Does Event Prestige Affect Spectators’ Behavior? Applying the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior

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Event prestige is defined as the status of an event which is consequent to its history, objectives, and pre-existing public image and prestige in the relevant sport (Kim, Liu, & Love, 2015). Recently, the concept of event prestige has been applied by scholars of sport management to investigate various topical areas including the influence of event prestige on participants’ willingness to donate to a charity sporting event (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007), active sport tourists’ participation (Getz & McConnell, 2011), volunteers’ satisfaction, commitment, and intention to return (Bang, Lee, & Swart, 2014; Kim, Hong, & Damon, 2013), and intentions to participate in marathon events (Kim et al., 2015; Kim, Liu, & Love, 2016).

However, there is still little known about the influence of event prestige on spectators’ actual intention to attend sporting events. This would be considered the ultimate tool, simply utilizing an event’s prestige to increase attendance. Anecdotally this phenomenon seems rather intuitive, but to fully appreciate the power of prestige this begs for further investigation. Therefore, this study employed the Model of Goal-directed Behavior (MGB) and incorporated spectators’ perception of event prestige to investigate their behavioral intention of attending sporting events. The application of the MGB could be especially meaningful for investigating individual intention as the MGB simultaneously takes not only volitional and non-volitional processes in to account but also motivational, affective, and habitual processes hence providing more precise predictions of human decisions and behaviors (Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001, 2004).

Self-administered questionaires were distributed to spectators (N = 400) at the 2016 William Jones Cup basketball tournament held in Taipei, Taiwan. This event was named in honor of basketball promoter Renato William Jones, who was one of the founders of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA). It is one of the most popular sport events held in Taiwan annually since 1977. After eliminating 29 invalid responses, 371 completed questionnaires were used for the analysis. Among the 371 respondents, most were males (65.2%, n = 242) between the age of 21 and 30 (48.5%, n = 180).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first stage, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. Based on the MGB and event prestige literature, we posited that attitude, subjective norm, positive anticipated emotion, negative anticipated emotion and perceived behavioral control have a significant influence on desire and, in turn, desire has a significant influence on behavioral intention to attend the event. In addition, perceived event prestige and frequency of past behavior also have a significant influence on both desire and behavioral intention. With the structural model analysis, this study utilizes the standard factor loading and t-value of the path coefficient to determine the path strengths and significance levels of the latent variables. The analyses of CFA and SEM were conducted using Amos 20.0.

The proposed model fit the data well: $\chi^2 (609) = 1731.48$, $\chi^2/df = 2.84$, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .07. In the MGB, all predictor variables (i.e., attitude, subjective norm, positive anticipated emotion, negative anticipated emotion, and perceived behavioral control) have significant influence on desire. Specifically, attitude (beta = .27, p < .001), subjective norm (beta = .18, p < .001), positive anticipated emotion (beta = .34, p < .001), negative anticipated emotion (beta = -.12, p < .01), and perceived behavioral control (beta = .17, p < .001) were significant variables in explaining the desire of spectators. Moreover, desire, perceived behavioral control, and frequency of past behavior have significant influence on behavioral intention. Behavioral intention was most influenced by desire (beta = .82, p < .001), followed by perceived event prestige (beta = .13, p < .001), perceived behavioral control (beta = .12, p < .001) and frequency of past behavior (beta = .08, p < .05). However, the path from the frequency of past behavior to
desire was statistically insignificant.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study may enhance the understanding of spectator intention to visit a sporting event by extending the MGB. The MGB, incorporated with event prestige, accounts for considerable variance in spectators’ intention of game attendance (R-squared = .81), indicating the importance of event prestige in spectators’ decision-making process. Further practical ramifications will be discussed regarding how event organizers should utilize various emotional marketing and prestige branding strategies to make their events more attractive to prospective and returning event-goers.