Presentation

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The Impact ot the Covid-19 Pandemic on Participants of Mass Participation Sports Events. A Comparison of the Sports Bahaviour Before and Since the Corona Measures in Belgium.

INFORMATION

Aim and Research Questions

The current study investigates the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the sports behaviour of participants in mass participation sports events (MPSE). From mid-March 2020 onwards, all sports events in Flanders (Belgium) were cancelled to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Since many participants were fully engaged in preparing for their event, their preparations seem to be lost. Therefore, the following research questions are posed: (i) To what extent have sports event participants altered their training behaviour because of the cancellation of their event? (ii) Are (non-)participants willing to engage in virtual challenges? (iii) Can similar findings be found among participants of running, cycling, walking and triathlon events? These sports are selected as these are the most popular sports in Flanders (Scheerder et al., 2015; Thibaut et al., 2019).

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The current study elaborates on the social ecological model, which states that an individual's behaviour is influenced by interpersonal, organisational, community and societal systems, and their interactions. The model was introduced in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and is still used in sports (events) settings (e.g. Derom et al., 2015). Due to Covid-19, the Belgian government announced the national lockdown from 13 March 2020 onwards, combined with the cancellation of all sports events. That lockdown had implications for the sports behaviour of individuals. The closing of sports infrastructure and clubs ensured that many participants lost their social network. After all, past research found that people who cannot use structural resources in their community (e.g. indoor or outdoor recreation infrastructures) are less likely to be active after a sports event has taken place (Derom et al., 2015). The present study mainly focuses on the interpersonal and organisational system to investigate to what extent people adjust their sports (events) behaviour during crisis situations. It complements the already extensive literature on interpersonal and organisational predictors of participation in MPSE (e.g. Derom et al., 2015). However, the current study is unique, in that the main focus lies on the adjustment of behaviours during crisis situations.

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

A questionnaire was distributed online between 24 April and 3 May 2020. The questionnaire was disseminated through (i) a popular newspaper in Flanders, (ii) Dutch-speaking sports federations, (iii) commercial event organisers, (iv) (local) sports governing bodies, (v) other organisations in and out of the field of sport, and (v) academic and personal networks.

The instrument included socio-demographic characteristics and organisational features for sports practice, as well as three constructs that measure involvement in sports, including attraction, centrality and self-expression (Kyle et al., 2004). The motivation to participate in MPSE was measured by using an abbreviated version of the Recreational Experience Preference scale (Alexandris et al., 2009). Further, the adaptation of training intensity and the participation in a virtual event as a result of a cancellation of the event are investigated.

First, chi squared tests are used to detect differences between groups of event participants as regards adaptation of training intensity and participation in virtual events. Next, logistic regression analyses are executed to investigate associations between adaptations of training behaviour and