

VOLUNTEERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS DERIVED FROM VOLUNTEERING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Volunteers form an integral part of the sport industry. The operational and financial success of many major sports events is highly dependent on the benevolent contribution of volunteers. Although several studies have been conducted internationally regarding volunteers, comparatively few empirical studies exist within a South African sports context that investigate the perceived benefits of volunteerism. Hence, the purpose of this study was to elicit responses from volunteers at a major sport event regarding their perceived benefits. The respondents (n = 218) in the study comprised volunteers at the 2006 Federation of African Students Universities (FASU) games. A structured questionnaire comprising 51 items regarding the benefits of volunteering was used in the study. The items in the questionnaire were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 anchored at strongly agree and 5 anchored at strongly disagree. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted resulting in four factors (32 variables) viz. social interaction, skill enhancement, personal rewards and personal enrichment being extracted. This study demonstrated that social interaction, skill enhancement, personal rewards and personal enrichment are substantial benefits that volunteers derive through volunteering. In conclusion, the factorial dimensions developed in the study may be employed by sport organisations as a mechanism to attract volunteers by emphasising the salient benefits derived from volunteering. Prospects for future research are also outlined.

Key words: Volunteers; Volunteering; Sport organisation; Benefits; Sport event.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are one of the most valuable and important human resources to the amateur sports sector (Catano *et al.*, 2001). They have been and will continue to be an integral and indispensable part of the sport industry (Cuskelly, 1998; Green & Chalip, 1998). This is because they provide both organisational and economic efficiency, bring innovation into an organisation by contributing new and fresh ideas and minimise costs involved with sport events through their free labour (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). Thus, the operational and financial success of many major sports events has become highly dependent on their contribution (Cuskelly *et al.*, 2004). Regardless of the fact that sport has become increasingly professional and commercialised, reliance on volunteers continues to increase, especially in amateur sport (Green & Chalip, 1998).

A volunteer is regarded as an individual who offers oneself to a service without an expectation of monetary compensation (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). For the purpose of this study a volunteer is

regarded as someone who willingly gives or offers to give help in the form of time, service or skills at a sport event without expectation of payment or any other tangible reward.

The act of volunteering is not a new phenomenon. For many decades there have been individuals who have been willing to give their time, effort and resources to help their fellow man (Gaston & Alexander, 2001). Volunteering has benefits for three different sets of people: the volunteers themselves, the organisations they help, and the communities they volunteer in. The conditions under which sport event volunteers function contrast markedly with those of volunteers in other settings such as community sport, social service organisations, recreation and social clubs (Phillips *et al.*, 2002). This is because of the routinised elements like the limited number of days, inflexible deadlines and the fact that volunteers are required to complete a high number of hours over a short period of time (Cuskelly *et al.*, 2004). In addition, sport event volunteers may often have to rearrange family and work commitments and sometimes study commitments to accommodate the needs of event organisers. Unlike paid employees in a sport organisation who are motivated by both tangible and intangible rewards which may be in the form of a salary or praise for their services, the sport event volunteer is motivated by intrinsic rewards specific to oneself (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). Volunteers in sport settings have multiple needs which, if not met, could lead to volunteer dropout (Inglis, 1994).

Several studies have been conducted with regard to volunteers. Some of these focused on: motives for volunteers continuing membership in a recreation-related environment (Caldwell & Andereck, 1994), motives of volunteers in multicultural events (Saleh & Wood, 1998), recruitment and selection of volunteers (Green & Chalip, 1998), organisational commitment and turnover of volunteers (Cuskelly, 1998; Catano *et al.*, 2001), dependability of volunteers (Cuskelly *et al.*, 2004), benefits of participation in corporate volunteer programmes (Peterson, 2003) and management of job satisfaction of volunteers (Goslin, 2006). However, comparatively little research, particularly in a South African context, and specifically in sport settings, has been undertaken regarding the benefits volunteers derive from their involvement in sport events.

