

I'm not playing anymore: Developing a model of why consumers stop playing social sport

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Abstract

While a diverse range of programs and sports marketing research has been undertaken to explain the effects of participation in sport in general, little research has addressed how to increase sport participation rates and even less attention has been given to why participants choose to stop participating in social sport. This paper begins to address this gap by building a conceptual model identifying the psychological stages of a person's participation in sport, specifically looking at why people stop participating. The model draws from a number of multi-disciplinary models utilising relevant constructs from each. Drawing on concepts from psychological, cultural and social frameworks the proposed model focuses specifically on why people choose to stop participating in social sport and proposes a more comprehensive examination and hence a better understanding of this important area.

Introduction

Participation in sport has many proven physical, psychological and social benefits (Beedy 2007; Taks and Scheerder 2006). Despite these positive effects, participation in sport remains low in many segments of society (Taks and Scheerder 2006; Mota and Esculas 2002). In Australia for example, only 27% of males (15 years and over) and 32% of females (15 years and over) engage in sport or physical activity more than twice a week (Linacre 2007). While sports marketing research has studied how and why individuals choose to participate or not participate in sport (King, Leonard and Kusz 2007; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007; Hartmann and Depro 2006; Sabo et al. 2005), several key gaps in our understanding remain, including a lack of research integrating models of sport participation and motivation. In addition, while research has typically focused on the decision to participate or not, little research has focused on those individuals who start to play a particular sport and then decide to stop. Traditional marketing theory tells us that this segment of customers, who have overcome the initial barrier or reached the 'decision to participate' stage should be the most cost effective to retain (Dowling and Uncles 1997). Hence the purpose of this paper is to develop a model which explores an individual's choice to stop participating in social sport. The ultimate goal is to use this model in research aimed at increasing participation and retention rates in social sport.

Background

Sports marketing is an emerging discipline (Pedersen et al. 2007; Lehmann 2005; Shannon 1999). Within the current sports marketing literature several research themes can be identified of which sports participation (Linacre 2007; Scheerder et al. 2006; Scheerder, Vanruesel and Taks 2005) is one. Within sports participation sub-themes include psychological connection to sport (Beaton and Funk 2008; Funk and James 2006), children's participation in sport (Taks and Scheerder 2006; Stratton, Conn and Smallacombe 2005; Gaskin and Garland 2005), the elderly in sport (Nicholson 2004), comparisons of participation over time (Scheerder et al. 2006; Cushman, Veal and Zuzanek 2006; Scheerder, Vanruesel and Taks 2005), self-determination and its effects

on exercise (Daley and Duda 2006), demographic differences in physical activity (Casper 2007; Luna-Arocas and Tang 2005; Mota and Esculas 2002), sport participation rates (ABS 2007), motivators to participate in sport (Stratton et al. 2005) and participation constraints (Shores, Scott and Floyd 2007; Liechty, Freeman and Zabriskie 2006; Dong and Chick 2005). However the studies conducted have three key gaps which will now be discussed.

Social sport like competitive sport involves an element of competition, however it involves competitors simply coming together for the game only, with no formal training or playing for a specific club. Examples of this include oztag and touch football competitions, and indoor sports, such as indoor netball and cricket. Social sport is the focus of the proposed model because it allows the inclusion of the majority of the population by allowing for all skill levels, ages, genders, and not being effected by time constraints for training. While existing research identifies factors influencing the decision to participate/not participate in sport (Shores, Scott and Floyd 2007; Liechty, Freeman and Zabriskie 2006; Dong and Chick 2005), no research does this specifically for social sport. For example Alexandris and Carroll's (1997) use of Crawford, Jackson and Godbey's (1991) model for leisure constraints focused on recreational sport, while studies conducted by Beaton and Funk (2008) and Dong and Chick (2005) simply cover leisure in general of which sports participation (of any type, but not specified) is included. This is similar to Shores, Scott and Floyd (2007) whose study was conducted on outdoor recreation activity but again with no specified sport type. Finally, Liechty, Freeman and Zabriskie's (2006) research into body image as a constraint to women's participation is not specific about which leisure activities were used in the research.

Secondly, none of the existing research explores the factors affecting a person's decision to stop participating in sport. That is, they view sport participation via the rational consumer decision making process used in product marketing which examines the decision to participate or not to participate but no consideration is given to the decision influences on those who commence participating but then stop. Targeting former sport participants provides two key advantages over attracting new participants. Firstly, it is more cost effective to retain current customers over attracting new clients (Dowling and Uncles 1997). Secondly, because these people have participated in the sport previously it is known that they are open to participation. Developing a model of why people drop out will allow sporting organisations to address these issues and maintain higher rates of participation at a much lower cost. Therefore sporting organisations are at least trying to retain qualified and motivated markets rather than waste valuable resources trying to sift through a potential and general sport participant target market.

