

Do Charity Sport Events Function as “Brandfests” in the Development of Brand Community?

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Given the ubiquity of charitable organizations and the events used to solicit donations for a cause, many charity-based organizations are continually looking for ways to expand their fundraising efforts. In this quest, many have added endurance sport events to their fundraising portfolios. Anecdotally, we know that building long-term and meaningful relationships with current (and potential) donors is critical for a nonprofit organization's success. However, there is a paucity of research regarding whether these charity sport events serve as relationship-building mechanisms (i.e., ‘brandfests’) to assist in developing attachments to the charity. The purpose of this mixed-methods investigation was to explore to what extent a charity sport event served as a brandfest to foster a sense of identity with the charity. For this particular case study, the charity event had little effect on participants' relationship with the charity.

Currently, over one million charitable organizations exist in the United States, a number that has risen by over 30% during the last decade (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2010). This marked increase has created a mature industry where competition for donations has become extremely intense (Liao, Foreman, & Sargeant, 2001) and supplies (i.e., donations) are not currently paralleling demand (Blum & Thompson, 2010). To survive in this overcrowded and competitive market (e.g., raise awareness, secure donations, and solicit volunteer support) charitable organizations are continually looking for innovative ways to distinguish themselves from their competitors. In this ongoing quest, many charity-based organizations have added sporting events to their fundraising repertoires (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009), which typically include endurance-type sport activities (e.g., 5K runs, marathons, triathlons, etc.).

From the charity's perspective, the use of sport to raise funds is considered a desirable strategy because it enables a mutual exchange of valued benefits between the individual and the cause (Higgins & Lauzon, 2003). Instead of simply soliciting a donation, the charity

exchanges a commodity (i.e., access to participate in the event) for a contribution to the charity (i.e., registration fee). Beyond this exchange, sport events provide opportunities for the charity to increase awareness for their cause through the media, thereby adding sponsorship value and increasing social awareness among the participants, volunteers, and staff (Higgins & Lauzon, 2003). These events also allow the charity to reach a new demographic of participants that might not otherwise be familiar with the organization or the cause it supports.

In light of these positives, the effectiveness of sport events to accrue such benefits varies considerably. For example, due to the sometimes high operational costs, other fundraising strategies might provide a greater return on investment for the charity (Sargeant & Kahler, 1999), thereby limiting the event's overall economic potential. In addition, the majority of participants engage in the event in a ‘one-off’ basis, which can limit the organization in reaching their goal of recruitment and retention of donors and volunteers (Webber, 2003). While these events might provide the organization with a one-time financial boost, and increase awareness for the cause, it remains unclear to what extent these events increase the involvement of potential boosters or volunteers with the organization. In situations such as these, charitable organizations might become heavily reliant on sponsorship dollars, which in the current economic climate could lead to a fragile competitive position.

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For organizations to survive in the nonprofit industry sector, building long-term and meaningful relationships with current (and potential) donors is critical. Therefore, sport events not only serve as mechanisms for increased awareness and a fiduciary boost, they might also serve as meaningful ‘brandfests’, which could lead to the development of stronger (and new) attachments to the charity (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). The purpose of this study was to explore this idea. Specifically, we examine the extent to which a charity event served as a brandfest to foster a sense of identity with the charity. One charity-based organization (i.e., the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults) and its inaugural endurance event (i.e., the Half-Full Triathlon) served as the research setting to test its influence on donor involvement with the charity. In addition, this charity organized a team of fundraisers (i.e., Team Fight) who compete in endurance events on a regular basis to raise funds. Since Team Fight potentially represented the existence of an established community, this group’s presence provided an additional context for this study on charity sport events.

Charity Sport Events

Charity sport events provide extra meaning to participants by providing benefits they might not receive when participating in other types of sport events and activities. Aside from physical participation, the registration fee and connected fundraising provides an added psychological benefit (Webber, 2003). In addition, reinforcing the cause is used as a point of differentiation from regular participatory sport events. Participants in charity sport events often possess multiple motives for participation (see Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2008; Scott & Solomon, 2003), which include supporting the charity, socialization opportunities, business obligation, or increased physical activity.

Some individuals may be motivated to support the charity because of a personal connection with the organization or a high degree of affinity with the cause. For example, Filo et al. (2008) noted that their participant sample mainly included cancer survivors and the friends and families of people affected by cancer in a cancer-related charity event. They concluded that opportunities to engage and socialize with like-minded others were among the most influential factors motivating individuals to participate. Bennett et al. (2007) maintained that the physical challenge of the event also reinforces participation and motivates people to engage in a physically active lifestyle. Similarly, Filo et al. (2009) reported that event participants enjoyed the training necessary to complete the event. These findings illustrate that charity sport events provide a competitive and meaningful experience in addition to bolstering physical activity for the participants. Concurrently, these experiences also increase social bond formation, which may lead to an overall sense of community among event participants (Peloza & Hassay, 2007).

From the charity’s perspective, the primary goal of fundraising is twofold: (1) secure donations and (2) secure future commitments for donations. Despite the ubiquity of charity sport events, few organizers have leveraged these events to build a large supporter base (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). Within the sport tourism literature, O’Brien and Chalip (2007) noted that a pivotal component of leverage is that event participants may undergo a temporal ‘liminoid’ state, where the event is experienced as being extraordinary or special. Chalip (2006) suggested that the transcendent experience of a liminoid state may bring people together in shared sense of community (i.e., *communitas*). O’Brien and Chalip’s (2007) model proposes that the liminality and *communitas* created from a sport event, provides an opportunity to raise awareness for the host community. Thus, the sense of community that develops while participating at an endurance event is a potential mechanism to influence charitable involvement (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). However, the charity needs to be fully aware of the temporal (i.e., fleeting) nature of this phenomenon. It might be that a charity is only able to benefit from the event if they can transform this temporal liminal state into an enduring sense of *communitas*.