According to Green & Chalip (1998), most of the research done in the sport setting has been based largely on concepts and measures derived from volunteers in non-sport industries. Most research on volunteers thus far has focused on volunteers in social services such as health services, welfare agencies, religious organisations and education (Kemp, 2002; Peterson, 2003). They contend that very little thought has been given to packaging the volunteer product in a sport event so that it meets the needs of the volunteer.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sport in South Africa, which was once an amateur-focused activity, has become increasingly commercialised with many sport organisations transforming their core business from amateur to professional (Surujlal, 2004; Goslin, 2006). In addition to hosting numerous regional and provincial events, South Africa is increasingly hosting international sport events since 1991. The involvement of volunteers is crucial to the success of these events. Consequently, the South African sport industry is heavily dependent on volunteers to deliver services and events to sport consumers (Goslin, 2006). There are, however, concerns when it comes to the culture of volunteering in South Africa. Being a volunteer could be viewed as serving one's

community or country without expecting any reward. But because the socio-economics of the African continent are so different from those of Europe, expectations of rewards are higher in South Africa (Africa, 2006).

There are problems regarding the poor retention and management of volunteers which impact negatively on the quality of the sport event (Goslin *et al.*, 2004). Despite the fact that the bid documents for international sport events to be held in South Africa emphasize the contribution of volunteers to these events (South African Sports Commission, 2003), there is little evidence either at national level or provincial level of a policy on volunteers. It also appears that volunteers are prepared on an ad hoc basis for different events.

Currently there is no integrated database for volunteers in South Africa although there do exist data bases for different events. According to Professor Cora Burnett, the head of the Sociology of Sport at the University of Johannesburg the volunteer programme of the 1999 All-Africa Games was a disaster because of the lack of a database (Africa, 2006).

On the positive side there appears to be a serious effort in South African sport to address the issue of volunteers. A fulltime Volunteer Manager has been appointed at Sport and Recreation South Africa to develop management strategies for volunteers, recruitment criteria for volunteers, curriculum and training schedules for volunteers and the selection of training facilitators (SRSA, 2007). In addition, the University of Johannesburg has initiated a volunteer programme called the Varsity Volunteer initiative for South Africa. This initiative is aimed at encouraging South Africans to volunteer and to prepare South Africa for large scale sport events. There has also been a move to ensure that the training material developed for volunteers meets the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework.

Despite the many studies of volunteerism in the sport industry, there has been little written (and empirically verified) research that has identified the specific benefits that volunteers perceive they gain through their involvement in sport events (Geroy *et al.*, 2000). In addition, although previous research on the use of volunteers by sport organisations has produced reciprocal benefits for both the host organisations and individuals (Andrew, 1996), there is no empirical evidence in the South African context to support this claim.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate volunteers' perceptions of benefits derived from volunteering at a major sport event. A major sport event is defined as a national or international sport event which was conducted over more than one day and deployed a minimum of 150 volunteers in operational positions (Jago & Shaw, 1998). The Federations of African Students Universities (FASU) games, which is regarded as the second biggest event in Africa (Frank, 2006), fulfil both these criteria. The information gleaned from this study would go a long way to equip organisers of sport events with the information needed to design necessary strategies to attract potential volunteers and to retain them. In addition, it could also enlighten volunteers on the different benefits that could accrue to them through volunteering.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents

The respondents in this study comprised volunteers at the 2006 FASU games. The FASU games in which 13 different African countries participated in Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Chess, Football, Judo, Karate, Netball, Table Tennis, Tennis and Volleyball, took place in the City of Tshwane (Pretoria) during 1-8 July 2006. Most of the volunteers were recruited from institutions of higher learning. A total of 218 usable questionnaires were collected representing 56% male and 44% female volunteers. The sample size of 218 provided adequate power for statistical analysis such as factor analysis (Andrew, 1996: 21) and was considered adequate for a preliminary investigation. Where the sample size is 100 or less, factor loadings of 0.30 or more are appropriate and with sample sizes of more than 100, factor loadings of 0.40 or more are considered salient (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Kline, 1993).

