The Donors Supporting Charity Sport Event Participants: An Examination of the Factors Driving the Decision to Donate

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20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Abstract 2019-146

The act of fundraising for a charity sport event (CSE) is a critical and challenging aspect of the event experience due to the time, effort and energy required. As part of these requirements, CSE participants must effectively engage with their network of friends, family and colleagues to solicit donations. These CSE donors (i.e., those individuals who donate on behalf of a CSE participant) may face social pressures to make a donation (Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter, Kang, & Tax, 2003), and may be approached for donations more frequently due to the increasing number of CSEs (Hamilton, 2013). Understanding the CSE donor decision making process can assist in addressing these challenges as well as optimising CSE fundraising. Accordingly, the purpose of the current research is to examine the factors that drive CSE donors’ decision to contribute financially on behalf of a participant.

Bekkers and Wiepking’s (2011) mechanisms that drive charitable giving provided the framework for this examination. This framework advances eight factors that lead an individual to donate to charity: awareness of need, solicitation, costs and benefits, altruism, reputation, self-worth, values and efficacy. Each of these factors relate to motives for CSE participants (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Won, Park, & Turner, 2010). The current research applies this framework to an additional event stakeholder: CSE donors.

Twenty interviews were conducted with a panel of individuals who had donated on behalf of a CSE participant within the previous 12 months. The interview guide consisted of 11 questions based upon Bekkers and Wiepking’s (2011) framework adapted to the CSE context. Preliminary analysis of the data has uncovered four themes. First, interviewees described how they felt their donation empowered the charity to achieve its mission (i.e., efficacy). Second, donors indicated that they felt a number of positive about themselves as a result of their contribution (i.e., self-worth). Third, interviewees cited that the donation brought them closer to the CSE participant as their contribution communicated support for his/her efforts (i.e., relationships). Notably, interviewees revealed that they did not expect to be acknowledged, nor did they expect any benefits (e.g. prizes, incentives) for their donation.

The findings of the current research contribute to the literature on the CSE experience through responding to calls for examination of additional event stakeholders (e.g., Daigo & Filo, 2018). Select themes uncovered align with Bekkers & Wiepking’s (2011) framework, while also illustrating the importance of the fundraiser-donor relationship (Andreoni, 2006). In addition, the initial findings reinforce the challenge of engaging with donors in the CSE context as the CSE donor decision is determined by a collection of inter-related factors, and effectively leveraging these factors can be time consuming for CSE participants (Buning & Gibson, 2015; Hendriks & Peelan, 2013). The findings can inform CSE management practice through increased education and training of event participants on approaching prospective donors, as well as more transparent communication with donors on fund allocation.