Because many charity sport events focus on endurance activities (e.g., running and biking) the successful completion of these events requires thorough physical preparation. Many who engage in endurance sports prepare in small groups, which may play a crucial role in engendering a sense of community with the charity. The charity may capitalize on this potential benefit through organized training groups (e.g., Team Fight), regardless of whether the charity runs its own event or partners with a race organizer. Therefore, while a sense of community may originate from the event itself, the training groups might actually create the enduring sense of community.

In sum, charity events provide opportunities for the development of social bonds between supporters and nonsupporters and may influence participants’ overall connection with the charity (Peloza & Hassay, 2007). To leverage participation into sustained charitable involvement, event organizers must understand the ways in which a sense of community (e.g., brand community) is generated.

Brand Communities

Based on the idea of marketing subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), marketing scholars have focused their attention on a shared community idea, appropriately attaching the ‘brand community’ moniker. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) were among the first to define a brand community as a “... specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (p. 412). Membership in a brand community enables an individual to develop social bonds with likeminded others, which leads to affirmation or development of a personal identity (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). In their research, Muniz and

O'Guinn identified three markers of brand community: (1) consciousness of kind—the ways community members think of themselves in relation to the brand and who embrace the idea of 'we', signifying they are part of a homogeneous group of like-minded people; (2) rituals and traditions—reflect the ways in which the culture of the community and its historical foundation are reinforced; and (3) moral responsibility—the sense of duty (i.e., obligation) members feel toward the community.

Research on brand communities has focused on a range of consumer products which include automobiles, (McAlexander, et al., 2002, Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), esculents (Cova & Pace, 2006; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009), electronics (Long & Schiffman, 1997; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, et al. 2009), musical groups (Schau et al., 2009), and sport teams (Heere et al., 2011; Grant, Heere, & Dickson, 2011). Results from this research have shown that brand communities cocreate value for the brand and the community member; and increased product, service, and media consumption are among the most notable outcomes of brand community engagement. Recently, Schau et al. (2009) proposed twelve practices by which brand community value is created and that do not occur in traditional consumer-business relationships. These twelve practices are categorized into four components: (1) social networking, (2) community engagement, (3) impression management, and (4) brand use. The authors maintained that these practices are interrelated, so each has the potential to impact the other and create value for the community (see Table 1). For example, the social networking function of

welcoming a new member into the community may also be educational regarding the customization of brand use. When these practices occur, members of the community become ambassadors for the brand who proactively recruit new members.

Despite these observations, research on brand communities and charitable organizations is limited. Filo and colleagues (2009) hinted at this community value idea but their work was more observational than prescriptive. In contrast, Hassay and Pelozo (2009) acknowledged the importance of research on brand communities (and charities) by proposing mechanisms through which a brand community may be fostered. The authors suggested that consumers might develop a sense of community through a series of satisfying behavioral experiences with the charity, provided the experiences are 'inspirational' and symbolize some type of community. The development of training groups and the staging of fundraising sport events represent behavioral experiences that may lead to the development of a charity-based brand community. However, whether this actually occurs, remains an unanswered empirical question.

Charity Event as 'Brandfests'

A primary way in which brand communities are fostered is through festivals that celebrate and demonstrate the brand, reaffirm participant identity, develop cultural capital, and aid in attracting new members. These festivals have been termed 'brandfests' by McAlexander et al. (2002) and provide "... geotemporal distillations of a

Table 1 Brand Practices (Schau et al., 2009)

Category	Practice	Definition
Social networking	Welcoming	The process whereby new members are welcomed and socialized into the community, wherein knowledge of the brand is obtained.
	Empathizing	Supportive behavior (emotional or physical) provided to members for brand-specific as well as general (i.e., beyond the brand community) issues.
	Governing	Communication of normative behavior within the brand community.
Impression Management	Evangelizing	Advocating for the brand, which involve negative comparisons with competitor brands.
	Justifying	Explanation for commitment to the brand.
Community Engagement	Staking	A process whereby members recognize hierarchy and/or intragroup classifications within the community.
	Milestoning	Acknowledgment of significant events in brand ownership and consumption.
	Badging	Outward displays of milestones.
	Documenting	The use of narrative to record experiences with the brand.
Brand Use	Grooming	Use of the brand in a caring and concerning manner.
	Customizing	Refined use of the brand to meet individual or group needs.
	Commoditizing	Demonstrations in ways in which the brand should, and should not, be brought to market directed toward either the brand or community members.

brand community that afford normally dispersed member entities the opportunity for high-context interaction” (p.41). An example of a brandfest is Jeep Jamboree—a “. . . full two-day, family oriented four-wheel-drive adventure” (Jeep, 2011, p. 8) where participants are guided through challenging off-road courses. The Jamboree enables Jeep owners, and potential owners, to learn about Jeep’s capabilities and meet other Jeep enthusiasts. Since a brand community is not geographically bound, the temporal geographic concentration of a brandfest provides a rich social context for communication that accelerates socialization into the community. A brandfest can impact a number of desirable outcomes associated with the brand such as increased patronage intentions and the stimulation of affective responses toward the brand (McAlexander et al., 2002). Therefore, a charity sport event represents a classic brandfest opportunity to celebrate the charity, bring likeminded individuals together, foster social bonds among participants, and build a sense of community.