Instrument

An extensive literature study on volunteers was conducted. Arising from the literature review a questionnaire was developed seeking demographic information (eg. gender, age, education level, work status, frequency of volunteering, main job performed at the event) and information regarding the perceived benefits of volunteering. This paper reports on volunteers' own perceptions regarding the benefits they derive from volunteering. The items in the questionnaire investigated perceived benefits of volunteer participation using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. All the items in the questionnaire were preceded by "*I feel that volunteering has benefited me in the following ways:*" The questionnaire was administered to the volunteers during the last day of the event because it was felt that the recency effect would be greater (Sinha & Banerjee, 2004) and would capture the total volunteer experience. The rationale for such a data collection method at an event is based on the theory that respondents will be more attentive to the task of completing the questionnaire when they are contextualised in the environment that they are evaluating (Dabholkar *et al.*, 1996). Furthermore, being in the relevant environment, volunteers would be more likely to focus on benefits that were important to them (Dhurup *et al.*, 2005: 144). Sport Management students of the Vaal University of Technology who were trained to do fieldwork were used as fieldworkers to administer the questionnaire to volunteers at the FASU games. Volunteers were informed about the purpose of the study and were also told that they were under no obligation to complete the questionnaire if they did not desire to do so. As far as possible, the questionnaires were completed in the presence of the fieldworkers. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS – Version 14.0).

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Data analysis comprised three phases. The reliability of the research instrument was assessed, followed by an assessment of the validity of the instrument. Finally, exploratory factor analysis was undertaken to establish the underlying perceived benefits in event volunteerism.

Reliability and validity of the research instrument

The first stage of the data analysis entailed the assessment of the reliability of the research instrument with computation of coefficient alpha (Cronbach α). Item reduction and scale purification was undertaken whereby items with low factor loadings, communalities and low-item-to-total correlations were investigated (Chandon *et al.*, 1997; Aldlaigan & Buttle, 2002). The iterative process was re-run several times until deleting an individual item from the instrument could not improve the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The coefficient alpha reliability, a measure of internal consistency for the entire scale was 0.975, exceeding the suggested level of 0.70 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

In addition, Avkiran (1994) advocates the testing for response bias in the data collection procedure whereby the computation of separate coefficient α values (split-half reliability) is required. The scale is divided into halves of the completed responses and resulting half scores are correlated (Malhotra, 2004). High correlations between the halves indicate high internal consistency. In this study it was hypothesised that α value would not be significantly different from both groups (split samples) of responses. The Cronbach α emerged as 0.952 and 0.956 respectively, inferring that the difference is small. The Spearman-Brown coefficients were 0.941 for both the equal and unequal length questions and the Guttman Split-half Coefficient was 0.941, indicating that there were no significant differences in the data sets. The results are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1: SPLIT HALF RELIABILITY

Cronbach Alpha	Part 1	Values	0.952
		Number of items	16
	Part 2	Values	0.956
		Number of items	16
Total number of items			32
Correlation between forms			0.889
Spearman-Brown coefficient	Equal length		0.941
	Unequal length		0.941
Guttman split-half coefficients			0.941

Although reliability is a necessary, but not sufficient, indicator of the psychometric soundness of an instrument (Bosch *et al.*, 2003), the validity of the scale was also assessed. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a sample of fifteen volunteers on a one-to-one basis to ensure that the scale satisfied content validity. Changes were made to the questionnaire with regard to wording, phrasing and sequence after de-briefing. In addition, the questionnaire was reviewed by three academics from two universities and three practitioners in the field of Sport and Recreation Management to refine the questionnaire. The instrument was further purified during the various stages in the iterative process.

