An Empirical Examination of Participatory Sport Event Motives

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Active living research supports a notion that participatory sporting events (PSEs) represent popular community-based interventions to promote healthy lifestyles. Existing empirical evidence on key motives that account for event participation has been beneficial but adequate statistical model specification and validation remains underutilized. To address this gap, this study aims to develop and validate a comprehensive yet parsimonious instrument using the multiple indicators and multiple causes (MIMIC) model.

Distance running events have recently received extensive attention among sports participation enthusiasts. The intervention is designed to facilitate individuals to increase their levels of physical activity and shape healthier lifestyles (Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2014). The popularity and success of participatory running events not only has placed importance on the impact of these events on host communities, but also on determining the factors that promote participation and create euphoric event experience for participants. Theoretically, these events have the capacity to generate significant social and economic impact to the host communities, as well as to elicit health-related benefits for the engaging populations.

Given the well-documented physical and psychological benefits, research has stressed that it is crucial to understand individuals’ motives to engage in physical activity and the associated organized events (Ingledew & Markland, 2008). Scholars have developed an array of multi-attribute scales but these instruments have either focused on (a) motives for engaging in physical activities or (b) motives for participating in sporting events (Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2011; Funk, Filo, Beaton, & Prichard, 2009; Markland & Ingledew, 1997; Masters et al., 1993; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002). To date, the integration of these two perspective to create a parsimonious measurement tool that captures patrons’ desire for distance running event participation has yet to emerge. An integrated approach is needed to provide a more thorough understanding of event participants’ motivation, while simultaneously facilitating academic efforts to build a coherent body of knowledge that is grounded in the distance running event phenomenon.

Motivation refers to the processes that energize and guide purposeful goal-directed behavior (Hebb, 1955). A variety of measurement tools have been developed to examine the nomological relationship between motivation and a variety of attitudes and behaviors of sport consumers using the social-psychological perspective (Funk, Ridinger, & Moorman, 2003; McDonald et al., 2002; Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). Within the participatory sport event context, Funk et al. (2011) postulated that the act of preparing for and running in such events facilities purposeful behavior by allowing a variety of motives, both physiologically and psychologically based, to be fulfilled. Therefore, a configuration of key motives related to both exercise and events is vital to understand multifaceted benefits that participants receive through event participation.

From a measurement perspective, existing exercise motivation scales have largely focused on intrinsic motives. The application of generic exercise motives is necessary but not sufficient to fully explain event participation, as this approach neglects to consider event-specific attributes as additional reasons for participating in events. While efforts are needed to continually assess core motives for participation in all sports, it is also necessary to consider contextual motives specific to an exercise-based context. In addition, recent critiques on measurement model misspecification highlight that failing to correctly configure the directionality between a higher-order construct (e.g., motivation) and its multidimensional constituents could result in an increasing likelihood of making a type I error (e.g., retaining motives that do not exist). A formative approach (e.g., the causality flows from lower-order constructs to a higher-order latent variable) is more appropriate to address the conceptual complexities of a latent variable where its subordinate facets are not interchangeable.

The present study deployed a step-wise procedure to develop and validate a participant sport event motivation scale (PSEM) following MacKenzie et al.’s (2011) recommendations. First, an initial pool of items related to both extrinsic
and intrinsic motives for a distance running event was formulated based upon an extensive review of the literature as noted in the previous section. In the second step, a panel of experts was invited to justify the face and content validity of the item pool. In the third step, a multi-attribute online survey was distributed to patrons at a large-scale running-event held in the northeast United States (N=2,324). An integrated instrument was developed and validated through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis using a covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). Finally, evaluation of the theoretical congruency of the scale was conducted via a MIMIC approach. This technique enables the current research to test the PSEM scale with correct model specifications consistent with theoretical premises. The findings using two random subsets of the original dataset revealed a five-factor participatory sport event motive (PSEM) scale consisting of well-being, competition, event enjoyment, socialization, and self-confidence. Results of the MIMIC model further demonstrated that the scale showed measurement invariance across gender, and was equipped with adequate content, construct, and predictive validities.

In summary, the PSEM scale conceptually offers a comprehensive yet parsimonious instrument to assess motives to participate in PSEs. Conceptually, the current study provides an integrated approach to capture intrinsic and extrinsic forces that energized goal-directed behavior that leads to event participation and augments prior research by incorporating motives for engaging in exercise and contextual motives specific for attending an event. With regards to exercise-related motives, Well-Being reflects an individual's assessment of their physical condition. Self-Confidence is related to individuals' security with their appearance. In terms of event-related motives, Competition refers to the challenge presented by the event or by other participants. Socialization items relates to participants' desire to interact with others and Event Enjoyment pertains to participants' assessment of the race course and event experience. The integration of these two motivational sources offers valuable insight for event managers to understand their customers, that is, participatory sport events should be marketed as enjoyable and challenging activities. Event experience offers the unique opportunity for socialization, self-image enhancement, and elicitation of positive health-related outcomes. Furthermore, this instrument presents an empirical illustration of how MIMIC models can be used as a rigorous tool for a scale development and validation with correct model specifications. Pragmatically, understanding the motivational profile of participants using the PSEM scale will help organizers to better plan and market events (Funk et al., 2011).