A primary difference between for-profit brandfests and charity-based (sport) brandfests are the motives for participation. Traditional brandfest participants possess some connection or interest in the brand. For example, they may have a friend or family member who is already a brand user or their participation is spurred simply for exposure to the brand. In contrast, a charity sport event participant might only participate because they are interested in the event rather than the brand behind the event. This could prove problematic because some participants may have little interest in the brand (i.e., the charity), which may affect long-term support for the charity’s event. Alternatively, a lack of interest in the charity may not be a threat as much as it is an opportunity to leverage the event to gain new members.

The literature has shown that charity-based events can aid in developing a donor’s sense of shared value and affiliation with an organization (Bhattacharya & Bolton, 2000). For example, Filo et al. (2009) reported that sport participants mentioned the camaraderie that developed leading up to and during an event, which manifested as a sense of community. Therefore, staging an event enables the charity to celebrate the organization’s accomplishments and the social bonds created, which may further develop the brand community (McAlexander et al., 2002). Despite the proliferation of these events, little research has been conducted on the consumer-behavior side, particularly regarding brand community development (Peloza & Hassay, 2007). Practically speaking, research on the development of a charity-based brand community is desirable for three main reasons. First, since the nonprofit market segment has become increasingly cluttered, charity-based sport events could be an ideal way for organizations to distinguish themselves (Liao et al., 2001). Second and similar to for-profit organizations, the charity may benefit from the development of a brand community by securing long-term customers (i.e., a sustainable donor base). Moreover, a charity-based brand community instills a strong charity-affiliation and might result in a more willing pool of volunteers (Clary

et al., 1998), which is a much-valued resource due to the charity’s heavy reliance on volunteer support.

Method

An embedded mixed-method approach was employed to investigate the influence of a charity sport event on the enduring involvement of potential boosters with the host charity organization. An embedded design is sequential. Therefore, quantitative data were initially collected, followed by qualitative data, and then concluding with a final round of quantitative data. By using this study design, the qualitative results were used to inform the expectations and explain the outcomes of quantitative data. The parallel use of both qualitative and quantitative data provided greater insight into the research question, over and above either method used in isolation. A description of the organization and its inaugural event is provided followed by an explanation of the mixed-methodology.

The Research Setting

The organization that agreed to participate in the research was the Ulman Cancer Fund for Young Adults (UCF), a regional based charity in Columbia, Maryland. The UCF originated in 1997 and has a direct connection with the Lance Armstrong Foundation through its founder Doug Ulman who is the current President and CEO of LIVESTRONG. The UCF’s mission is to “. . . enhance lives by supporting, educating and connecting young adults, and their loved ones, affected by cancer” (Ulman Fund, 2010, para. 2), which is supported by a range of cancer support programs such as mentorship programs, web-based interactive education programs, and a scholarship program for young adults diagnosed with cancer. During early interactions with the charity, we noticed they had established a specific group of fundraisers called Team Fight.

At the time of the research, the Team Fight program was in its third year as a subdimension of the UCF, boasting a current membership of approximately 250 individuals. Members raise funds for the UCF in exchange for entry to a UCF partnered endurance event. The fundraising goal required for entry is based on the type and number of endurance events the member wishes to enter. For example, a Team Fight member that races in a triathlon would be assigned a goal of raising \$750 for the cause. A discount rate is applied to the goal as more events are entered. This fundraising strategy is an incentive for members to participate in multiple events. Team Fight members receive advice on fundraising tactics through information sessions and other conduits featured on the team’s website and through Twitter.

To help prepare Team Fight members for competition, structured training programs run by professional coaches are offered several times per week. Customized training programs are provided because many members are endurance sports novices. The coaches conduct running, biking, and swimming sessions, which are the

three main sports that comprise a triathlon. The coaches help the members plan entry to specific events during the season (i.e., approximately 6–8 events), one of which is the Half-Full Triathlon—UCF’s own organized race.

The presence of this particular group within the charity’s community was particularly interesting because they seemed to have developed their own brand community within the larger community of UCF. The assumption was that Team Fight members are involved with the charity on a continual basis due to their practices and fundraising activities, while for non-Team Fight members the event might be on a one-off basis. By controlling for Team Fight membership we were able to account for individuals who have had multiple satisfying behavioral experiences with UCF and were potentially already part of a brand community. In contrast, non-Team Fight members are likely experiencing UCF for the first time via their participation at the event. The existence of Team Fight as a subdimension of the UCF also provided an opportunity to investigate the effects of training groups on brand community development.

The Half Full Triathlon

The Half Full Triathlon (HFT) was chosen as the ‘manipulation’ to quantitatively capture the influence a sport event had on charitable involvement. The HFT is a 70-mile race and the name and distance were specifically chosen for their symbolic significance. That is, the 70-mile distance represents the estimated 70,000 young adults diagnosed with cancer each year. The Half Full slogan signifies that the distance is half that of a full triathlon. In addition, Half Full is a cultural idiom for optimism, a notable perspective for an event that focuses its attention on cancer and cancer survivors (e.g., over 10% of participants identified themselves as cancer survivors). At the time of this research, the HFT was in its inaugural year. This event characteristic provided an opportune circumstance to investigate the influence of a brandfest on consumer behavior because the absence of the confounding variable of exposure to the event. While Team Fight members ($n = 72$) did participate in the HFT, the majority of participants ($N = 622$) were not affiliated with Team Fight.