In addition to reliability, the validity of the scale was assessed through discriminant, construct and convergent validities. Discriminant validity in this context refers to the ability of the research instrument to assess the uni-dimensionality of underlying dimensions. Evidence of reliability and validity confirm the construct validity of the measuring instrument (Bosch *et al.*, 2003). In assessing discriminant and construct validity of the research instrument,

exploratory factor analysis was conducted. In each step of this procedure, scale purification was undertaken where individual items were removed from the research instrument to improve the discriminant and construct validity until all items demonstrated acceptable levels of discriminant validity (*i.e.* all the items load on a common factor only with no cross-loadings) and construct validity (*i.e.* all the items relating to each dimension have factor loadings of at least 0.40). Furthermore, the reliability of a scale as measured by the coefficient alpha reflects the degree of cohesiveness among scale items and is also an indirect indicator of convergent validity (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

Exploratory factor analysis

To give effect to the purpose of the research and in establishing the internal structures on the benefits of volunteerism, exploratory factor analysis was performed in order to examine the dimensionality of the scale. The appropriateness of factorability was initially established by conducting both the Bartlett's Tests of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO), a measure of sampling adequacy (MSA). The approximated chi square value of the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 6115.636 (df = 528) at an observed significance level of 0.000 rejecting the hypothesis that the population correlation matrix is an identity matrix, *i.e.* with zero correlations. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.963, which is considered "marvellous" by Kaiser (1974: 35). The results are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TESTS

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.963
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
Approx. Chi Square	6115.636
Degrees of freedom	528
Significance	0.000

The principle components factor analysis (unrotated) was first applied. This method was used as the primary concern was to identify the underlying dimensions that will account for maximum variance in the data (Malhotra, 2004). The un-rotated factor matrix was difficult to interpret owing to the majority of variables loading onto one factor. Varimax rotation (using Kaiser normalisation) was then applied in order to obtain clearer factor structure. Varimax rotation was also used in order to minimise the number of variables with high loading on a factor, thereby enhancing the interpretability of factors (Malhotra & Birks, 2003). Varimax rotation was also used in similar studies (Avkiran, 1994). Variable loadings of 0.40 and above were retained (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). The determination of the number of factors to be extracted were homogenously and conceptually accomplished by applying a combination of statistical techniques, namely percentage of variance explained, the eigenvalue criterion, the scree plot, split-half reliability and taking into account the interpretability of factors (Malhotra, 2004). An *a priori* determination of factor extraction was not considered in this study as this was an exploratory analysis aimed to establish the underlying benefits of volunteering. Taking cognisance of the various criteria alluded to above, four factors with thirty two variables were eventually retained. The number of factors is consistent with Sieber's 1974 model of the benefits of multiple role participation (Geroy *et al.*, 2000). The eigenvalues in respect of the four dimensions ranged from 18.42 to 1.05. Together, these factors accounted for 67.02% of

the variance, which according to Malhotra (2004) is satisfactory. The final factors' structure, eigenvalues and the coefficient alpha values (per dimension) are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3: SORTED EIGHT-FACTOR LOADING MATRIX

ITEM	F1	F2	F3	F4
More motivated	0.662			
Developed morals in me	0.543			
Increase in confidence	0.656			
Learn more about society	0.521			
Cooperate easily with others	0.558			
Helped me make new friends	0.538			
Work as a team	0.621			
Build faith in myself	0.703			
I am more independent	0.601			
More interest in my life	0.609			
Aware of my capabilities	0.617			
Fear of trying new things has decreased	0.571			
Increased my self esteem	0.668			
Improved my self image	0.617			
Motivated me to face challenges		0.448		
Increased my chances of job opportunities		0.474		
I am more tolerant		0.531		
Developed valuable job skills		0.586		
Understand people better		0.691		
I am seen as a valuable person		0.676		
Taught me to share knowledge		0.749		
Helped me prioritise my responsibilities		0.696		
Made me appreciate what I have		0.728		
Brought more meaning in my life		0.721		
Fear of trying new things has decreased			0.623	
Given me rewarding experiences			0.547	
Earned me certain rights			0.703	
Earned me privileges			0.745	
It decreased my stress levels				0.710
Experience personal fulfillment				0.447
Taught me about other cultures				0.671
Provide me with enjoyment				0.571
Eigenvalue	18.42	1.45	1.18	1.05
% of variance explained	55.84	4.40	3.59	3.18
Cumulative %	55.84	60.24	63.83	67.02
Reliability (Cronbach alpha)	0.955	0.949	0.821	0.800
Method of extraction: Principal component with varimax rotation. Variable loadings of < 0.40 excluded from analysis.				

