Positive Youth Development through Extreme Sports: Geo-Cultural Effects on Youth Participations of Extreme Sports

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Due to the various types of benefits, extreme sports have been one of popular subjects to be studied by many researchers (Clawson, 2000; Gonzalez, 1998; Midol & Broyer, 1995; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2000). The potential benefits of participating in extreme sports are feelings of freedom and social belongingness (Quester, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2006). The sense of ‘freedom’ is a key concern for the vast majority of respondents, who noted feeling a sense of escape from the ordered world. Another advantage of participating in extreme sports is social bonding. As Turner (1969) labeled as “communitas” and as Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry (1989) characterized “shared flow,” participants enjoy each other’s company while also contributing to something greater than simply being oneself (Celsi, 1992). Thus, participating in extreme sports creates desirable social outcomes such as friendship. Moreover, participants described “feelings of self-change and personal growth (i.e., feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy)” as rewards of extreme sports participation.

Dudfield (2014) argues that extreme sports are particularly valuable to children and youth because of perceived improved health and well-being. It encourages self-expression and creative thinking, and develops other physical and social skills among children and youth from different socioeconomic and geo-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, in contrast to traditional rule bound sports such as baseball, and football, extreme sports are non-competitive and is defined as a self-regulating sport; these particular aspects affords opportunities for youth to gain a worthwhile sense of achievement without beating up opponents, to develop social skills (i.e., communication, sharing of social space), and experience humanitarian and empathetic practices (Brymer, 2009). Young adolescents have been fascinated with extreme sports than other traditional individual sports (Bennett, Henson & Zhang 2002), and are the main consumer group of action sports spending $250 billion each year (Gordon, 2000; Petrecca, 1999). The overall number of extreme sports participants in the United States has increased continuously over the last decade (Liberman, 2004). The Active Marketing Group (2007) reported that people who participated in skateboarding, snowboarding, surfing and BMX each year is over a million in the United States, with the average age among this group being 16.

With the beneficial influences of extreme sports on youth participants in mind, the present study examines the behavioral patterns of youth participants in extreme sports in order to pursue positive youth development through extreme sports. Numerous studies of extreme sports have emerged that investigated the current expansion in both North America (e.g., Canada, the United States, etc) and Asia (e.g. China, Japan, South Korea) (Thorpe, 2008). Yet, the previous studies have tended to overlook the potential geo-cultural effects— consequence of different or similar social factors that complete geographic characteristics. From the business perspective, it is essential to the prospects of the study to take culture based on geographic locations into account due to their proven effect on consumer purchases (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). Similarly, in the context of sport, previous findings have emphasized the geo-cultural influences on physical activity and sport participations (e.g., Park, 2006; Kondrie, Sindik, Furjan-Mandic, & Shiefler, 2013; Kriska, 2000; Yan & McCullagh, 2004) and sport spectators’ consumptions (e.g., Kwon & Trail, 2002). Despite a significant quantity of studies dedicated to geo-cultural differences on physical activity and traditional sport participation, only few studies have considered the geo-cultural dynamics to illustrate the patterns of diffusion of extreme sports (Park, 2006). In this sense, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of geo-cultural dynamics (cognitive and social domains) on youth participation of extreme sports in North America and Asia.

Many researchers have contributed to measuring extreme sport motivation by developing factors of sport
participation (Shoham, 1998; Bennett, Henson & Zhang, 2002; Burton, 2003; Ko, et al, 2008; Koivula, 1999). However, the current study attempts to expand or rename some of those factors specific to the youth population in North America and Asia. Additionally, the present study implements methodology appropriate for the means-end approach. Gutman’s (1982) means-end framework has been implemented in sport marketing area (e.g. Goldenberg, McAvoys, & Klenosky, 2005) in order to discover the motivation and fundamental relationship with respect to consumers and the products or services they consume. For instance, applications has been executed to understand the factors influencing ski destination choice (Klenosky et al., 1993), examine the role and meaning of the benefits associated with rope course program (Goldenberg et al, 2000), and understand the motivations of individuals associating with a Base jumping (Allman et al., 2010). Laddering, one analytical tool from a means-end approach, can be conducted by one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). This laddering procedure allows the researcher(s) to discover key links between elicited concepts which emerged across all of the participants determined by the later conducted content analysis. Furthermore, a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM), which is a graphic summary of the associations in the data, will be created. In HVM, calculated correlation coefficients among factors of attributes, consequences, and values will attribute to develop a theoretical model to understand the process of motivation of youth extreme sports participation and contribute to developing a questionnaire including these data. Therefore, the method will consist of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Considering Rudd & Johnson (2010)’s argument of low frequency of mixed methods approaches in recent sport management research, despite the benefit of combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the current study will allow present research to have more confidence in the validity of results, help discover possible contradictions from previous studies that may not have considered geo-cultural impact, and deepen the current understanding of motivation factors (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003).

As an exploratory study, the present study allows sport practitioners to predict the behavioral tendency of extreme sports consumers, and design their marketing tools to maximize impacts on its target market. Moreover, many researchers have concluded that extreme sports events are also increasingly popular with young adolescents (Bennett & Henson, 2003; Bennett, Henson, & Zhang, 2002; Gladden & McDonald, 2005; Griffin, 2002; Petrecca, 1999, 2000). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is currently in the process of adopting sports like snowboarding and BMX for the winter and summer games (Huffington Post, 2012; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011), and increasing the number of extreme sports events (e.g., Red Bull events, KIA World Extreme Games, Asian Extreme Sports Championship, etc.). Sport marketers may utilize the results of this study, not only to develop effective marketing strategies (e.g. market segmentation, differentiated programs/service offering), but to also define the constraints that affect youth participants’ motivation that deter them from participating in extreme sports. Ultimately, examining geo-cultural influence on youth's participation in extreme sports will explain differences in selecting these sports among youths from different cultural backgrounds, and may also facilitate understanding of youths’ participatory motives which can be helpful in organizing sport s for various population.