

Exploring the value sponsors co-create at a charity sport event: A multiple stakeholder
perspective of sport value

Abstract

The charity sport event experience is created by a wide array of stakeholders including participants, event managers, and sponsors. This research explores value co-creation for charity sport event sponsors. Specifically, the purpose of the current research is to examine charity sport event sponsors' and managers' perceptions of how sponsors co-create value in the charity sport event context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with charity sport event sponsors (n=5) and charity sport event managers (n=5) in Japan. Within the interviews with sponsor representatives, one theme, sponsor contributions as symbolic contributions, and two categories: giving beyond financial contribution and internal awareness, were uncovered. One theme, sponsors as event advocates, and two categories, cause amplification and employee participation, emerged from the interviews with event managers. The interviews also revealed similarities in the perceptions of sponsor managers and event managers in that sponsor employees are viewed as important advocates for the cause and partnership. Meanwhile, differences between the two groups emerged as event managers spoke explicitly about importance of financial contributions from the sponsors, while sponsorship managers highlighted how the sponsorship went beyond the monetary aspects. The findings can be integrated into event management strategy to create off-site event initiatives such as workshops and lectures for sponsor employees and to use short-form videos and digital storytelling facilitate authentic engagement between the event and sponsor.

Keywords: charity sport events, value co-creation, sponsorship, event management

Introduction

Charity sport events encompass participatory sport events aligned with a specific charitable cause, or a collection of charitable causes, wherein participant registration fees, or a portion of registration fees, benefit the charitable cause(s). In addition, participants are further encouraged to fundraise on behalf of the benefiting charity as part of their event preparation (Bennett et al., 2007). As consumers shift to engaging with products, services, and experiences that can provide their lives with meaning (Matthijssen, 2018), charity sport events can be positioned as desirable entities with which brands can align through sponsorship and corporate partnerships. To this end, sponsorship of charity sport events has been shown to enhance corporate image and positively influence purchase intention among event participants (Lee et al., 2017). The current research investigates the value created by charity sport event sponsors.

Charity sport events are growing in popularity. The market for walking, running and cycling events has been expanding and is further complemented by more novel offerings such as mud and obstacle events (Hamilton, 2013). This has led to diversification in terms of both the types of events on offer, as well as the charities to support (Panepento, 2016). In turn, prospective sponsors can choose among a variety of charity sport event offerings upon which their brand can be distinguished. Sponsoring a charity sport event can allow a brand to demonstrate its willingness to give back to the community and generate goodwill (Dean, 2002). And, association with community and charity-based sport events has been identified as a mechanism to engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to advance community values and public health outcomes (Batty et al., 2015)

Charity sport event sponsorship can be defined as a meaningful, mutually beneficial, and publicly visible alliance between a business and a charitable organisation within a participatory sport event context (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). Sponsors are encouraged to promote the charity sport sponsorship through engagement with event participants and other

publics, in an effort to achieve marketing objectives (Lacey et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016). Researchers have suggested that charity sport event sponsors are an important stakeholder worthy of academic investigation (Smith et al., 2016). Initial research on charity sport event sponsorship activation revealed that participants believe that sponsors need to communicate their role in enhancing the event experience in a more visible and authentic manner (Fechner et al., in press).

The current research explores value co-creation for charity sport event sponsors and managers by interviewing charity sport event managers and charity sport event sponsorship managers. Specifically, the purpose of the current research is to examine charity sport event sponsors' and managers' perceptions of how sponsors co-create value in the charity sport event context. Woratschek et al.'s (2014) sport value framework guided this research. Achieving the research purpose will provide insights for how charity sport event managers and sponsors can effectively activate their partnership to assist in creating mutually beneficial partnerships. In addition, addressing this research purpose will build upon the existing but somewhat limited research on charity sport event sponsorship. Furthermore, the findings from the current research can provide an empirical understanding of the co-creation process within charity sport events. Filo et al. (2018) demonstrated that event organisers and participants can co-create value in the charity sport event experience. However, their research only collected data from event participants, and as noted above, this has been the dominant perspective in charity sport event research (Daigo & Filo, 2020).

The current research responds to calls for research in the charity sport event context that extends to stakeholders beyond participants (Daigo & Filo, 2020). A high proportion of existing charity sport event research has relied upon data collected from event participants (e.g., Bennett et al., 2007; Filo et al., 2008; Won et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2010), including research on charity sport event sponsors (e.g., Filo et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2017; Smith et al.,

2015). The current research employs semi-structured interviews with charity sport event managers and charity sport event sponsorship managers. The sport value framework guided these interviews, and this is reviewed next.

Literature Review

The Sport Value Framework and Charity Sport Events

The Sport Value Framework (SVF) (Woratschek et al., 2014) is the theoretical framework guiding the current investigation. The SVF was developed to examine value co-creation within sport management, and has specific application to sport events. This framework suggests that sport event participants and other entities related to the event can create value propositions for event managers. Specifically, the SVF advances that consumers (i.e., event participants) and event organisers (i.e., event managers, event sponsors) are agents involved in an inter-related process of creating value through the event experience.

The SVF is embedded within service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), which states that value is co-created through collaboration among a variety of stakeholders (e.g., customers, private enterprises, non-profit organisations, government, etc.) through the integration of resources. The consumer, charity sport event participants in the context of the current research, needs to integrate the value provided by event stakeholders such as event sponsors with their own knowledge, skills, and information along with resources provided by additional stakeholders. And value is, in turn, determined by the beneficiary (Woratschek et al., 2014).