DISCUSSION

This study was initiated to elicit responses from volunteers at a major sport event regarding their perceived benefits. The dimensions regarding the potential benefits volunteers derive from volunteering is illustrated in Figure 1.

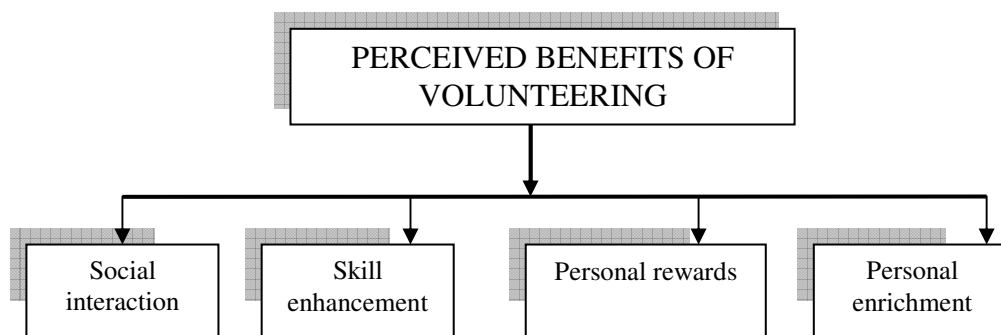


FIGURE 1: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

The social interaction factor comprised fourteen variables and accounted for 55.84% of the variance. Motivation, development of morals, building of confidence, cooperation, acquiring new friends, teamwork, independence and building one's image were some of the key benefits derived from such a social interaction. These findings are consistent with the research findings of Geroy *et al.* (2000) where respondents indicated that their volunteer activities gave them new ideas they could use in their work place and exposure to a variety of people and situations helped them to be more creative at work. Peterson (2003: 615) also established through his research that the volunteer "morale was up three times higher in companies that were actively involved in volunteer programmes". While volunteering also "leads to positive attitudes and the likelihood of taking responsible actions" (Catano *et al.*, 2001: 256), Peterson (2003) acknowledges that there is insufficient empirical evidence to conclude that a causal relationship exists between volunteer participation and positive outcomes. A plausible reason for this may be that most research on sport event volunteerism has focused on a single organisational setting.

The skill enhancement factor comprised ten variables and accounted for 4.40% of the variance. Facing of work-related challenges, better job prospects, development of valuable job skills, knowledge sharing, prioritising responsibilities and bringing more meaning into life were some of the strategic benefits perceived by volunteers. Professional volunteers such as doctors and teachers who give of their skills to volunteering may benefit by exercising new skills and exploring their personal strengths. Several research findings (Green & Chalip, 1998; Cuskelly, *et al.*, 2004; Peterson, 2003; Geroy *et al.*, 2000) support the notion that skill development is an essential benefit derived from volunteering. Peterson (2003) found that volunteering enhances their job-related skills through participation in volunteer programmes. Geroy *et al.* (2000) uncovered that people skills, management and organisational skills, training skills and ability to balance time and prioritise responsibilities were notable benefits volunteers draw from their experiences during the process of volunteering. Similarly, volunteer activities make some respondents thankful for what they have and appreciative of what they have around them and the people that they work with.

The personal rewards factor comprised four variables and accounted for 3.59% of the variance. This factor encapsulates the "privilege" factor of Geroy *et al.* (2000). Pearce (1993) also shares analogous sentiments and argued that volunteers derive their rewards from participating in the act of volunteering itself. Volunteers are not paid for what they do and volunteering is legitimized by emphasising its work facet (Pearce, 1993). The author further states that rewards for volunteering are not under the control of the organisation but derived from the act of participation itself, since volunteers are motivated by the pleasure of the activity.

