Why Are Some Events Better than Others? The Influence of Event Elements on Spectators' Perceptions of Value of Non-Mega Sport Events

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Non-mega events are frequently hosted in many communities and hold the potential to create positive impacts for the host community (e.g., tourism, community pride).

In many cases, small to medium sized sport events have the potential to attract spectators from the local community as well as visitors. The attraction and engagement of spectators at sport events can lead to or enhance the impact of hosting the event beyond the impact directly obtained from participants and media coverage. Thus, city officials tasked with the selection of sport events that could capture the interest of spectators need to understand the specific elements of an event that spectators perceive to be valuable.

Assuredly, a significant amount of research has identified motivations behind sport event attendance (James & Ross, 2004; Kim & Trail, 2010). However, a limited understanding exists of the unique elements of non-mega events and how these elements are connected to spectators’ perceptions of value. The purpose of this study is to compare perceptions of value between two similar types of sport events held in the same city in consecutive years, and identify the elements of the events that explain differences in perceptions of value. The specific event elements of focus were based on the work of Yoshida, James and Cronin (2013) and included offerings (i.e., player performance, drama), processes (i.e., facility access), setting (i.e., aesthetic environment), and social connections (i.e., spectator community).

Data were collected through questionnaires at two events held in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Specifically, the events were the 2013 International Children’s Games (ICG) and the 2014 Ontario Summer Games (OSG). The events are comparable in scope, with a similar number of total events and participants. In total, data were collected from 1550 spectators during all event days (ICG, n=802; OSG, n=748). The average age of participants was 45 and 58% of the sample was female. The internal consistencies of the measures used in the analyses were good, with Cronbach alphas ranging from .754 to .902. Perceived value was measured by adapting Sweeney and Soutar’s (2001) perceived value scale to a sport event context. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation indicated the sub-components of value (i.e., quality, price, reputation and emotion) could be represented as one construct.

Previous research has found that people are driven to be involved in a sport event based on their level of personal connection to the sport (Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2008; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005). Furthermore, a person’s identity may influence their interest in specific elements of a sport event (Snelgrove, Taks, Green, & Chalip, 2008). Thus, to assess whether the two events under study were comparable in terms of fan type (i.e., personal identity tied to sport), personal identity was measured. A t-test revealed no significant differences (t=.250, p=.802) between spectators sport identities at the ICG (M=5.61, SD=1.40) and OSG (M=5.63, SD=1.22).

An initial comparison of the mean scores (t-test) of perceived value between the two events revealed that participants perceived the ICGs (M=6.28) to be more valuable than the OSGs (M=5.83) (t=10.618, p<.001). Subsequently, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify any factors that might explain differences in perceived value. Results indicated that, as a whole, the event elements were strong predictors of variances in perceived value (R2 = .560). Importantly, higher ratings of spectator community (B=.362, p<.001) and aesthetic environment (B=.346, p<.001) were major positive predictors of perceived value. Facility access (B=.082, p<.01) and athlete performance (B=.078, p<.01) were small positive predictors of perceived value. Drama experienced during the event was not a predictor of perceived value (p=.151).
Practically, city officials responsible for selecting non-mega sport events with a spectator focus can draw some implications from this study. First, the selection of events that have aesthetic appeal is important. An element of this concept is the overall theme of the event, which should be unique and excite spectators. Clearly, spectators perceived the ICG to have this quality, while the OSG did not. To enhance the effect of the aesthetic element, deliberate theming of the event throughout the city may be helpful (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004). Second, events should be selected in concert with an availability of facilities that can aid in the enhancement of spectator connections and communitas, as well as those facilities that have an appealing aesthetic quality. Furthermore, the city’s ability to make their best facilities available to event organizers is important (Snelgrove & Wood, 2010). Although athlete performance was predictive of perceived value, the relationship was small. Keeping in mind that both events feature youth, future research is needed to explore the implication that spectators are able to see value in an event even though it does not showcase elite level competition. From an event organizers perspective, results suggest that a focus on enhancing the spectator community and aesthetic environment would be beneficial (Green, 2001). Overall, this study further reinforces the connection between the uniqueness of sport event elements and important consumer outcomes, such as perceived value (Yoshida et al., 2013).