The SVF advances 10 foundational premises, which take into account the unique characteristics of sport management (Woratschek et al., 2014). These foundational premises encompass the basic assumptions of the SVF, and each is relevant to the charity sport event context. First, sport activities are the basis of sport management and this accounts for the uncertainty of outcome inherent to sport, as well as the role of physical competency and

emotion within sport (Woratschek et al., 2014). In the context of charity sport events, the actual event represents the sporting activity. An array of research has examined the factors that contribute to a meaningful charity sport event experience (e.g., Filo et al., 2008). This includes a collection of research on the motives driving individuals to participate in charity sport events (e.g., Bennett et al., 2007; Hyde et al., 2016; Won et al., 2010). This line of inquiry reveals that participants are drawn to these events based upon a combination of the physical activity aspects of the challenge (Snelgrove & Wood, 2010), the charitable aspects of the event such as helping others through fundraising (Goodwin et al., 2017), social factors such as interacting with like-minded people (Bennett et al., 2007), as well as individual factors such as the recognition or status that comes from participation (Hyde et al., 2016). Collectively, these factors can interact with an individual's values to deliver emotional, symbolic, and functional meaning through event participation (Filo et al., 2009).

Second, service is the basis for exchange in sport (Woratschek et al., 2014). Charity sport events represent a platform wherein a vast collection of services are exchanged. Sponsors pay for the opportunity to promote their brand and products via these events (Filo et al., 2010). Event managers deliver the event as a mechanism to promote the benefitting charity and community (Daigo & Filo, 2020). Event participants pay registration fees, and often fundraise, in support of the benefitting charity (Taylor & Shanka, 2008) for the opportunity to challenge themselves physically (Filo et al., 2008) and socialise with others (Bennett et al., 2007). Charitable organisations get involved in these events to attract financial donations from participants (and sponsors), as well as to attempt to get participants further involved with the charity (Pent & Crowley, 2011). Each of these entities exchanges services through charity sport events.

Third, sport products and services are the vehicles for service provision (Woratschek et al., 2014). The meaningful event experience (Filo et al., 2008) represents the sport product

and service in the context of the current research. The meaning derived from charity sport event participation can translate to a variety of impacts among participants. A meaningful charity sport event experience may allow an individual to overcome fears related to training, fundraising, and completing the physical task associated with the event (Coghlan, 2012). The heightened awareness of the cause that stems from participation can lead to increased empathy among participants (Inoue et al., 2018).

Fourth, firms and customers can only offer value propositions (Woratschek et al., 2014). This suggests that value on offer can only be derived through the use of sport goods and services. In the charity sport event context, the event represents the platform, and participation in the event will allow the various stakeholders to derive value. As an example, Hyde et al. (2016) found that those individuals who derived social support from the event experience were more inclined to support the charitable cause following the event.

Fifth, sport organisations create value propositions as part of a value network (Woratschek et al., 2014). This assumption speaks to the interrelatedness of the various stakeholders involved in the delivery of sport products and services. In the context of charity sport events, the outcomes that result from the event (Inoue et al., 2018) rely upon direct interaction and collaboration among event stakeholders. Similarly, Filo et al. (2018) demonstrated that the success enjoyed by a charity sport event fundraising team is the result of collaboration among team organisers, participants, event organisers, and attendees. Accordingly, the importance of securing and collaborating with sponsors among charity and community sport event managers has been emphasised (Giannoulakis, 2014). And sponsors have been identified as a key mechanism towards establishing credibility for a charity sport event (Parris et al., 2015).

Sixth, the value co-creation conducted by sport consumers is frequently accomplished in groups (Woratschek et al., 2018). This speaks to the interaction among consumers inherent

to sport experiences, and the fact that consumers often attend or participate in sport activities in groups. Charity sport event participants often register and participate as part of a larger group (Woolf et al., 2013), and charity sport events rely upon fundraising teams as part of the experience (Filo et al., 2018). Seventh, the value created through a sport activity is co-created by participants, organisers, and additional stakeholders (Woratschek et al., 2014). Coming to an understanding of this value requires investigation across these different groups. Again, the multiple stakeholders involved in the delivery of a charity sport event underscores this assumption. Smith et al. (2015) advanced that charity sport event sponsors and managers should work in partnership to effectively communicate event and sponsorship objectives for the community. To date, research in the charity sport event context has been primarily collected from participants (Daigo & Filo, 2020), hence opportunity exists for investigation of more diverse stakeholder perspectives.

Eighth, the co-created value derived from sport services is value in use. This speaks to the subjective nature of sport experiences (Woratschek et al., 2014). In line with this, the motives driving charity sport event participants can vary by the individual (Won et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2010) while the event impacts can vary based upon the event stakeholder (Filo & Coghlan, 2016). Cornwell and Smith (2001) determined that the meaning derived by charity sport event participants from the experience can transfer to corporate partners and advocated for managers and sponsors to work together to foster and manage this meaning. Parris et al. (2015) interviewed a collection of charity sport event stakeholders (i.e., participants, volunteers, managers and sponsors) and uncovered three identities formed which interact to contribute to event outcomes such as stronger relationships with sponsors, increased purchase intention towards sponsors, and higher donations to the charitable cause.

Building off of this value in use, co-created value is value in context. This suggests that the value created through sport services is context dependent. Similarly, the impacts of

charity sport event experiences can be determined by the community in which the event is taking place (Inoue et al., 2018). Sung and Lee (2016) found that cause-related sport sponsorship programs such as partnering with charity sport events can lead to positive impacts on the corporate image of the sponsor among participants, as well as increased purchase intention. Accordingly, the authors suggest that potential sponsors devote careful attention to the events and causes with which they align. Increased purchase intention among charity sport event participants who are highly identified with the charitable cause was uncovered by Cornwell and Coote (2005). This finding further underscores the importance of carefully selecting the charitable cause and event with which to partner. Filo et al. (2010) revealed that participants who derive emotional, symbolic, and functional meaning from a charity sport event have more favourable images of corporate sponsors of the event, while also demonstrating increased purchase intention toward sponsor products. Lee et al. (2017) reinforced these findings while suggesting that long-term sponsorship was necessary to foster the meaning required to influence participant attitudes and behaviours.