To investigate the combined and separate effects of this brandfest and the presence of training groups on the development of brand community, an embedded mixed-method approach was employed. In keeping with the sequential nature of this design, quantitative data was collected on event participants (i.e., Team Fight members and nonmembers) before the event and served as baseline data. Next, qualitative data were collected at the event. The qualitative data examined how participants perceived the HFT and whether they felt part of the UCF community. In particular, the presence of brand practices that signify the existence of a brand community were investigated. The purpose of the qualitative part of the research was to propose additional hypotheses that could be tested after the second quantitative data

collection. Lastly, quantitative data were collected one month postevent to determine whether the hypothesized impact of the event (i.e., a change in sense of community) actually occurred. This combined results approach allowed for a more holistic depiction of the impact the HFT, and presence of training groups (i.e., Team Fight), had on the development of a brand community (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Qualitative Method

Qualitative data included interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Interviews were conducted to obtain information on participants’ experiences of the event and their motivations for competing. The interviews helped depict the ‘life world’ of the participant and aided in developing a collective appreciation for the ways in which the HFT and UCF affected these individuals (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Interviews were conducted using an intercept method before the event (i.e., during the registration period conducted at the event Expo) and also following the event. Professional judgment regarding the participants’ emotional and physical state was used when soliciting postevent requests.

In total, ten interviews were conducted (7 males, 3 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.50$, $SD = 11.33$), which is appropriate for a mixed-methods approach (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Of the ten interviews, three participants indicated they were members of Team Fight, with two of the three having joined during the HFT. One additional interview was conducted with two Team Fight coaches. Using recommendations from Kvale and Brinkman (2009), the interviews were semistructured with meaning-based questions. This approach enabled the researchers to comprehensively understand the meanings that the participants ascribed to their experiences. During the data collection, the researchers discussed emergent themes so the interviews were continually adapted and built upon the previous.

Two focus groups involving 10 Team Fight members (2 males, 8 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.40$, $SD = 5.66$) were performed before the HFT. As the name entails, focus groups involve group interaction, which is favorable for opinion formation and expression (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther 1993). The focus group questions were specifically designed to gain an understanding for the ways in which Team Fight membership occurred, members’ motivations for competing and maintaining membership, members’ activities within Team Fight, and the meanings and associations that they drew from membership. Finally, participant observation using an open-ended unobtrusive narrative format was performed (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Photographic evidence was also collected and participant observations (i.e., during registration, the sponsorship expo, a preevent Team Fight luncheon, and the event itself) helped to identify direct evidence of brand community hallmarks, such as traditions, rituals, showcasing history and the display of symbols (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Focus groups, interviews, and speeches at the Team Fight luncheon were audio-recorded and transcribed, which yielded 39,854 decipherable words. Three researchers read each transcript a minimum of three times to: (1) become familiar with the material, (2) embed memos into the text, and (3) compare memos written by the other researchers. Memos were written as a basis for classifying and labeling segments of text (Spiggle, 1994). The memos served to: (a) identify motivations for participation and (b) identify evidence for the existence of brand community practices. The latter approach was a deductive process while the former was inductive.

With the inductive analysis three researchers formed an interpretative group to analyze the data (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). Individually, each member analyzed the text using an open coding procedure where the text was opened so to "... expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). Next, general themes pertaining to motivations for, and meanings attributed to, participation were categorized and segments of text identified with memos (Spiggle, 1994). Each researcher then read one another's memos. The group then engaged in an iterative process where they discussed their insights, individually reviewed the memos, and reflected on previous discussions. The interpretative group process was completed when consensus was reached on the motivations for, and meanings attributed to, participation. Participant observation data, in the form of notation and photographic evidence, was recorded and consensus was reached on the significance of the observed phenomena.

To ensure the validity of qualitative data, several strategies as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Maxwell (2005) were employed. First, the multiple methods of qualitative data were triangulated to provide support for reported results. For example, evidence of the presence of community was obtained from watching participants' behavior and through discussions with participants via interview or focus group. Second, rich data were collected as evident by the volume of transcribed data. Rich data enables the researcher to confirm the correctness of observation. Third, respondent validation was sought during the interviews and focus groups by using interpretive questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Fourth, comparisons were made between the two groups (i.e., Team Fight vs. non-Team Fight) to determine motivation differences for participation. Finally, multiple researchers were used to reduce researcher bias.

Quantitative Method

Quantitative data were collected using a multigroup preevent/postevent quasi-experimental design (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). In this design, the HFT served as the manipulation, while groups were differentiated based on Team Fight membership. The particular nature of the use of HFT as a manipulation did not warrant the use of a control group. With quasi-experiments it is not always practical or desirable to include a control

group and in cases such as this, a control group has the potential to negatively impact the validity of the study (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Based on the principle of coherent pattern matching, any change in organizational identification associated with the charity could be attributed to the event itself.

