current study were as follows: (a) to examine the structural relationships among event image, satisfaction, and behavioral intention and (b) to investigate the mediating effect of satisfaction on the relationship between event image and behavioral intention.

Marathon running is a leisure activity that provides participants with several possible benefits including goal achievement, improved health, affiliation, and improved self-esteem (Masters, Ogles, & Jolton, 1993). These positive benefits help explain why marathon running has grown in popularity. In fact, the numbers of participants and marathon events have increased, demanding more effective marketing strategies, not only to meet participants’ needs but also to maintain the popularity of the marathon events. Accordingly, data for this study were collected at the Mercedes-Benz Marathon Event, a recurring small-scale marathon event held in a southeastern city in the United States. Based on a detailed literature review, a questionnaire was developed that consisted of four sections: (a) event image, (b) satisfaction, (c) behavioral intention, and (d) demographics. The sport event image (SEI) scale, which consists of 13 five-point semantic differential scale type items, was used to measure event image (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). Satisfaction was measured using two items adopted from Oliver (1980). These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Behavioral intention was measured using two items: (a) likelihood of revisiting the event and (b) willingness to recommend the event to others (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993). These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). For demographics, age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income level were gathered. Applying the convenient sampling technique, a total of 176 valid questionnaires were collected from a local marathon event.

The demographic profile of respondents indicated that the average age of the respondents was 36. In terms of gender, 49.5% were male and 50.5% were female. Ethnicity was predominantly Caucasian (64.6%), followed by African American (18.5%). The mean scores of items in terms of event image ranged from 3.98 to 4.41 on the 5-point semantic differential scale. These scores reflected that most respondents generally held a positive image of the Mercedes-Benz Marathon Event. The means of the satisfaction items were above 4 on the 5-point Likert scale and ranged from 4.19 to 4.47, indicating that most respondents felt a high level of satisfaction with the event. The mean scores of the behavioral intention items ranged from 4.24 to 4.47 on the 5-point Likert scale, suggesting that most respondents had positive behavioral intention for future event participation. In addition, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the proposed model to ensure goodness-of-fit for the measurement model. The results of CFA indicated a good fit of the hypothesized model to the data ($\chi^2 = 586.915; df = 244; p < .01; SRMR =$...
Factor loadings for each item were statistically significant, ranging from .43 to .88, indicating the convergent validity was established. Lastly, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were employed to assess the reliability of the three instruments. For items to be reliable, CR should be greater than the suggested cut-off value of .70, and AVE should be greater than the recommended cut-off value of .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The values for CR were above .70, and the values for AVE were close to .50. Therefore, the psychometric properties of each respective latent construct were acceptable.

A regression analysis was employed to examine the impact of event image and satisfaction on behavioral intention as well as the impact of event image on satisfaction, revealing that event image had a positive effect on satisfaction and behavioral intention ($\beta = .52$, $p < .05$, and $\beta = .51$, $p < .05$, respectively) and that satisfaction was positively related to behavioral intention ($\beta = .82$, $p < .05$). A series of hierarchical regressions was also conducted to test the mediating role of satisfaction in the relationship between event image and behavioral intention, following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) guideline. The first step showed that the influence of event image on both satisfaction ($\beta = .52$, $p < .05$) and behavioral intention ($\beta = .51$, $p < .05$) was significant, the second step indicated that satisfaction was significantly related to behavioral intention ($\beta = .82$, $p < .05$), and the third step revealed that when satisfaction was controlled, the influence of event image on behavioral intention was still significant ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) but that the magnitude of the beta coefficient was reduced, indicating that satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between event image and behavioral intention for participants at the recurring small-scale marathon event.

The findings from this study provide a number of insights and important implications for recurring small-scale marathon event organizers interested in developing marketing strategies based on the identification of key elements of participants’ decision-making process. First, event organizers should consider building a positive event image and maintaining that image. Event image appears to be a direct antecedent of satisfaction, as well as a major influence on behavioral intention, even without the mediation of satisfaction. This finding supports the position that event organizers should develop and pursue an event image-development agenda by focusing on event image attributes that influence satisfaction and behavioral intention. Second, enhancing satisfaction should be considered a strategic investment for event organizers. The general view is that if participants are satisfied, they will have positive behavioral intention (i.e., engaging in positive word-of-mouth and returning to the event site) in the future (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). This study also provides empirical evidence supporting the notion that satisfaction directly affects behavioral intention at a recurring small-scale marathon event. Further, the finding that completing a marathon race can enhance event satisfaction, marathon organizers should consider hosting races of various distances (e.g., 5K and half marathon) to draw participants with different levels of confidence and experience so that a greater number of participants will be able to compete their races. Lastly, as satisfaction was found to play an important mediating role in the relationship between event image and behavioral intention, improving event image with satisfaction could maximize positive outcomes in terms of participants’ behavioral intention. Therefore, event organizers should develop a strategy for enhancing satisfaction through event image (i.e., linking participants’ emotions more closely with the sport event’s aspects).