Finally, the role of customers and stakeholders is to integrate the resources of their specific networks to co-create value (Woratschek et al., 2014). As noted above, each stakeholder within the charity sport event context provides different resources within the exchange inherent to the event. Accordingly, research investigating how these resources are deployed by stakeholders beyond event participants is warranted. The current research aims to do so through collecting data from charity sport event sponsors and charity sport event managers.

The framework advanced by Woratschek et al. (2014) has been integrated within the charity sport event context. Filo et al. (2018) applied the sport value framework in positioning charity sport event participants as co-creators of social value with event managers.

Specifically, the authors suggested that charity sport event participants, along with leaders of

fundraising teams within these events, can collaborate with event managers to co-create value within the event experience. This value can be represented through contribution to event impacts such as positive fundraising outcomes, meaningful event experiences, and sense of community. While sense of community has been identified as a charity sport event outcome that informs event management decision making (Daigo & Filo, 2020), the suggestions advanced by Filo et al. (2018) were drawn from the participant perspective. The current research investigates value co-creation from additional perspectives: charity sport event sponsors and charity sport event managers. In doing so, the following research questions are advanced:

Research Question 1: What are charity sport event sponsorship managers' perceptions of their value co-creation within the event experience?

Research Question 2: What are charity sport event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience?

Research Question 3: What are the similarities and differences across charity sport event sponsorship managers' and event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience?

To address these research questions, qualitative data were collected from charity sport event sponsors and charity sport event managers in Japan.

Method

Participants

Representatives from charity sport event sponsors (n=5) were interviewed, along with charity sport event managers (n=5). These individuals represented 10 different organisations, with one sponsor for each event examined. The interview format allowed interviewees to provide richness in describing their involvement in the charity sport event (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011). The demographic profile for the event managers and sponsorship managers is provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1

Procedures

Potential interviewees were identified based upon an existing database of charity sport event managers that was created for a previous research project (e.g., Daigo & Filo, 2020). This database was generated based upon a keyword search conducted on Google and KIKUZO (a Japanese newspaper archive system). The objective of this database search was to identify participatory sport events in Japan that benefit a designated charity (i.e., charity sport events). Given the relatively low number of events in Japan that met our criteria of being participatory and having a charitable partner, a total of 16 events qualified, and two of these events were managed by the same individual. Based upon this database, 15 email invitations were sent out to event managers to participate in the interviews. Five event managers indicated that their event did not have a sponsor in their response to the invitation. Hence, these events were deemed as not suitable for the current research. Of the remaining, 10 events, seven managers responded, with two of these responses expressing that s/he was not willing to participate. This left the research team with five event managers who were willing and able to be interviewed.

Each event manager then provided the contact details for a representative from one official event sponsor for their respective event. This referral process allowed us to interview one event manager, and one event sponsor for each event examined. Each interview lasted between 40-60 minutes. The interviews were conducted by one member of the research team, and each interview was audio recorded with the interviewee's permission. While the pool of potential interviewees was exhausted after 10 interviews, the research team agreed that data saturation had been reached after eight interviews (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Data saturation

was noted in a meeting among the research team, wherein the interviewer discussed how interviewees were repeating ideas shared in previous interviews (Saunders, et al., 2018). Two additional interviews were conducted to confirm this, and following these final two interviews, the research team agreed that no ideas were coming through.

After all interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed in Japanese by a member of the research team. Once transcription was complete, member checking was conducted as interviewees were provided a copy of their transcription and asked to comment on the accuracy (Smith & McGannon, 2018). All interviewees were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcripts.

The completed transcripts were then forwarded to a third-party translation company. After receiving the translation of each transcript, a back-translation process was conducted and managed by a bilingual member of the research team and third-party translation companies. The back-translation process utilises two bilingual translators who are familiar with the source and target language (Su & Parham, 2002). Specifically, the Japanese transcripts were translated to English by a third-party translation company. Next, back translation was conducted by a bilingual member of the research team. From there, a native check was conducted by another third-party translation company to confirm all processes. No major issues were identified within the back-translation process.

Materials

The interview guide was comprised of two sections. First, a collection of demographic questions was included to provide a profile of each interviewee. These questions included the interviewee's age, gender, education level, and their length of tenure working for the event/organisation. In addition, information concerning the number of event sponsors was collected. Second, nine questions concerning value co-creation were asked. These questions were developed based upon Woratschek et al.'s (2014) sport value framework. Questions

were asked about the role of event sponsors in creating the event experience. Example questions include: how would you describe the collaboration between the event, sponsor, and participants to create a valuable partnership? This question aligns with the fifth and seventh foundational premises within the sport value framework allowing the research team to collect data on the role of value networks, and the collaboration across firms, customers and other stakeholders. Along with what value do you feel the partnership provides to the sponsor? This question aligns with the eighth and ninth foundational premises of the sport value framework, and allowed the research team to investigate value-in-use and value-in-context. Flexibility was afforded to the interviewee to ask probing questions (Barriball & While, 1994) to provide greater clarity and depth on points raised by the interviewees. Each interview concluded with a brief summary of main points provided by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of six steps conducted for each group of interviewees – charity sport event sponsors and charity sport event managers: 1) getting familiar with the data, 2) creating initial codes, 3) generating categories, 4) developing category labels and representative quotes, 5) reviewing each category for overlap, and 6) reporting of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The lead analyser initiated getting familiar with the data (step 1) by reading each transcript multiple times through the lens of Woratchek et al.'s (2014) framework. From there, initial codes could be drawn (step 2) based upon the concepts described by interviewees (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Third, categories were generated (step 3) based upon these codes. Within the interviews with charity sport event sponsors two categories were uncovered: giving beyond financial contribution and internal awareness. Meanwhile, two categories emerged from the interviews with charity sport event managers: cause amplification and employee participation.