Online questionnaires were administered to participants as they registered online for the event ($n = 267$; response rate = 42.93%), and one month following the event ($n = 80$; response rate = 12.86%). Descriptive statistics for both pre and post questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

Since an embedded mixed methods approach was used, the quantitative analysis was informed by the qualitative results. Two separate analyses of the quantitative data were conducted. First, using the preevent data, an ANCOVA was performed to compare Team Fight members with non-Team Fight members on organizational identification with the UCF. A measure for personal connection to the UCF was used as the covariate. Second, the preevent and postevent data were simultaneously analyzed to determine if participants' organizational identification with the UCF changed. With this analysis respondents' ($n = 42$) preevent survey were matched with their postevent survey. A repeated measures ANCOVA was performed, with personal connection to the UCF as the covariate.

A number of respondents completed the preevent questionnaire only ($n = 225$) or the postevent questionnaire only ($n = 38$). Because the sample size for the repeated measures procedure was relatively small it was decided to conduct an independent t test that compared the preevent only data with the postevent only data. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether the two groups differed in terms of organizational identification, while not violating the assumption of independence. In this analysis it was assumed that differences between the groups could be logically attributed to the impact of participating at the HFT. It was also assumed that the groups being compared had similar characteristics. To support this, potential differences in demographic variables were examined among groups based on Team Fight membership (i.e., member vs. nonmember) and survey respondent (i.e., completed preevent questionnaire only, postevent questionnaire only, both pre- and postevent questionnaire). These analyzes were performed to ensure the different groups were similar in terms of demography. By controlling for demography, potential rival explanations from subsequent data analyses were eliminated.

A MANOVA was performed on the parametric variables and produced no significant differences between Team Fight membership based on age or education, $F(2, 273) = 0.800, p = .451$, or among survey respondent groups, $F(4, 546) = 0.645, p = .631$. To analyze the nonparametric variables a Kruskal-Wallis analysis showed no significant differences between Team Fight membership based on gender, $\chi^2(1) = 3.798, p = 0.051$, ethnicity, $\chi^2(5) = 1.694, p = .890$, or among survey

Table 2 Pre- and Post-Event Sample Characteristics

	Pre-Event (N = 314)		Post-Event (N = 80)	
	N	%	N	%
Affiliation				
Team Fight	101	37.8	13	16.3
Non-Team Fight	166	62.2	67	83.8
Gender				
Female	111	41.7	38	47.5
Male	155	58.3	42	52.5
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	244	77.7	66	83.5
African-American	2	.6	1	1.3
Hispanic	5	1.6	4	5.1
Asian	9	2.9	4	5.1
Native-American	2	.6	0	0
Other	3	1.0	4	5.1
Income (Categorized)				
0–25k	12	3.8	3	4.1
26–50k	16	5.1	5	6.8
51–75k	33	10.5	9	12.3
76–100k	32	10.2	13	17.8
101–125k	38	12.1	9	12.3
126–150k	28	8.9	10	13.7
151–175k	20	6.4	9	12.3
+176k	64	20.4	15	20.5
Age (Categorized)				
19–32	76	28.5	10	25.6
33–43	115	43.2	15	38.4
44–54	62	23.3	13	33.3
55–65	13	.05	1	.02

Note. Due to missing values, some cells do not equal the total N

respondent groups based on gender, $\chi^2(2) = 3.855$, $p = 0.146$. However, there was a significant difference among survey respondent groups based on ethnicity, $\chi^2(2) = 7.697$, $p = 0.021$. Post hoc analysis using crosstabs did not reveal significant differences among column proportions, although the data indicate that more white participants completed only the preevent questionnaire (207 vs. 201.7) and fewer white participants completed only the postevent questionnaire (30 vs. 34.4) than expected. Therefore, with one exception, it was concluded that the groups did not differ based on gender, age, ethnicity, or educational background.

The preevent questionnaire included a classification variable used to identify Team Fight and non-Team Fight members and items that captured organizational identification (6 items; $\alpha = .91$) adopted from Mael and

Ashforth (1992; $\alpha = .92$), and personal linkage to the charity (4 items; $\alpha = .76$) adopted from Sargeant and Woodliffe (2007). The postevent questionnaire repeated the organizational identification items ($\alpha = .91$) and items to measure event satisfaction (8 items; $\alpha = .90$) adapted from Westbrook and Oliver (1981); and intentions to volunteer for the charity in the future (2 items; $\alpha = .90$) adapted from Stukas, Snyder, and Clary (1999; $\alpha = .88$). The importance of organizational identification as a desirable outcome was confirmed by examining the extent to which the postevent data of organizational identification related to intentions to volunteer. A simple regression analysis revealed this to be significant $F(1, 78) = 28.58$, $p < .001$, $r = .518$, $b = 0.678$ and organizational identification accounted for 27% of the variance on intentions to volunteer.

Results

Qualitative Results

Sport-Related Participation Versus Charity-Related Participation. The charitable connection provided by the HFT enables participants to experience added value from participation in half-triathlons. Even those who mentioned their primary motivation was competition acknowledged that the cause was an added benefit to participation, which was largely consistent with previous research (see Bennett et al., 2007; Filo et al., 2008:2009; Scott & Solomon, 2003). Despite this congruence, a distinction emerged between Team Fight and non-Team Fight members. On one hand, we interviewed non-Team Fight triathletes, whose main attachment was to the sport, but placed value on the cause element. These athletes felt this aspect was secondary to their participation. As there are physical limitations to the number of events they can compete in, they put together a schedule that fits with their practice routines, and as such, the date of the event and convenience of location are of primary importance. These athletes sometimes attempt to participate in cause-related events but cared less about the actual charity. One male participant stated:

... I did the Savageman two weeks ago. They did it for Melanoma, so it's also a cancer thing but other than that I didn't do anything with the Ulman Fund this year. I know there's a bike ride, I know there's a 5k run, but from a schedule standpoint I wasn't able to do it.

