Determinants of Trust, Commitment, and Satisfaction among Participants in Charity Affiliated Sporting Events

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Charity affiliated sporting events have been very successful in increasing public awareness of important social issues and increasing charitable donations for nonprofit organizations over the last decade. A number of major charity walks and runs, however, have experienced total fundraising revenue declines in recent years. According to the Trends and Insights on the top fundraising programs (2014), the American Cancer Society’s Relay For Life series and Susan G. Komen’s Race for the Cure events reported at least 10% revenue decreases in 2014. Hrywna (2013) also pointed out that the total revenue of the Komen’s 3-Day event for the Cure significantly decreased from $84.4 million in 2011 to $57.5 million in 2012. In addition, the numbers of the Relay For Life events have decreased in the last few years. Thus, given this financial situation, it is critical for practitioners working for charity sporting events to develop more effective relationship marketing strategies for their donors and event participants. In order to develop effective donor retention programs, it is important for them to understand factors affecting commitment and satisfaction among their donors. Sargant and Jay (2004) suggested that even small improvements in donor loyalty can have a significant impact on the financial success of nonprofit organizations. Donors’ trust in and commitment to the non-profit organization have been found to have a significant impact on donor loyalty (Garbarino & Johonson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt; Sargeant & Woodlifee, 2007).

A number of academic research studies have been conducted on charity sporting events (e.g., Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2009, 2010; Scott & Solomon, 2003). Scholars have paid attention to the psychological processes and factors affecting an individual’s decision to participate in charity sporting events. These empirical studies have significantly contributed to the growing body of research on charity sporting events. However, there is a need to expand on the existing literature to have a better understanding of factors influencing trust and commitment among charity sporting event participants.

The purpose of this study is to propose a theoretical model which identifies the antecedents and consequences of trust, commitment, and satisfaction among charity event participants and to examine the relationships between the proposed constructs. In order to identify the antecedents affecting the three constructs, the researchers conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on relationship marketing, donor behavior, and charity sporting events (e.g., Filo et al., 2010; Garbarino & Johonson, 1999; Margan & Hunt, 1994; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011; Sargeant & Woodlifee, 2007). In addition, the principal investigator conducted interviews with five Relay For Life event participants (three cancer survivors, a board of directors member for the American Cancer Society, and a regular participant in the Relay event). The researchers identified six antecedents, which include Ethical Standards, Personal Involvement, Consistent Communication, Sense of Community, Sense of Achievement, and Perceived Performance (of a non-profit organization). The dependent variable was Future Participant Intent.

Data was collected from 274 participants from five 2015 Relay-For-Life events in a Midwestern state. Participants were 73 percent (n = 199) female and 27 percent (n = 74) male, and the average age of participants was approximately 45 years old. Concerning the education level, approximately 50% of the participants had a college degree. The majority of respondents were White/Caucasian (91%). Forty-seven percent had an annual income level of more than 45,000. A majority of the study participants (75%) had individuals in their household or relatives who had cancer or are battling against cancer, while 15% were cancer survivors.

Both measurement and structural models were tested using AMOS 23. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that the model showed an acceptable fit for the data. The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom [1059.39/482] was 2.20, and the reported root mean square residual of approximation (RMSEA) was .066 (Hair et al., 2009). Other fit indices also indicated that the overall fit of the model was good (CFI = .927; IFI = .928; TLI = .910; NFI = .876). Regarding the reliability of the measurement, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the 10 factors
were satisfactory, ranging from .74 to .95, and AVE (average variance extracted) for each construct ranged from .51 to .86, thus exceeding the threshold of .5 (Hair et al., 2009).

Concerning convergent validity, all estimated loadings of indicators were statistically significant, and all items loaded on their respective factors. Factor loading scores ($\lambda$) ranged from .70 to .95. Discriminant validity was measured by comparing the AVE value for each construct with the squared interconstruct correlations (SCI). All AVE estimates for the nine constructs were larger than the SIC estimates, except for the AVE value for Sense of Community (.51), which was smaller than the SCI estimate (.69) between the construct and Commitment to Relay. The two items that were cross-loaded on both of the factors were combined into the Sense of Community construct, and the modification significantly improved discriminant validity. In addition, there was improvement in model fit (CFI = .931; IFI = .933; TLI = .914; NFI = .882; RMSEA = .066).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed in this study to confirm the goodness-of-fit for the structural model. The hypothesized model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data (chi-square/df[925.34/397] = 2.33; RMSEA = .070; CFI = .929; IFI = .930; TLI = .912; NFI = .884). The results of the comprehensive model testing indicated the six antecedents explained 66% of the variance in Trust in the NPO and 87% of the variance in Satisfaction. The nine constructs explained 64% of the variance in Future Participant Intent. Concerning the hypothesized links between the six antecedents and Trust in the NPO, the three antecedents that had a significant positive impact on Trust in the NPO included Ethical Standards ($p < .05$), Consistent Communication ($p < .05$), and Sense of Community ($p < .001$). In addition, Sense of Community positively influenced Satisfaction ($p < .001$), however, Trust did not have a positive impact on Satisfaction. The proposed relationship between Sense of Community and Commitment to the NPO was statistically significant ($p < .001$), while Personal Involvement and Ethical Standards did not have positive impacts on Commitment to the NPO. Commitment to the NPO ($p < .05$) and Personal Involvement ($p < .05$) were found to positively influence Future Participant Intent, while Trust and Satisfaction did not have significant effects on Future Participant Intent.

The main findings indicated that Sense of Community played a critical role in affecting Trust, Satisfaction, and Commitment. In addition, Commitment made a stronger contribution to Future Participant Intent than Trust and Satisfaction. Regarding the theoretical implication, there has been a dearth of studies on trust and donor retention in the context of charity sporting events. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on charity sporting events by presenting factors affecting trust and commitment. As for the practical implication, sport managers working for charity sporting events should establish and maintain high ethical standards that lead to increasing the levels of trust among charity event participants (Kottasz, 2004; Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011).