The lead analyser then provided these initial category labels, working definitions, and respective representative quotations for each category, to the other members of the research team (step 4). Discussion of the categories, labels, and definitions among the research team followed, and there was agreement on each category label, definition, and representative quotations. This agreement reflected intercoder agreement (Carey et al., 1996), and there were no themes or categories dismissed by the research team. Fifth, the lead analyser developed and finalised operational definitions for each category, while identifying additional representative quotations from the transcripts (step 5). Once the categories were finalised, the research team combined these categories to develop themes (Burnard et al., 2008). In developing these themes, the research team reviewed the transcripts for each interview by research question to ensure that the theme was consistent and present throughout the data (Morse, 2008). The themes were developed and defined based upon the data presented in the categories as well as the sentiment shared by the interviewees in the context of each research question (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The final list of themes, categories and representative quotations was then provided to the research team to review for overlap. The results of this analysis process are provided below (step 6). The results present representative quotations identified within the data analysis process communicate the themes and categories narratively, while pseudonyms are used for each interviewee to protect anonymity.

Results

The interviewees described the partnership between sponsors and event managers in positive terms, with a focus on open communication and a collaborative relationship. The results are presented below. First, the theme encompassing sponsorship managers' perceptions, symbolic contributions, is introduced and defined. From there, the categories to emerge from the interviews with sponsorship managers are described: giving beyond financial contributions and internal awareness. Next, the theme encapsulating event managers

perceptions, event advocacy, is relayed, along with its operational definition. This then transitions to the categories that came through in the discussions with event managers: cause amplification and employee participation. Finally, in line with research question 3, the theme illustrating similarities between sponsorship manager and event manager perceptions is put forward, followed by the category within this theme. And the theme addressing differences between sponsorship manager and event manager perceptions is advanced along with the category within this theme.

Research Question 1

Sponsor Contributions as Symbolic Contributions

The first theme developed from the data was: sponsor contributions as symbolic contributions. This theme can be defined as tangible and intangible gifts and efforts put forward by sponsors to enhance the event experience and advance the charitable cause. In describing the symbolic contributions, sponsorship managers spoke to the emotions and narratives attached to tangible products exchanged within the sponsorship (e.g., books, t-shirts) along with efforts made to integrate the event and cause within their organisational culture.

Giving Beyond Financial Contributions. Sponsorship managers described creating value through means beyond the traditional financial transaction associated with sponsorship. Giving beyond financial contributions is defined as sponsors contributing non-monetary resources to an event in an authentic manner. Makoto specifically positioned active event participation as an effort towards moving the sponsorship beyond the financial and underscoring the importance of the emotional contribution required:

I don't want to simply donate money....donating money doesn't require other people.

At an event day, there is some enjoyment of meeting customers or participants. I think

it is fascinating to get connected with others. The president of my company also told me we shouldn't just donate money. It is a matter of heart.

Similarly, Ai indicated that contributing money is not appealing to the organisation and instead they prioritise providing in-kind contributions:

If we were simply asked if we could become a sponsor and donate money, we might have answered 'Sorry, but no'.... If we donate just money there is no story there.

However, sending out books is a different matter. There is a pleasure as a bookshop to send books and this has led us to become a sponsor. We can proudly announce now we give away books every year because there is a story of support.

In articulating how the sponsorship must go beyond a financial contribution, interviewees detailed additional resources that can be provided by sponsors and the subsequent returns. Tomoko said:

We felt more emotions from donating goods, which didn't happen from simply giving away money. If it is just giving money away, it is only about money but when we handed out goods, we felt we were utilising our company resources and that gave us more satisfaction.

Kaori provided free t-shirts to participants and viewed this contribution as a way to foster a narrative and legacy for the event and sponsorship:

In this event, donating t-shirts alone is not one simple thing for us. We want to believe there are stories in giving t-shirts. That's the reason why our company doesn't simply donate money.... T-shirts are not the main part of the event, but they may help for memory.

Kaori further elaborated that the response garnered from the t-shirts delivered positive feelings:

By offering just our t-shirts, all the participants and organisers were happy. They trusted our company's products and I am thankful. It is a great feeling that our own products are appreciated.... We just wanted to give good quality products and if people were happy and smiling when they saw them, that was enough.

Sponsorship managers highlighted that their value manifests through going beyond monetary contributions, and their provisions should leverage emotions and legacy.

Internal Awareness. Sponsorship managers outlined the need to get employees involved in the event as part of their value co-creation. Internal awareness is defined as cultivating support and advocacy from sponsor employees to improve the event experience. Tomoko described how encouraging employees to volunteer for the event aligned with the sponsoring organisation's culture: "Our company has a culture that employees should have more opportunities to join volunteering work in society... this year we brought 11 volunteers." Beyond the alignment with the organisation's culture, employee engagement in volunteering was revealed to have a positive impact on the event experience, "At this stage, we can say it has a good effect when we see our own employees participating in events." Kaori described the impact of the sponsorship on employees and their subsequent impact on the event with the following, "It is stimulating for a company to get involved in these events."

