Turning a Meaningful Charity Sport Event Experience into Social Change

Abstract

Charity sport events continue to increase in popularity and have been shown to provide meaningful experiences for participants. This research evaluates how the meaning derived from a charity sport event translates into social empowerment and social engagement among participants. An online questionnaire was administered to participants in the 2007 Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF) LIVESTRONG Challenge (N = 568) to investigate the relationships among recreation motives, charity motives, attachment, social empowerment and social engagement. Results indicate that attachment mediates the link between motivation factors and both social empowerment and social engagement. The authors propose that charity sport event managers should promote the event as an opportunity for participants to collectively serve as advocates for the cause and increase awareness of the relevant social issues.

Introduction

Charity sport events refer to participatory sport events in which an individual engages in physical activity (i.e., running, walking, cycling) where a portion of event proceeds benefit a specified charity. These events have increased in popularity due to the massive participant base from which events can draw (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), increased support for charitable causes from both individual consumers and corporations (King, 2001), and a pronounced shift in consumer attitudes towards consumption experiences that provide meaning (Ebenkamp & Stark, 1999). Research has examined the motives driving charity sport event participation (e.g., Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Scott & Solomon, 2003) and a variety of factors have been uncovered that contribute to the meaning derived from the charity sport event experience (e.g., Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008; 2009).

With the antecedents of a meaningful charity sport event uncovered, attention can shift towards examining how this meaning impacts participants and the specific outcomes of the experience. The purpose of this research is to evaluate how the meaning derived from a charity sport event translates into advocacy for the charitable cause. Specifically, this research examines how attachment to a charity sport event influences social empowerment and social engagement.

Literature Review

Motivation

Participants take part in charity sport events to satisfy a variety of needs and motives. Motives for sport event participation have been examined through a number of different frameworks (e.g., Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Maslow, 1954). Most notably, Beard and Ragheb (1983) advanced four dimensions of leisure and recreation motivation: intellectual, social, escape, and competency; related to leisure needs that have been highlighted in the literature on motivation (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Zhang & Lam, 1999).

These recreational motives represent core factors that contribute to charity sport event participation in general. However, additional consideration in the form of contextual motives

may also serve to fulfill needs within consumers, contributing to participation (Funk & James, 2004). Factors related to charitable giving may serve to motivate contributors towards participating in a charity sport event. Donors may be motivated by reciprocity, self-esteem, need to help others, and the desire to improve the charity (Amos, 1982; Hibbert & Horne, 1996; Marx, 2000; Ritzenheim, 2000). Collectively, these recreation and charity motives drive participation in a charity sport event, as well as attachment to the event (e.g., Filo et al., 2008).

Attachment

Attachment is regarded as a universal human experience (Schultz, Kleine, & Kernan, 1989) allowing individuals to express themselves, as well as demonstrate a connection with others (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). In a sport setting, individuals have been shown to have multiple foci of attachment (Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Attachment to a charity sport event is reflected in the event taking on emotional, symbolic, and functional meaning (Funk & James, 2006).

Charity sport events represent an effective means for a charitable organization to provide a meaningful event experience, while communicating the mission of the organization. Sport events provide an inherent sense of community (Chalip, 2006), which can be leveraged to affect change in a community's social agenda (O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). This social change can be facilitated through empowerment and engagement among participants.

Social Empowerment and Social Engagement

In the charity sport event context, social empowerment can be conceptualized as participants' confidence and capability to advance change on behalf of the charitable organization. Empowered individuals enjoy a sense of control over outcomes, while understanding their environment and actively exerting control (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1988). Social empowerment reflects integrity and cohesion within a community, based upon a collective effort towards a goal or activity (Scheyvens, 1999).

Consumers are becoming increasingly socially aware and engaged in communities. Pringle and Thompson (1999) suggest that material wealth is becoming less important for consumers, while post-materialist needs such as belonging, self-esteem, and self-realization hold a higher priority. Consumers feel they can influence the activities of organizations through their consumption (Williams, 2005). In the charity sport event context, social engagement can be conceptualized as the priority participants place upon affecting change based on the charitable cause.

A logical objective of a charity sport event would be to empower and engage participants in the charitable endeavor outside of the event parameters. This research examines how recreation motives, charity motives, and attachment contribute to participants' social empowerment and social engagement.

Method

Participants

A questionnaire was completed online by a sample of participants in the 2007 LAF LIVE**STRONG** Challenge in Austin, Texas (N=568). The LIVE**STRONG** Challenge is the

LAF's signature fundraising event, with all proceeds benefitting the LAF's mission to empower individuals living with cancer. The LIVE**STRONG** Challenge includes a 5K walk or run, a 10K run, a 10-, 40-, 70-, or a 100-mile cycling ride. The sample of participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 with 46.3% between the ages of 40-64. Thirty-five percent had obtained at least a Bachelor's Degree, and 74.6% selected White as their ethnicity.

