Understanding the Volunteer Experience: A Holistic Examination

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Introduction and Literature Review

Sport event volunteers have been recognized as a valuable resource for the operations and success of sport events (Hoye, Cuskelly, Auld, Kappelides, & Misener, 2020). Research on sport event volunteers is recognized as one of the largest bodies of literature in sport management (Hoye et al., 2020). Within such research, the volunteer experience is discussed and examined according to four-related constructs: motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community (Lachance & Parent, 2019).

When examining previous research on the volunteer experience, two important gaps remain. First, while each aforementioned construct is believed to hold individual importance to the volunteer experience, these constructs have been researched in independent silos (Lachance & Parent, 2019). Second, while past research has used quantitative instruments to measure each construct, with claims of their relative importance to the volunteer experience, studies have yet to measure volunteer experience as a dependent construct.

Consequently, the direct, pluralistic influence that motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community have on the volunteer experience remains unclear. Further, more research is needed to combat the fragmented nature of past sport event volunteerism research, as constructs have been examined individually or independently from the volunteer experience. Thus, the purpose of this study was to empirically test the relationship between volunteers’ motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and sense of community to their experience.

Methods

The context of this study was the 2019 Osprey Valley Open, a professional golf tournament held in Toronto, Canada. A post-event online questionnaire was administered to 246 event volunteers for a two-week period. A sample of 160 volunteers completed the questionnaire (response rate = 65%) which assessed motivation, satisfaction, commitment, sense of community, and experience using previously validated scales (e.g., Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2001; Jackson & Marshs, 1996; Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015; MacLean & Hamm, 2007). A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict volunteers’ experience from the four included constructs.

Results and Discussion

The multiple regression model significantly predicted volunteers’ experience, F(156, 4)=30.134, p<.001, adj.R2=.436. Motivation (β=.216, p=.007) and satisfaction (β=.446, p<.001) were found to both significantly predict volunteers’ experience, while commitment and sense of community did not.

Findings confirm previous claims regarding the relationship between motivation and satisfaction towards the volunteer experience (Farrell, Johnson, & Twynam, 1998; Lachance & Parent, 2019). However, the insignificance of commitment and sense of community in relation to the volunteer experience contests previous claims in which these constructs are argued to be predictive of the volunteer experience (e.g., Costa, Green, Chalip, & Simes, 2006; Kerwin et al., 2015; Lachance & Parent, 2019).

Conclusion

This study offers empirical insight into the joint statistical relationship between motivation, satisfaction, commitment, sense of community, and volunteer experience. Notably, the statistical insignificance found between commitment and sense of community suggests these constructs may indirectly impact the volunteer experience or be
antecedents to satisfaction and motivation. As such, these findings should inform future studies regarding the empirical examination of the volunteer experience and its related constructs.