Factors Influencing the Choice of Graduate Programs in Sport Management: A Consumer-Oriented Perspective in Brazil

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In recent years Brazil hosted important sports mega events (e.g., 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games). This scenario had repercussions in terms of investment in Brazil and created opportunities for development of sport management careers (Forbes, 2015). Consequently, a great number of sport management graduate and MBA courses were established and have been formed, by 43 in 2012 (Rocha & Bastos, 2011; Mazzei, Amaya & Bastos 2013). Understanding why students choose sport management programs is important, with Hancock and Greenwell (2013) suggesting that identifying such factors may aid the universities tailor their marketing efforts and, develop more efficient programs. Although the number of sport management graduate programs have grown in Brazil, there is a lack of studies assessing the drivers of a sport management career choice. This may limit the ability to modify activities and practices to better reach select target markets and contribute to development of sport management field (Hancock & Greenwell, 2013). In this sense, understanding the drivers leading students to choose sport management graduate programs in Brazil could be of increasing importance as new programs are established at universities each year (Rocha & Bastos, 2011; Mazzei, Amaya & Bastos, 2013). Additionally, understanding the factors that lead to the consumption of a service could contribute to understand how this aspect tends to influence future behaviors towards services (e.g., Yoshida et al., 2014), with this being applied to sport management courses as well. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the factors that influence students to choose sport management courses in Brazil, and then to identify how these factors influence the behavioral intentions towards the sports management courses.

This study was conducted with alumni and graduate students from Brazilian sport management programs. Data were collected through an online survey. During fifteen days, a link was shared by e-mail and on official pages of social networks (facebook and twitter) of five sport management graduate programs inviting students or alumni with a graduate degree in sport management to participate. A total of 218 visitors responded. To avoid redundant responses the IP address was recorded. After data screening, 201 responses were deemed usable. A scale for assessing factors that influence sport management graduate programs’ choice was adapted from Hancock and Greenwell (2013) including a total of 28 items distributed by nine constructs: interest in sport management (i.e., related with interest in the field of sport management), interest in sport (i.e., related with interests in sports in general), program quality (i.e., perception about reputation and general quality of graduate program), program convenience (i.e., perception about the class convenience of the program), social image (i.e., perception about the prestige of the sport manager career), job availability (i.e., perception about jobs available for graduates in sport management), ease of program (i.e., perception about course difficulty), job salary (i.e., related with perception of job salary after course), and influential others (i.e., related with groups that encourage to choose sport management graduate program). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=Strongly Disagree, to 7=Strongly Agree). The construct of behavioral intentions included four items adapted from Biscaia et al. (2012) related with the future intentions of participation and recommendation on graduate programs of sport management. These items were measured on a 7-point Likert type scale (1=Not Likely at All, to 7=Extremely Likely). Through AMOS v.24.0 CFA procedures were used to develop the nine-dimension scale, while SEM procedures were used to examine the relationships between constructs. The results of the CFA showed a lack of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) among the following constructs: interest in sport management and interest in sport; program quality, program convenience and ease of program; social image, job availability and job salary. Based on this evidence, the constructs of interest in sport management and interest in sport were grouped into a single construct called interest in sport and management field. The constructs of program quality, program convenience and ease of program were merged into a construct called...
quality of graduate program. Finally, the constructs social image, job availability and job salary were grouped into a single construct called job expectation. Only the items with higher factor loading were selected to ensure the reliability and parsimony of the model (Hedlund, 2014). After these refinements, the measurement model indicated an acceptable fit to the data [$\chi^2$(146) = 251.07 (p < .01); $\chi^2$/df = 1.72; CFI = .95; GFI = .88; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06]. Evidence of reliability of the refined four-dimension scale was found, with all composite reliability values above .70 and AVE values above or close to .50. Discriminant validity was accepted given that the AVE value for each construct was greater than the squared correlation between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Next, the results of the structural model [$\chi^2$(226) = 477.70 (p < .001), $\chi^2$/df = 2.11, CFI = .90, GFI = .84, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .07] including the four-dimension scale (i.e., factors influencing the choice of graduate programs in sport management) and behavioral intentions showed an acceptable fit to the data. The analysis of the path coefficients indicates that the constructs of interest in sport and management field ($\beta$ = .46, p < .001), quality of graduate program ($\beta$ = .33, p < .001) and job expectation ($\beta$ = .20, p < .001) have a significant positive effect on behavioral intentions explaining 36% of the variance of this construct (R² = .36).

This is an ongoing project seeking to shed light and initiate a debate about formation in sports management in Brazil. The results of the initial CFA and SEM analyses suggest interest in sport and management field, quality of the program, job expectation and influence of others are the factors influencing the choice of sport management programs. This is consistent with previous studies considering these factors to be important for a sport management career choice (e.g., Downey, McGaughey, & Roach, 2011; Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005; Zhang, 2007). The new factors of 'interest in sport and management field', 'quality of the program' and 'job expectation', may suggest that in Brazil there is a lack of specific information about the sports management field in terms of course quality, program convenience, social image, job availability and job salary, (Mazzei & Bastos, 2012). The implications of these results are important to understanding what sport management graduate programs should make to maintain interactions with market in order to evaluate attributes of their program, assess students' experiences, and develop a marketing plan that will attract diverse students and make the program more competitive (DeLuca & Braunstein-Minkove, 2016). In addition, the results of the structural model support the idea that factors that influence a perception of consumer in the consuming a certain service, have impact on future behavioral intentions (Biscaia et al., 2013). This means that the greater the interest in sports and management field, and the perception of the program quality, the better the chances of sport management students or graduates to continue seeking professional qualification and education in the area, to recommend sport management programs to other people, and to continue sharing positive opinions about the sport management field to others. These findings should be considered by the institutions with sport management graduate programs in Brazil, while also providing opportunities to continue advancing our knowledge about how develop the sport management field.