Thirdly, while common elements exist in the models used in existing research, there is no use of an integrative theory to provide a deeper understanding of all factors influencing participation and non-participation in social sport. As a result of these gaps a preliminary integrated model of sports participation is developed next.

Model Development

Table 1 summarises five key models identified as relevant for this research. More specifically three groups emerge from the five with two versions each of Social Cognitive Theory and the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints. While the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)

contributes a staged approach to decision making, Social Cognitive Theory and the Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints provide key constructs to fit within this approach.

Table 1: Summary of Key Models relevant to Sports Participation

Model	Theorist	Constructs	Scope
Psychological Continuum Model	Funk and James (2006; 2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological attachment to a sport or sporting team (4 stages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sports spectators
Social Cognitive Theory	Nets and Raviv (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self efficacy outcome expectations self-evaluated satisfaction or dissatisfaction motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sports participation
Social Cognitive Theory	Compeau and Higgins (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self efficacy outcome expectations encouragement by others other's use support anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information technology
Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints	Alexandris and Carroll (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intrapersonal constraints interpersonal constraints structural constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-participation in sports
Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints	Dong and Chick (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> intrapersonal constraints interpersonal constraints structural co constraints cultural constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-participation in sports

Source: Adapted from Funk and James 2006; Dong and Chick 2005; Nets and Raviv 2004; Funk and James 2001; Alexandris and Carroll 1997; Compeau and Higgins 1995

The PCM identifies four stages of a spectator's psychological commitment for a sport or team. The first stage, awareness, is when an individual knows that a team exists but s/he is not interested in following that team. The second stage, attraction, occurs when a spectator has developed an interest in a particular team. Attachment, stage 3, is the point at which the individual has formed a meaningful psychological connection to the team, while the final stage, allegiance, occurs when this psychological connection becomes resistant, persistent and biased, and a loyalty to the sporting team now exists (Funk and James 2006; Funk and James 2001).

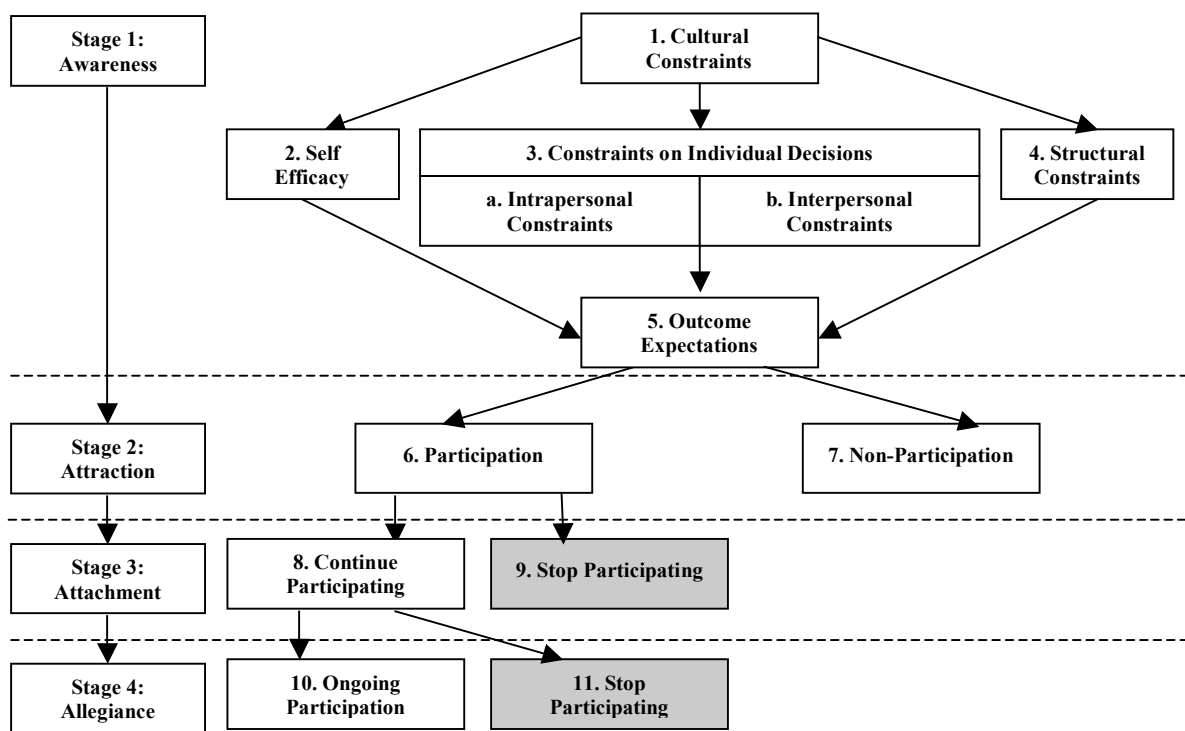
Nets and Raviv's (2004) adaptation of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory to sports participation proposes that self efficacy, outcome expectations and self-evaluated satisfaction or dissatisfaction influence an individual's motivation to engage in physical activity. However, Nets and Raviv's (2004) model focuses on why people choose to participate and does not address why they do not participate or cease to participate. A further adaptation of Social Cognitive Theory by Compeau and Higgins (1995) for IT usage can be applied to sport. Compeau and Higgins (1995) adaptation proposes that in addition to self efficacy and outcome expectations other factors such as encouragement by others, other's use (e.g. family and friends using IT), support (e.g. of family and friends), and anxiety, also greatly effect an individual's decision to adopt IT.