For these athletes participating in charity sport events is all about the sport. Their involvement with the charity is ephemeral. Once the event is over, they move onto the next one that fits their schedule.

On the other hand with Team Fight members, the cause was the main reason for their participation and they felt strongly about UCF. While they were faced with the same challenges as the triathletes in terms of scheduling, they scheduled their year around the UCF's events to ensure they were able to participate in these events. These individuals expressed that the impetus for their involvement was a desire to ascribe meaning to physical activity and to life in general. The physical activity did not fulfill their need for a satisfying activity experience. It was often experienced as boring, hard, or unfulfilling. To remain motivated to participate in the endurance events, they needed to feel they were doing it for something bigger than themselves—the cause provided that meaning. A female Team Fight member expresses a yearning to find more meaning in her life, beyond that of her parental role:

... I felt like I needed to be doing something. And I love raising my kids, but I needed something - a little bit more than that. So for me being part of Team Fight and being a part of Ulman Cancer Fund meant that I was giving back in another way...

In addition, the informants felt the need for a more communal approach to endurance sport participation. While endurance sports are individual competitions, Team Fight members enjoyed practicing for these events in groups, and valued the camaraderie present during workouts. One woman discussed how this camaraderie helped her through some of the tougher moments in the sport:

... it's nice to have people there that know who you are. At one race [it] was completely pouring and two people I had been training with then ended up not competing. [Towards] the end, the people who had already finished from Team Fight were there, and they ran the last part with me. You're already miserable 'cause its pouring rain. It was an awful day and you thought you were going to die on the bike, so it's like that would never have happened if I didn't do it [with Team Fight].

What is apparent from the above quotes is that for these individuals, the rationale for participating was not initially related to cancer. While Team Fight members may have been impacted by cancer, many participants did not know a young adult with cancer before joining. Others, however, knew someone in a distal capacity, oftentimes outside the target age group of UCF. What would seem a natural introduction to UCF did not manifest. Instead, the anchor point for social identity became the Team Fight group and the members referred to the Team Fight group as their brand community, rather than UCF.

Team Fight as the Brand Community. Instead, individuals who are, or have previously desired to be physically active found their way to Team Fight. This resultant gravitation is due in part to this group offering a communal experience with an attached ideological cause that helped justify their sport involvement while supporting something bigger than themselves. This finding supports our earlier contention that opportunities to participate in sport or physical activity may not, in and of themselves, be completely satisfying for some. This is not surprising as adherence rates in sport and physical activity are relatively low particularly as people age (Calfas, Sallis, Loyato, & Campbell, 1994). Charity sport events serve as catalysts for physical activity by attaching meaning to the activity. Moreover, in the case of Team Fight, the connection between sport and the charity enabled a sense of community to develop. Whereas the "regular" participant of the HFT encountered the charity on a one-off basis, the Team Fight organization allowed members to become frequently involved with the community, because of the weekly practices (even outside the season) and their need to raise funds for upcoming events. The benefit of involvement with Team Fight was discussed by one of the male Team Fight members:

... you kind of puff up your chest a little bit when [someone asks] "what's that about?" First, they are

just shocked that you can do a triathlon and then they're really impressed that you're fundraising and your donating your time and everything else. You know, it's kind of a feel good. It's a little bit selfish, but it makes me feel good too.

Based on the preceding, we further explored how this community functioned, using the brand community literature as a guide (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). From observations during the event, it was apparent that a sense of community did not necessarily extend to all event participants and was somewhat restricted to the Team Fight members. Using an observation method, we observed that the staging area for the transition to the other legs of the race was one of the main areas where the athletes congregated. Specifically, the athletes involved in the half triathlon relay (i.e., where one person does the swim, another bike, and the third the run) wait for their partner to finish. It was an exciting area to watch the changeover, where athletes transition from one mode of exercise to another. Whereas most athletes were engaged in solitary activities (e.g., reading a book or using their smart phones), the Team Fight members were visually engaged with each other, sharing stories and interacting.

From both our observations and the interviews/focus groups it was obvious that all the elements of a brand community, as proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), were evident for members of Team Fight. Members often referred to Team Fight as 'we', a common indicator of the presence of consciousness of kind. The following quote demonstrates the strong presence of moral responsibility to the community: "... I think it's sort of our job as participants to be ambassadors for the group as well." More participants used this term of 'ambassador', a term that implies that the members are expected to behave on behalf of the community and exhibit practices such as discussed by Schau et al., (2009).

As an ambassador, it is imperative to represent the organization to the outside world and undertake brand practices such as *evangelizing* and *justifying* (see Table One for an explanation of brand practice terms and Table Three for evidence of these practices in action). In addition, it was perceived as duty to maintain the quality of the social network through support of other athletes, especially those that were physically not in the best shape. Practices such as *empathizing* and *welcoming* are seen as crucial to the survival of the community, and the coaches were devoted to maintaining these practices (i.e., *governing*). Once the members went through their first event, they start to document their own involvement in the sport, through the practices of *badging*, *documenting*, *milestoning*, and *staking*.