Makoto relayed that creating internal awareness required engagement and involvement with employees in advance of the event, "The <event> was accepted in our company because the company's involvement was not just giving away bags but also there were some fun aspects in collaboration at pre-event workshops." Makoto also indicated that internal communications were important to facilitating awareness, "We also put in our company newsletter what kind of presents were bought that day or which donations went to such and such hospital visits and so on.... It makes me happy to get involved in such an activity." Makoto further reinforced that internal communications were important, "When I

put on our company noticeboard explaining about it and wrote we will sponsor the event, soon after that, I received a lot of <positive> reactions from the people.” Sponsorship managers outlined how value can be created through embedding the sponsorship in the organisation’s culture and efforts to heighten awareness of the event and its meaning among employees can assist with this.

Research Question 2

Sponsors as Event Advocates

The second theme developed from the data is: sponsors as event advocates. This theme can be defined as event managers’ expectations that sponsors promote the event. The promotion of the event can include coming to an understanding of the meaning and purpose of the event and broadcasting that meaning, as well as encouraging participation and establishing a presence at the event.

Cause Amplification. Event managers stated that sponsors co-create value within the charity sport event experience through championing the charitable cause aligned with the event. Cause amplification is defined as charity sport event sponsors advocating on behalf of the designated charitable cause. Daisuke detailed how sponsors need to communicate the meaning derived from the event, as a point of distinction, to encourage participants to join:

I think it is important not only just to sponsor but also to feel the meaning of charity and the event itself. There are a great number of running competitions, and there are also various fun run events including the bubble run that our company is in charge.

This event has a small number of participants and is a simple event, but whether or not people can participate depends on letting them feel the meaning.

Emi further reinforced that sponsors must understand and appreciate the meaning and purpose of the event: “I also appreciate the sponsor, but I am looking for a company who agrees the purpose of the event and join us.” Yuko also commented on how sponsors must

understand the charity and objectives of the event, “I think those sponsors who understand the aims and are willing to cooperate are important for a partnership...that encourages us as a host organisation.” Megu indicated that charity sport event sponsors can co-create value through cause-related activities before the event, “There is our process that we hold a lecture in advance for those who are interested in refugees, [the sponsors] ask for participation at the lecture, and prepare for the day.” Event managers described how sponsors can create value through coming to an understanding of the meaning and purpose behind the event, then using that understanding to promote the event and cause.

Employee Participation. Event managers relayed how sponsors can co-create value in the charity sport event experience through getting their employees to participate in the event. Employee participation can be defined as sponsors encouraging their employees to get involved in the event experience. Employee participation aligns closely with internal awareness as advanced by sponsorship managers.

Megu described employee participation as a mechanism that allows sponsors to create value and extend beyond the financial contribution of the sponsorship:

When they [sponsors] say yes, we ask them not only just to offer money but also to let their employees participate in the event and know a lot of things. I try to have as many employees as possible to come to our event.

Emi also spoke to employee participation as an extension of the monetary support provided:

It is an important point to have the sponsors to attend the event to understand the purpose of it and not finishing [the sponsorship] by [only] offering money support.

We ask them to come as runners or volunteers and they themselves are looking forward to the event.

Yuko indicated that sponsor employee participation in the event can create value and create a potential legacy:

People from sponsors' companies also come to the site on the day and walk with handmade signs. When they enjoy by incorporating it as a company event and go back to their offices, it helps to connect to the future.

Event managers detailed how sponsors can create value by encouraging and incentivising participation in the event to better understand the event, its meaning, and the experience.

Research Question 3

Similar Perceptions of the Role of Sponsor Employees

Both sponsorship managers and event managers expressed that sponsor employees were an important aspect of value co-creation and the event experience. This represents a similarity in sponsorship managers' and event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience, and is embodied in the theme, employees as champions. This theme is defined as sponsor and event managers' expectation that sponsor employees have direct involvement with the event and cause.

Sponsor Employees as Champions. Sponsorship managers and event managers positioned sponsor employees as an important resource within the partnership and event experience. The category of sponsor employees as champions is defined as the role that sponsor employees play in the event and cause within the partnership. This category extends the categories of internal awareness, wherein sponsorship managers spoke to their efforts to get employees involved in the event, and employee participation, in which event managers indicated that sponsors actively encouraging their employees to get directly involved in the event created value.

Tomoko described how raising awareness of the event translated to event participation among employees, "We also made our employees aware about the event and they paid their own fees and participated as charity runners." Tomoko also described how the opportunity for employee participation and engagement was central to seeking out the

sponsorship to begin with, “we were looking for something which our employees could participate in various ways” and further added that getting employees involved was beneficial for employees and the company, “We can say it has a good effect when we see our own employees participating in events, then they get their own satisfaction from that and show some improvement in themselves.” Kaori revealed that getting employees involved in some of the cause-related pre-event activities was very positive:

I saw at that day some were talking with the staff about refugee support and some were listening what kind of situations they were in now. Then naturally, move on to next question, what can we do to help them?

On a similar note, among event managers, Emi positioned employee involvement in the event and cause as an opportunity for sponsors with beneficial returns:

They use this event as one tool and an opportunity to let their employees participate.... they use our event as a participatory event so that the employees can know that their company does something good for charity. I think they feel this kind of value.

Meanwhile Megu indicated that sponsor employees were catered for specifically to ease and encourage participation and create value:

We put a reception for the [sponsor employees] apart from general participants, and consider that they can check in easily [on the event day]. By doing so, people from [sponsoring] companies are looking at that kind of thing and get good impressions for attending, which leaves the impression that our group is doing well.