Finally, the personal enrichment factor comprised four variables and accounted for 3.18% of the variance. Stress reduction, personal fulfilment, acculturation and enjoyment were rated as essential benefits in volunteer participation activities. Both marketing and consumer behaviour literature support the view that people consume products and services that expresses their identity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Early studies of Haggard & Williams (1992) resonates similar views that because of the high involvement inherent in the consumption of the sport products, volunteers are provided a particular opportunity for self-expression, largely through the identification one feels with the subculture. Pearce (1993) also found that volunteering is further motivated by enjoyment of the activity and social networks created that contribute to the larger social good.

A combination of conclusions obtained from literature and the exploratory empirical factorial study reveals that participation in volunteer activities does provide substantial benefits to volunteers. These results support claims in literature that volunteer programmes encompass positive experiences and have much to offer to volunteers. Whilst such opportunities and experiences are secondary from the perspective of event managers, research findings have highlighted that volunteers find volunteering satisfying when they learn new skills, make new friends and feel passionately engaged (Phillips *et al.*, 2002).

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Useful insights from the examination of the perceived benefits of volunteering in sport events have been discerned. This study demonstrated that social interaction, skill enhancement, personal rewards and personal enrichment are the pertinent advantages that volunteers derive in offering their services in sport-related environments. Whilst the social interaction and skill enhancement dimensions were found by volunteers to be essential, personal rewards and enrichment are just as important in order to make an inclusive evaluation of the benefits derived in volunteer participation. Sport organisations need to lure volunteers into their fold by emphasising these benefits. In addition, administrators of sport organisations should create a conducive environment which provides ample scope for social interaction, skill development, personal reward and personal enrichment. Without the personal contribution of volunteers, many of the mega-sports events may simply not have been staged. Furthermore, if volunteers are merely given to perform narrowly focused, routine activities with little opportunity to find their own niche and learn new things, they are likely to be dissatisfied with their volunteer experience (Phillips *et al.*, 2002). Administrators of sport organisations should therefore offer volunteers the chance to expand their volunteer responsibilities and provide opportunities for volunteers to explore new ways of performing their assigned tasks.

In order to ensure a regular cohort of volunteers, administrators need to inculcate a strong sense of commitment to an event. Sport Administrators should further ensure that the job expectations of the volunteers are realistic. This will, in turn instill a sense of pride among volunteers to pledge their commitment. As a consequence, it has become vital for event organisers to understand the key influencing variables that motivate volunteers to offer their services and use this knowledge to respond to the expectations of volunteers with respect to the benefits that they expect to derive from such experiences.

The current study presents the results of an investigation within a particular sport setting and therefore future researchers are cautioned not to generalise these findings to other sport events especially in events that may have an international connotation (for example, volunteerism within organisations in the 2010 FIFA World CupTM in South Africa where employees or volunteers tend to affiliate themselves with the government in order to “nurture contracts with government and private sector leaders (Caudron, 1994: 1). There is also a compelling need for further research efforts that may investigate sport volunteer programmes from a marketing standpoint; a perspective often “understudied” in literature in order to establish what volunteers are seeking to buy with the time, devotion and effort they give (Green & Chalip, 1998).

While there has been some research into the values and motives of persons who volunteer with charities or social service agencies, it is not clear that volunteering in sport settings is driven by comparable values, needs or motives (Green & Chalip, 1998). Additional research needs to be undertaken to compare sport volunteers in other settings in order to establish the degree to which findings in non-sport settings can (or cannot) be generalised in sport. The study has identified benefits that volunteers derive from volunteering which may be used by sport organisations to strategically focus on the identified dimensions to prepare for volunteer participation. The need for supplementary research may become obvious in the future as researchers, academics, sport administrators, and sport event organisers conscientiously grapple to identify benefits that draw volunteers to sport events.

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