The practice of staking was especially interesting because many Team Fight members discouraged this behavior, especially in regards to physical prowess. Members decided that becoming part of Team Fight, and taking on the accompanying financial obligations, were enough to stake your place. A superior physical

performance did not enhance your status in the group. This subsequently served as an attractive feature for many members. Some expressed admiration for the inventiveness of others fundraising tactics but this did not appear to create classifications. Instead, becoming part of the Team Fight was viewed as a staking practice within the larger UCF community. Finally, the physical participation among the athletes (for the various activities) demanded that the different members customized their involvement to their own ability (e.g., shorter distances, etc), and required constant *grooming*. For an overview, illustrations of different brand practices are available in Table 3.

The Event as Brandfest. Unfortunately, the event itself did not appear to play an important role with the identification process with the UCF community and we encountered little evidence for the event as a brandfest. We did not encounter any evidence that either individual athletes or Team Fight members felt any stronger about the charity after the event. The individual athletes seemed to move on to the next triathlon, while the focus of identity for the Team Fight members remained within the Team Fight community. From both the observations and interviews it appeared that the event did little to distinguish itself from other noncharity endurance events. Efforts to make the event charity-oriented as opposed to sport-centered were confined to the registration process. For example, as participants registered and collected their race packets, they were funneled past inspirational signage into an exposition area. Within this area were sponsors that encircled a UCF exhibit where people could write on canvas "Why I fight". One of the few traditions we encountered was a Team Fight luncheon that was hosted for members. Yet, rather than illustrating UCF's successes, it tended to focus more on the history of Team Fight and its successes.

In addition, little was done to promote the UCF brand on race day. A small hospitality village was positioned at the finish line but was composed of traditional sponsorship and hospitality tents. Other than during the expo before race day, there was no location that showcased the history of the UCF, or where people could register for the charity (or to volunteer), join Team Fight, or donate additional funds to the fight for young adult cancer. The two places that could have provided a location for athletes or supporters to socialize happened to be at either the Team Fight tent or the local triathlon club. When one of the participants was asked if this event was different from another triathlon that was held at the same location, he mentioned that the only difference was that this event had the finish line at the spot where the other event had its staging area and vice-versa.

Consequently, the sense of community of Team Fight members did not appear to transfer to other HFT participants or to UCF. Although a sense of community manifested within Team Fight, the HFT—the brandfest—for the UCF did not appear to be having the effect one would normally anticipate from a brandfest for a commercial product. To gain an empirical perspective to what extent

Table 3 Examples of Evidence for Brand Practice

Category	Practice	Example
Social Networking	Welcoming	“It’s such a great community and it’s just more low key. We spend half as much time chatting in between laps as we do, and catching up with each other as we do swimming.”—new member’s experience
	Empathizing	Cheering for fellow Team Fight members when they cross the finish line
	Governing	Expectations to wear Team Fight apparel at non-UCF races
Impression Management	Evangelizing	Team Fight members self-description as ‘Ambassadors’ for UCF
	Justifying	“And it’s a great cause and, I mean, the reason behind it, is definitely another factor”.—Team Fight member
Community Engagement	Staking	“...I’m not racing just for me. There are people, 10% of this race has fought <i>Life</i> , ya know. It’s like, we have nothing to even complain about.”—Team Fight member
	Milestoning	Staging of the first HFT. Team Fight membership peaking above 250
	Badging	Team Fight luncheon before events. The Half Full Triathlon identified as being UCF linked and not linked to other organizations. “I wore it on our cheerleader calendar trip cause I knew it was gonna be filmed so and it’s like on our website so I purposely brought my Team Fight shirt to wear one day and it’s bright yellow.”—Team Fight member
	Documenting	Slide shows at Team Fight luncheon that celebrate cancer survivors and in remembrance for those who succumbed to cancer Video recorded testimonies and writing canvas for “Why I Fight”
	Grooming	“so [with] Team Fight, if you did Irongirl in August and then [you’re] not doing anything with Team Fight until next year, you’re still welcome on Thursday nights to come do the swim and run and participate” —Team Fight coach
Brand Use	Customizing	Organizing ‘Blue and Yellow’ clothing days at a junior school as a fund raising tactic
	Commoditizing	Coaches advising which races/distances to enter and when

the event functioned as a brandfest, we compared how the different groups identified with the charity. To this end, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Because of their link with UCF, Team Fight members will have a higher level of identification with the UCF charity than non-Team Fight members.

H2: The level of identification of participants with UCF will not increase after the participation in the HFT.

Quantitative Results

Group Differences. To test the first hypothesis, an ANCOVA was performed on organizational identification with Team Fight membership as the between subjects factor and personal linkage to the charity as the covariate. Only the preevent data ($n = 253$) was used for this analysis. Results indicated no significant effect of Team Fight membership on organizational identification after controlling for the effects of personal involvement with the charity $F(1, 252) = 1.63, p = .203, r = .40$. Therefore, hypothesis one was rejected as Team Fight and non-Team Fight members did not differ based on organizational identification with UCF. The covariate (i.e., personal involvement with the charity), was significantly and

positively related to organizational identification $F(1, 252) = 46.94, p < .001$. Follow up analysis revealed that Team Fight members had significantly greater personal involvement with the charity than non-Team Fight members $F(1, 255) = 50.50, p < .001, r = .40$. The means and standard deviations based on Team Fight membership are portrayed in Table 4.

Pre and Posttest. To test the second hypothesis, a repeated measures ANCOVA was performed on organizational identification pre- and post-HFT with personal involvement used as a covariate. The results did not produce a significant difference on organizational identification pre- or post-HFT $F(1, 35) = 0.78, p > .05$, nor was the covariate significant $F(1, 35) = 1.81, p > .05$.