Differing Perceptions Towards The Role of Monetary Support

In terms of differences between charity sport event sponsorship managers' and event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience, the two groups expressed distinct opinions towards the role of financial contributions within the

partnership. This led to the theme of differing perceptions towards the role of monetary support. As noted above, sponsorship managers highlighted how it was central to them to contribute beyond financial support to bolster the meaning of the sponsorship and event as evidenced within the giving beyond financial contributions category. Meanwhile, event managers noted that the financial contribution was critical to the sponsorship and event. This is evidenced within the category, financial dependence, which is described below.

Financial Dependence. A difference between the perceptions of sponsorship managers and event managers towards sponsors' value co-creation was demonstrated through the financial dependence of event managers. Financial dependence can be defined as the priority that event managers placed on securing monetary support from sponsors. Emi summarised this category with the following comment, "One important value is the monetary support." Beyond the importance, Daisuke outlined how events are dependant upon sponsors for money in saying, "I feel strongly dependent on them in the aspect that they are offering money for managing the event."

The priority placed on receiving financial support from sponsors was explicitly referenced by Megu, "We ask them what they can do, including monetary supports....We also put great emphasis on getting sponsorship money, and we focus on negotiating the monetary sponsorship at our high priority." The importance, priority and dependence upon financial support expressed by event managers differs from the perceptions of sponsorship managers wherein interviewees outlined how they wanted their sponsorship contribution to go beyond financial contributions to underscore the broader meaning of the partnership and event. A full summary of each theme to emerge from each research question is provided in Table 2, along with operational definitions and representative quotes.

Insert Table 1

Discussion

The current research examined charity sport event sponsors' and managers' perceptions of how sponsors co-create value in the charity sport event context. Within this examination, three research questions were advanced. First, what are charity sport event sponsorship managers' perceptions of their value co-creation within the event experience? One theme, sponsor contributions as symbolic contributions, and two categories, giving beyond financial contribution and internal awareness, were uncovered. The second research question asked, what are charity sport event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience? One theme was developed, sponsors as event advocates, while two categories emerged from the interviews with event managers: cause amplification and monetary support.

The third research question advanced what are the similarities and differences across charity sport event sponsorship managers' and event managers' perceptions of sponsors' value co-creation within the event experience? The similarities encompassed one theme, similar perceptions of the role of sponsor employees, and one category, sponsor employees as champions. The differences were embodied in one theme, differing perceptions towards the role of monetary support, and one category, financial dependence. In addressing each research question, the current research revealed that additional event stakeholders such as sponsors play a role in value co-creation within the charity sport event experience (Filo et al., 2018). The current research also responded to calls for charity sport event research that extends beyond the perspectives of participants (Daigo & Filo, 2020).

With regard to the first research question, the category of giving beyond financial contributions suggests that just as sponsors may benefit from charity sport event partnerships beyond financial outcomes (i.e., brand building, image enhancement) (Filo et al., 2010), these sponsors should contribute beyond financial inputs. The non-transactional approach inherent to this category underscores the importance of sponsors and events building relationships that

go beyond the actual event (Parris et al., 2015). Furthermore, this category and the commentary from sponsors about the provision of contributions that spoke to the event experience and meaning aligns closely with the suggestion that charity sport event sponsors can create value through providing operational support (Fechner et al., in press).

The category of internal awareness reinforces the importance of drawing attention to the cause in the charity sport event experience (Inoue et al., 2018) as sponsors spoke to efforts to educate employees about the cause and event to foster support, and as a mechanism to get employees involved in the event. This education and awareness raising can translate to advancing CSR practices within sponsoring organisations (Batty et al., 2016) as the event serves to reflect and extend a sponsor's organisational culture and efforts to give back. The activities described within this category such as encouraging employees to volunteer further demonstrated the role of social support in the charity sport event experience (Hyde et al., 2016). To ensure that a sponsor's employees do fully support the cause and event, careful attention must be paid to event and cause selection within the partnership (Sung & Lee, 2016).

With regard to research question 2, cause amplification highlights the importance of the cause and meaning within the event experience (Goodwin et al., 2017). By promoting the cause and meaning inherent to the event, charity sport event sponsors can position the event as a CSR initiative and work to advance positive community outcomes (Batty et al., 2016). Event managers' advocacy for sponsors to promote the event's cause underscores how sponsors and event managers should collaborate to foster and manage the meaning behind an event and cause (Cornwell & Smith, 2001). This category also aligns closely with the themes of increasing charity sport event awareness and engaging authentically, which have been identified as means by which participants believe sponsors can create value in a charity sport event experience (Fechner et al., in press).

Employee participation provides further evidence of the importance of taking part in the event as event managers recognised that getting sponsor employees involved in the event through direct participation was important (Hyde et al., 2016). Contribution through participation can also allow sponsor employees to derive the benefits of charity sport event participation such as overcoming fears and developing empathy (Coghlan, 2012; Inoue et al., 2018). The quotes shared within this category spoke to employee participation as a means to come to a better understanding of the event and its meaning. This provides further evidence that facilitating employee participation in cause-related physical activity can create shared value (Wu et al., 2020).

In addressing the third research question, similarities and differences between the perceptions of charity sport event sponsors and charity sport event managers emerged. the categories of internal awareness (sponsors) and employee participation (event managers) highlight the role that sponsor employees can play in bolstering the partnership and event experience. Further, across the categories of giving beyond financial contributions and internal awareness, sponsorship managers underscored the importance of acknowledging and appreciating the meaning and cause behind the event. This acknowledgment and appreciation aligns closely with event managers' sentiments around feeling the meaning and purpose of the event as part of cause amplification.