The gap of why people stop participating in sport led to models of sport participation constraints being investigated. Crawford, Jackson and Godbey's (1991, cited in Alexandris and Carroll 1997) Hierarchical Model of Leisure Constraints (HMLC) was initially used. This model proposes that people choose not to participate in sport due to three categories of constraints; intrapersonal (e.g. personality factors, attitudes and mood), interpersonal (e.g. interaction with

family members and friends) and structural (e.g. lack of opportunity, costs of the activity, and income). Further studies identified that cultural differences also affected an individuals decision to participate in sport or not (Chick and Dong 2003). Chick and Dong’s original adaption of the HMLC included cultural and structural constraints effecting intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints. However a later study (Dong and Chick 2005) produced a refined model where structural constraints were also affected by cultural constraints. Cultural constraints could be important in the proposed model considering the cultural diversity in the Australian population.

From these models a preliminary integrated model of has been developed (Figure 1). The model incorporates key elements of all five models with the PCM model reflected in the four stages on the left hand side and the key constructs from the other models reflected in the right hand side.

Figure 1: Preliminary integrated model of sports participation



Source: Adapted from Funk and James 2006; Dong and Chick 2005; Nets and Raviv 2004; Funk and James 2001; Alexandris and Carroll 1997; Compeau and Higgins 1995

The primary framework for the model was the PCM. While originally PCM was dedicated to sports spectators, similarities between the theoretical concepts behind spectator’s motivation to passive participation in sport could be drawn to consumer’s active participation in sport. The PCM attempts to identify the process by which individuals become allegiant fans of a sport or sporting team (Funk and James 2006). The same process will be used to identify when individuals become allegiant participants of a particular social sport in attempt to identify the how, why and at which stage they stop participating. For use in this model the first stage, awareness, describes the awareness that exists for a certain sport, but the potential participant still does not want to participate in the sport. The second stage, attraction, describes a distinct interest in participating in a particular sport that has developed based on an evaluation process (boxes 1 to

5) on whether to compete in the sport (box 6) or not (box 7). In stage 3, attachment, the participant has developed an attachment to the sport and will continue to participate (box 8), or following the initial participation (attraction stage) realises that there is no attachment to the sport and therefore stops participating (box 9). The final stage, allegiance, is a loyalty to the sport, therefore continued participation (attachment stage) has led to the participant now competing on a regular basis and preference for this sport over any other sport (box 10), or as a result of other factors has caused the person to stop participating (box 11).

Exploring these stages will allow researchers to accurately identify at what stage a person is susceptible to leaving, therefore strategies can be implemented to combat this and ultimately retain participants. It is important to note that that initial participation in the sport can only occur at the attraction level (stage 2) i.e. if the participant was not attracted to the sport they wouldn't try it thus "stopping" can only occur in the final two stages. Hence this research will identify if a participant stops participating in stage 3, stage 4 or both, and if both is there a difference between the two stages. Supporting this focus, many factors are already identified to influence a persons initial decision to move from stage 1 to stage 2 (boxes 1-5), however no research has explored the movement from stage 2 to stage 3 and from stage 3 to stage 4.

In summary, while existing research models have considered sports participation/non-participation many gaps exist in each of the models. The proposed preliminary model integrates aspects of these models to address three identified gaps. Addressing these gaps will allow a deeper understanding of the decision making process involved in ceasing to participate in sport, enabling more effective marketing to former participants and so increasing sports participation.

Future Directions, Conclusions and Implications

Next the proposed model must be operationalised and tested. Multiple methods will be used to triangulate results. Firstly, meta analysis of existing studies will be conducted to confirm gaps, existing approaches and contexts, and further develop the preliminary model. Secondly, an exploratory study will be conducted to explore results of the meta-analysis (i.e. theory building) of two key groups: participants, and former participants of social sport. Finally, testing of the preliminary model for sports participation will be done using data gathered through an online survey of the same two key groups: participants, and former participants of social sport. At this stage analysis will be completed using structural equation modeling with group comparisons.

This research will contribute to both theory and practice. Firstly a **contribution to theory** is made by addressing the gaps identified above. Secondly the **contribution to practice** is addressed by providing a deeper understanding of why sport participants choose to stop. This will allow strategies to be developed to increase participation rates. Increased participation rates will improve both the physical and psychological health of individuals as well as the health of society in general.

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