Materials

Participants were given a multi-attribute questionnaire that included: (a) eight-items to measure a composite for recreation motivation (Beard & Ragheb, 1983), (b) seven-items to measure a composite for charity motivation (Dawson, 1988; Gladden, Mahony, & Apostolopoulou, 2004), and (c) six-items to measure attachment to the event (Funk & James, 2006). To measure Social Empowerment, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following three statements: (1) "I feel confident in my ability to make a change in the way cancer is addressed," (2) "I feel capable of achieving my goals to change the way cancer is addressed, even as challenges arise," and (3) "Overall, I feel supported to achieve my goals to change the way cancer is addressed." To measure Social Engagement, participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following three statements: (1) Making cancer a national priority is personally important to me," (2) "I feel that I am an active part of the LIVESTRONG Army making cancer a national priority," and (3) "I believe making cancer a national priority would benefit me, my family and/or my friends." All items were measured on 7-point Likert-scales anchored by (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Procedures

An e-mail including a link to the online questionnaire was submitted to 4,000 registered participants by a representative from the LAF. The e-mail was sent one day following the event in October 2007, and the questionnaire was made available for 12 days after the event. The questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes to complete. A total 568 completed questionnaires were deemed usable for a response rate of 14.2%.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and Cronbach alpha values for all constructs measured are reported in Table 1. The Cronbach alphas were calculated for the constructs since multi-item scales were used, and ranged from $\alpha = .82$ to $\alpha = .95$, indicating the items used to measure the constructs were reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Consistent with the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986), a three-step test of mediation was conducted using multiple linear regressions (MLR) to examine the relationships. Two separate tests were conducted. In the first test, step 1 examined the relationship between recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment. Step 2 examined the relationship between social empowerment and recreation motivation and charity motivation. Step 3 examined the relationship between social empowerment and recreation motivation, charity motivation, along with attachment simultaneously. For the second test, the same steps were followed with social engagement replacing social empowerment as the outcome variable.

Social Empowerment

The mediation tests for the sample are reported in Table 2 and Table 3. Within the first test, results from Step 1 indicate a significant relationship exists between recreation motivation, charity motivation, and attachment (p < .05). The results from Step 2 indicate a significant relationship exists between social empowerment and recreation motivation and charity motivation (p < .05). According to Baron and Kenny (1986), partial mediation exists if a regression coefficient in Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3 is significant (p < .05) and full mediation exists if a regression coefficient in Step 1 and Step 2 is significant but not in Step 3. Results from Step 3 indicate attachment partially mediates the relationship between social empowerment and recreation motivation and charity motivation (p < .05). In addition, the explained variance in social empowerment increased from 18% in Step 2 to 25% in Step 3 with the addition of attachment.

Social Engagement

Results indicate a significant relationship exists between social engagement and recreation motivation and charity motivation (p < .05). Results from Step 3 indicate attachment mediates the relationship between social engagement and recreation motivation and charity motivation (p < .05). Attachment partially mediates the relationship between recreation motivation and social engagement, while attachment fully mediates the relationship between charity motivation and social engagement. In addition, the explained variance in social engagement increased from 16% in Step 2 to 26% in Step 3 with the addition of attachment.

Discussion and Future Research

The results of this analysis imply attachment mediates the relationship between participatory sport motivating factors and both social engagement and social empowerment. The identification of this mediating variable suggests attachment facilitates social engagement and empowerment (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This research extends beyond motivation and identifies the factors that foster desirable social outcomes from participation (e.g. Filo et al., 2008; 2009).

Considering the greater societal goal of charity sport events, a desirable outcome may be to create a feeling of social empowerment and social engagement amongst participants. Any societal impact of the event may be enhanced if participants, through their attachment to the event, become socially engaged and empowered. This engagement and empowerment may be manifested by participants through increased effort towards advancing the cause. Socially engaged and empowered participants can act as advocates of the charitable cause.

Charity events serve the dual purpose of being both a fundraising and community building opportunity, a broader goal is to spread awareness and affect social change. In order to increase social engagement and empowerment, event managers can work to increase attachment among participants. While the four dimensions of leisure and recreation motivation are intrinsic to the participant (Beard & Ragheb, 1983), attachment can be impacted through managerial practices. Research has indicated relationship marketing is a useful tool in creating attachment amongst consumers (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Research has further suggested that relationships can be enhanced by offering participants the opportunity to interact with one another to share personal values (Gruen, Summers, & Actito, 2000). By developing relationships with participants and encouraging participants to interact with one another, management can leverage motivations

driving participation, and enhance attachment amongst participants. Specifically, charity sport event managers can facilitate the sense of community among participants to increase attachment through: enabling sociability, creating event-related social events, facilitating informal social opportunities, producing ancillary events, and theming (Chalip, 2006). Future research should examine the benefits of fostering social empowerment and social engagement. Additional research should further examine which specific techniques marketers can employ to maximize the feeling of attachment among participants.

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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Reliability Measures for Recreation Motivation, Charity Motivation, Attachment, Social Empowerment, and Social Engagement

Construct (# of items)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Recreation Motivation (8)	5.46	.97	.81
Charity Motivation (7)	5.28	.96	.82
Attachment (6)	5.60	.92	.86
Social Empowerment (3)	4.48	1.03	.95
Social Engagement (3)	5.36	.74	.89

Table 2: Three Step Test of Mediation for Recreation Motivation, Charity Motivation, Attachment, and Social Empowerment

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
	Attachment	Social	Social	Interpretation
		Empowerment	Empowerment	
	Beta	Beta	Beta	
Recreation Motivation	.16	.18	.12	Partial
Charity Motivation	.59	.34	.14	Partial
Attachment			.35	Mediator
Adjusted R ²	.42	.18	.25	

F-Value	210.33	64.04	64.25	
1 Value	210.55	0 1.0 1	01.25	

Table 3: Three Step Test of Mediation for Recreation Motivation, Charity Motivation, Attachment, and Social Engagement

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	
	Attachment	Social	Social	Interpretation
		Engagement	Engagement	_
	Beta	Beta	Beta	
Recreation Motivation	.16	.16	.10	Partial
Charity Motivation	.59	.32	p > .05	Full
Attachment			.40	Mediator
Adjusted R ²	.42	.16	.26	
F-Value	210.33	55.94	65.67	