With regard to differences in perceptions, event managers repeatedly highlighted the importance and role that the monetary support provided by sponsors plays within the event experience as it is crucial to the delivery of the event. Meanwhile, event sponsors articulated how important it was for the sponsoring organisation to extend their contribution beyond monetary support. Differences were further evident in that event managers were more explicit and direct in how employees can contribute (i.e., through participating) whilst sponsors spoke

in more broad terms about how employees could get involved (i.e., volunteering, participating, advocacy).

In the context of the SVF, the theme of sponsorship contributions as symbolic contributions reinforces the meaningful charity sport event experience as a vehicle for service provision. In addition, the symbolic contributions made by sponsors reflect value in context (Woratschek et al., 2014). Non-monetary provisions and heightened awareness among employees can represent intangible and subjective value to event stakeholders. Furthermore, the theme of sponsors as event advocates positions sponsors as having a vested interest in advancing and augmenting the cause and the event. This advancement and augmentation illustrates how stakeholders such as event sponsors need to integrate resources to co-create value (Woratschek et al., 2014). The similarities and differences revealed in addressing research question 3 align with Smith et al.'s (2015) contention that charity sport sponsors and managers must work closely to determine event and sponsor objectives.

Theoretical Implications

The current research contributes to the sport value framework in a number of ways. First, the current research investigated value co-creation at the intra-level through an examination of a sport organisation and other stakeholders (Woratschek et al., 2014). Specifically, the current research explored the dynamics between charity sport event managers and charity sport event sponsors in creating value through the event experience. Results demonstrated that sponsors can contribute value with an expectation that they invest resources in creating value. Examples of resources identified within the current research include physical goods (e.g., t-shirts, books), financial investment (e.g., monetary support), and emotional appeals (e.g., amplifying the cause, heightening awareness internally). This combination of resources aligns with the mix of operand resources and evangelising that a sponsor can provide to create value (Grohs et al., 2020).

Second, through the exploration of sponsors' role in creating value within the charity sport event experience, the current research responds to calls for research examining brand alliances within sport events (Woratschek et al., 2014). Specifically, the alliance between event management and individual sponsors was explored, highlighting an interdependent relationship. This exploration also addresses the concern that value co-creation from a business-to-business perspective is rarely investigated (Lorgnier & Su, 2014). The themes and categories revealed through the current research position sponsors as an important resource for event delivery broadly as well as creating cause advocates and event participants. This provides further evidence of the multiple roles required of entities within value creation in sport (Lorgnier & Su, 2014; Woratschek et al., 2014).

The findings of the current research reinforce the fifth foundational premise of the SVF in demonstrating that charity sport event sponsors create value as part of a value network. Specifically, the current research provides evidence of the entities involved in this value network. Sponsorship representatives and event managers discussed how sponsors can enlist suppliers and employees, including leaders and managers as well as marketing and communication personnel, to create value for the sponsorship. These findings provide an initial evidence base of the actors within a sponsor's network that are engaged to create value (Buser et al., 2020).

Managerial Implications

The themes and categories uncovered within the current research can inform practice for charity sport event managers and sponsorship managers. First, to bolster event advocacy and activate employee participation, sponsorship managers can design health promotion programs within their organisations to encourage employees to train and participate in the sponsored event. Promoting physical activity is becoming an increasingly important point of emphasis in the workplace to the point that some employees view these programs as part of

“initiative overload” (Chau et al., 2019, p. 516). However, integrating a health promotion training program alongside a cause-driven activity such as sponsoring a charity sport event could broaden the impact and speak to alignment with corporate values such as sustainability. Existing resources such as the Sports Yell Company, which certifies companies in actively promoting measures to improve employee health through sport, can be engaged to assist with this integration (The Sports Yell Company, 2018). The burdens associated with participating in a charity sport event (e.g., training, fundraising) have been found to be lessened through participation as part of a team (Filo et al., 2018). This team-based approach can be employed by sponsoring organisations encouraging participation among the workforce. The implementation of health promotion programs to facilitate training in advance of the event, and the creation and promotion of teams to participate in the event could also heighten internal awareness and amplify the cause.

Second, to further enable employee participation and broaden awareness among a sponsor’s employees, event managers can organise initiatives in advance of the event day for employees from sponsoring organisations. As highlighted within the results, one of the event managers described a lecture that was held prior to the event as a mechanism to educate employees of the sponsor on the event and cause. This idea can be extended to activations on site in the offices of the sponsor wherein representatives from the charity and the charity’s constituents speak about the cause and mission. In addition, incentive programs such as providing sponsor employees with a day of leave from work in exchange for volunteering for the charity can be created. The combination of encouraging participation among sponsor employees as well as organising additional activities outside of the event parameters can inspire servant leadership among sponsor employees to further advance the cause and the event (Parris & Peachey, 2013). This combination of activations and direct participation can expand event advocacy and symbolic contributions among sponsors.

Sponsorship managers and event managers should focus on authentic engagement through the sponsorship (Cornwell, 2019). Communicating links and articulating how a sponsor fits within a social cause represent ways to foster authentic engagement (Cornwell, 2019). Short-form videos and digital storytelling conveying the congruency and fit between a sponsor and event have been highlighted as mechanisms for sponsors to engage in an authentic manner (Fechner et al., in press). Consequently, event managers and charity sport event managers should collaborate to identify commonalities between the two organisations and develop a communication plan to publicise these links internally and externally. These initiatives can extend symbolic contributions among sponsors.

Limitations

Limitations of the current research are recognised. First, the context of charity sport events within Japan may be a limitation. Japan is a country where the presence of charity sport events is just starting to emerge (Saito & Nakamura, 2012) and societal attitudes towards charitable giving are evolving (Charity Aid Foundation, 2018). Hence, the dynamic between charity sport event sponsors and event managers may not be as sophisticated as in other countries. As a result, the findings derived from the current research may not be generalisable to other contexts where charity sport events are more established.

