

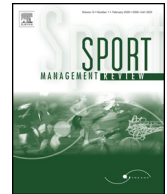


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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Sport Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/smr



The process toward commitment to running—The role of different motives, involvement, and coaching

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 March 2017

Received in revised form 13 October 2017

Accepted 13 October 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Active leisure

Serious leisure

Running event

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was twofold: (a) to explore and describe the relationships between different facets of motivation, involvement, and commitment to running, and (b) to test whether recreational coached runners differ from non-coached runners in their motivation, involvement, and commitment to running. Drawing on the psychological continuum model (PCM), a model was proposed to test relationships among motives, attitudinal and behavioral involvement, and commitment to running as a leisure activity. Results showed that two (enjoyment and health) out of five motives were significant indicators of attitudinal involvement. Attitudinal involvement was a significant predictor of behavioral involvement, which in turn was a significant predictor of commitment. Coached runners differed from non-coached runners in all tested variables. The structural relationships among the variables varied based on the tested group. Implications for theory and practice are presented.

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1. Introduction

People have different motives to engage in active leisure activities, such as running (Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, & Kaplanidou, 2011; Yair, 1992). Motivation is the first positive attitude that pushes people to consume active leisure activities (Madrigal, 2006; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2000). Motivation was defined by Mitchell (1982) as an individual psychological process that arouses and directs intentional behaviors. In this investigation, we explore different motives that people might have to run and to describe the relationship between motives and other attitudes, such as involvement and commitment to running. Although researchers have described some different motives for which people engage in active leisure activities, there is a gap regarding the relationship between different motives and intentions to continue exercising.

Different motives to run might push runners to different levels of involvement with running (Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011; Funk et al., 2011). People who run for fun, enjoyment or pleasure might be more involved with running than those who run for a sense of obligation, for example, to avoid diseases (Funk et al., 2011). Beaton et al. (2011) defined sport involvement as an attitude that emerges when individuals perceived that sport occupies a central part in their lives and provides hedonic (i.e., pleasurable) and symbolic values for them. Based on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, Funk et al. (2011) proposed that attitudinal involvement with running should affect behavioral involvement, which has been empirically represented by, for

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2017.10.003>

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example, participation in running events and time spent in running training sessions. After getting involved with a leisure activity, people may develop increased attachment to this activity and become committed to it (Beaton et al., 2011; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Previous researchers have provided support for the idea that involvement and commitment are related but distinct constructs (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). For this research, we followed Pritchard et al. (1999) and Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) and defined commitment as a stable preference guided by an attitude of resistance to change.

The rationale of this research is that different motives may have different effects on attitudinal involvement, which should affect behavioral involvement, which in turn should affect commitment to running as a leisure activity. We drew on the psychological continuum model (PCM – Funk & James, 2001) in setting up our study. The PCM is a theoretical framework that consists of four hierarchical stages: awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance (Beaton & Funk, 2008). We proposed that different motives represent the fuel for action, which pushes individuals from the awareness stage to the attraction stage. Then, attitudinal and behavioral involvement represent forces that push individuals from the attraction stage to the attachment stage. The higher the levels of involvement, the more individuals are likely to become attached to running. Finally, we propose commitment to running as representing an attitude responsible for moving individuals from the attachment stage to the allegiance stage. This sequence of attitudes and behaviors toward running has not been empirically tested yet. The existence of a logical sequence of attitudes does not mean that specific attitudes are present only in one or another level of the PCM. That is, motives are not present only in the awareness stage, nor is involvement present only in the attraction and attachment stages. Beaton et al. (2011) proposed that by the end of the awareness stage, individuals start to show some little involvement, which is necessary to bring them to the next stage of attraction to a sport object. By moving from the attachment to the allegiance stage, the levels of involvement are supposed to be very high. Therefore, in different stages of PCM, different attitudes are present at different levels. Different attitudes at each PCM stage implicitly exist on a continuum that encompass all levels across stages. We propose that different motives should lead to different levels of involvement, which in turn should lead to different levels of commitment. As proposed by Funk and James (2001), depending on the strength of one's attitudes toward the sport object, "an individual may not progress beyond certain level [of the PCM]" (p. 124).

In analyzing attitudes and behaviors toward running, previous scholars have investigated either isolated constructs or relationships between pairs of constructs. For example, Beaton et al. (2011) classified runners into theoretically meaningful groups within the PCM based on their levels of involvement. They classified runners based on their low, medium, or high perceptions of the role of running in their lives in terms of three dimensions of involvement: centrality, hedonic value, and symbolic value. For instance, runners with high perceptions in any two dimensions were classified in the allegiance stage of the PCM. Funk, Toohey, and Bruun (2007) investigated different motives of runners to register into a running event, while Funk et al. (2011) used event participation motives to explain future exercise intentions. In none of these previous studies have researchers approached motives as plausible antecedents of involvement and commitment. Interestingly, they used the PCM as the theoretical framework, but they did not investigate the process toward allegiance. Rather, they took pictures of specific moments inside that process. In this sense, we justify the need of an investigation that focuses in *the process*. In other words, runners present different levels of involvement and that motives can affect attitudes toward running, but less well understood is whether different motives explain different levels of involvement and different levels of commitment to running. In this sense, the first purpose of this investigation was to explore and describe the relationships between different facets of motivation, involvement, and commitment to running.

Additionally, we tested whether recreational coached runners (i.e., those who pay to receive instruction from a running club or a running expert) differ from non-coached runners (i.e., those who run based on their own knowledge, not paying for any type of instruction) in their motivation, involvement, and commitment to running. Funk et al. (2011) suggested that about one third of participants in running events have belonged to organized running clubs. The quest for running clubs and coaching to run may imply that some recreational runners are taking running too seriously to be considered casual runners. In the Brazilian context, people join running clubs almost exclusively to receive coaching orientation. They pay for coaching services in the running clubs – the organizations that offer this type of services. In the context of this research, runners become members of running clubs to be coached and to receive orientation related to training, nutrition, apparel usage, and any other factor that may help them to improve their running performance. Considering that coached runners are investing more time, money, and effort to improve performance, they might differ from non-coached runners in their attitudes and behaviors toward running. Running club managers and other professionals (such as, personal trainers or personal running coaches) should be interested in knowing differences and similarities between these two groups of runners (probably two market segments), in order to be more effective in their marketing strategies and to deliver better services.

1.1. Processes of engagement with active leisure activities

The PCM (Funk & James, 2001) is said to be part of a group of models, proposed to explain the process of engagement with sport (Weed et al., 2015). Along with the PCM, the trans-theoretical model (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992) and the exercise adoption model (Brooks, Lindenfeld, & Chovanec, 1996) have been adopted as theoretical backgrounds in many previous investigations about active leisure engagement (Weed et al., 2015). We chose the PCM as the theoretical background based on previous studies, which advocate for the suitability of this model over the others, when the aim of the research is to answer practical questions related to active leisure or participation sport (Beaton & Funk, 2008). The PCM has been successfully applied in different studies to explain engagement with active leisure activities (Beaton & Funk, 2008; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

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