Second, the overall positive portrayal of the partnerships examined within the current research may reflect a degree of social desirability bias, wherein interviewees responded to questions in a way that was overly positive because this would be deemed more appropriate (Welty Peachey et al., 2014). This bias could have been particularly resonant given that the objectives of the research were communicated to all interviewees in advance, and consequently all participants understood that we would be interviewing both event managers and sponsorship managers. This social desirability could also reflect the research context as Japan is a culture that emphasises politeness, respect and humility (Ogawa & Gudykunst,

2000). Furthermore, the positive portrayal of each partnership could be a product of selection bias resulting from the process of recruiting interviewees (Sterken, 2006). Those individuals who did elect to participate could have been motivated to take part in the interviews because of the positive experience they had through the partnership.

Future Research

Building upon the findings of the current research and in the context of the limitations acknowledged above, future research can be designed. First, to address the limitations derived from the nuances of the Japanese charity sport event context, data can be collected using charity sport events across a number of different countries. This can include charity sport events within countries in which these events are well established such as Australia and the United States, as well as within emerging markets such as Southeast Asia (Inoue et al., 2018). Frameworks such as consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) can be applied to guide this research and identify differences that may exist across contexts. In addition, future research can be conducted in Japan using a variety of data collection mechanisms beyond semi-structured interviews. In particular, the relative newness of charity sport events in Japan makes this a context worthy of experimental design where various interventions can be put in place to test audience response.

Second, to overcome issues related to social desirability bias and selection bias, research can be designed to collect data from additional charity sport event stakeholders including charity sport event participants, volunteers, and host community members. This proposed research would facilitate collecting data from individuals who do not necessarily have a vested interest in the sponsorship being investigated. The data collected from these additional stakeholders would allow for a more holistic understanding of the value added, and contributions to be made, in charity sport event experiences. In particular, charity sport event volunteers and host community members have received limited attention within academic

research to date. Meanwhile, data collected from event participants could be especially insightful in assessing the role of active participation from sponsoring organisations within the event experience. The event participant perspective would provide understandings of how sponsors' event advocacy can take shape.

In addition, donors represent an important stakeholder worthy of further examination. In Japan, over 80% of charity sport event participants use their own money to pay entry fees to cover their fundraising requirements (Sugimoto, 2015). This demonstrates that fundraising is not yet a common practice within charity event participation. However as evidenced by the Tokyo Marathon Committee developing capacity for crowdfunding among runners seeking to raise funds for charity as part of their participation, the importance of donors will increase. Research that can provide additional insights on the relationship between participants and donors can be beneficial. These insights can illustrate how additional stakeholders can make symbolic contributions.

Conclusion

The current research demonstrates that charity sport event sponsors perceive their value contribution within the charity sport event experience through giving beyond financial contributions and promoting awareness of the event and partnership internally within their organisation. In addition, the current research reveals that event managers perceive charity sport event sponsors' value contribution through amplifying the charitable cause aligned with the event and encouraging sponsor employees to participate. The current research represents an initial exploration of the charity sport event experience from the perspective of multiple stakeholders and contributes to the limited research on sponsors in charity sport events. It is hoped that the current research leads to further investigation of how charity sport event sponsors can optimise charity sport event outcomes.

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Table 1

Demographic profile for event managers and sponsorship managers

Interviewee	Role	Age	Gender	Benefitting Charitable Cause for Event	Industry
Emi	Event Manager	40-50	Female	Aid for developing countries	
Yuko	Event Manager	30-40	Female	Children's hospitals	
Kumiko	Event Manager	30-40	Female	Breast cancer awareness	
Daisuke	Event Manager	20-30	Male	Natural disaster support	
Megu	Event Manager	40-50	Female	Refugee support	
Makoto	Sponsorship Manager	20-30	Male		Sporting goods
Tomoko	Sponsorship Manager	40-50	Female		Children's clothing
Ai	Sponsorship Manager	50-60	Female		Pharmacy
Kaori	Sponsorship Manager	20-30	Female		Bookstore
Naoki	Sponsorship Manager	50-60	Male		Organic clothing

Table 2

Summary of categories, including operational definitions and representative quotes

Category	Operational Definition	Representative Quote	Research Question Addressed
Giving Beyond Financial Contributions	Sponsors contributing non-monetary resources to an event in an authentic manner	I don't want to simply donate money....donating money doesn't require other people. At an event day, there is some enjoyment of meeting customers or participants. I think it is fascinating to get connected with others. The president of my company also told me we shouldn't just donate money. It is a matter of heart. (Makoto)	1
Internal Awareness	Cultivating support and advocacy from sponsor employees to improve the event experience	It is stimulating for a company to get involved in these events. (Kaori)	1
Cause Amplification	charity sport event sponsors advocating on behalf of the designated charitable cause	I think those sponsors who understand the aims and are willing to cooperate are important for a partnership...that encourages us as a host organisation. (Yuko)	2
Employee Participation	Sponsors encouraging their employees to get involved in the event experience	When they [sponsors] say yes, we ask them not only just to offer money but also to let their employees participate in the event and know a lot of things. I try to have as many employees as possible to come to our event. (Megu)	2
Sponsor Employees as Champions	The role that sponsor employees play in the event and cause within the partnership	We can say it has a good effect when we see our own employees participating in events, then they get their own satisfaction from that and show some improvement in themselves. (Tomoko)	2
Financial Dependence	The priority that event managers placed on securing monetary support from sponsors	We ask them what they can do, including monetary supports....We also put great emphasis on getting sponsorship money, and we focus on negotiating the monetary sponsorship at our high priority. (Megu)	2