Table 4 Means (Standard Deviations) of Organizational Identification and Personal Involvement With the Charity

Membership	Organizational Identification	Personal Involvement with Charity
Team Fight	3.12 (0.85)	3.84 (0.81)
Non-Team Fight	2.96 (0.84)	3.06 (0.90)

The number of individuals that completed both the pre- and postevent questionnaire was relatively small. Therefore, an additional analysis was conducted to verify this outcome. An independent *t* test was performed using participants who only completed either the preevent survey or the postevent survey. We removed any participant who completed both surveys so that the assumption of independence was not violated. With this analysis, we tested the assumption of equal variance between groups using Levene's test statistic, which was significant ($F = 5.20, p = .023$). Although this assumption was violated, the difference between preevent and postevent organizational identification was not significant $t(71.78) = 1.804, p > .05$, while the effect size was large $r = .21$. As both analyses yielded the same outcome the validity of our results was improved. Based on these two analyses, hypothesis two was supported and organizational identification did not increase after the HFT.

Discussion

The HFT was a successful and well-run event, which is particularly impressive since this was the inaugural year and the UCF's first venture into an event of this magnitude. However, as evident by both the qualitative and quantitative results, the event itself did not function as a brandfest for UCF and did not increase the identification or involvement of their (potential) members. This study represents the first time charity sport events have been investigated as potential brandfests. The context of investigating a charity event as a brandfest represents a dramatic departure of the way brandfests are typically encountered. Unlike traditional brandfests, which attract consumers of the brand itself, the HFT targets a new market segment of athletes who may have limited cognitive awareness of the charity. Many of the triathletes were at the event because of the product, not necessarily because of the associated charity responsible for organizing the event. The ever-presence of charity linked endurance events may further obfuscate the connection. This was witnessed in this study when one participant retorted that all endurance events have a charitable component.

With the exception of Team Fight, where members have the benefit of engaging in weekly interaction through their training, participants at the HFT received a singular exposure to the brand. Hassay and Peloza (2009) noted that a community will develop from inspirational consumption of the brand and after a series of satisfying behavioral experiences. Hence, it falls on the organization to ensure that the event provides inspirational consumption by celebrating the brand through rituals and traditions and that the event is a first in a series of behavioral experiences. Within the sport management literature, O'Brien and Chalip (2007) support the emphasis on inspirational consumption and state that liminality must be cultivated such that a sense of community (i.e., *communitas*) can develop. This means the whole event must be planned to move beyond functional competency, focus more on "organizational evangelism," increase opportunities for

brand practices (e.g., social networking), and serve as a starting point for ongoing membership in the brand community. As such, the event did little to foster the involvement of traditional triathletes with the charity.

The focus of this study was to explore the extent to which, the event served as a brandfest. As such, we only briefly discussed the strategies of the charity to leverage the event for a stronger involvement (e.g., expo). It appeared from this case study that the addition of a sport event and a few ancillary features in and of itself might not be sufficient to increase the involvement of their members with the charity. Future research should address this challenge and examine how these events can be leveraged to this end. During the event, the lack of activities that could form the foundation to future traditions, rituals or group experiences were noticeable, as well as the lack of selling the brand story of the UCF. In this regard, Chalip's (2006) work on the identification of means of generating and cultivating liminality may be a starting point for empirical investigation. Examining the effective implementation of such strategies as fostering social interactions and prompting a feeling of celebration could be valuable. Moreover, the application of brand practices to develop brand community within the charity sport context also warrants further study.

While it was initially proposed that Team Fight members would more strongly identify with the charity because they have an ongoing association with UCF, this was not the case. There was no significant quantitative difference in organizational identification between Team Fight members and general participants. This discrepancy resulted because the Team Fight community had become an anchoring point of social identity in itself, rather than UCF. While the concept of Team Fight was posited as a subsidiary group to support the overall charity, it is currently becoming its own brand community, with its own traditions and rituals. In each of their marketing communications and celebratory functions, the Team Fight brand comes to the fore. For example, the luncheon was the 'Team Fight luncheon', the expo displays asked "Why do you Fight?", and members wore merchandise of the Team Fight brand—the UCF brand was always subaltern. Many of the brand practices described in this study were focused on Team Fight, and not UCF.

Currently, the division between UCF and Team Fight is not problematic and it is a partnership that works quite well. In fact, Team Fight members in our focus groups made frequent reference to UCF. As one person explained, "Like a couple of people have asked, 'What was Team Fight?' and then I get to talk to them about the Ulman Cancer Fund." As such, Team Fight operates as a well-functioning and fast growing fundraiser arm for UCF. It is a relatively young organization that has experienced rapid growth from 20 members in year one, 100 in year two, and just over 250 members in its third year. The Team Fight community allows UCF to engage members in a sustainable manner with their organization and as such, it could be regarded as a very effective and powerful way to leverage people's involvement with the charity.

Yet, the use of a subsidiary brand to create an enduring sense of community might have its challenges, and it is uncertain whether the strong connection between Team Fight and UCF would remain indefinitely. As Team Fight grows and evolves as an independent organization, they might 'outgrow' their host charity and instead decide they could better serve their cause by aligning them with more than one cancer-oriented charity. In this instance, the brand community featured with Team Fight could become conjoined with the fight against cancer. The potential for other cancer-related charities to adopt their own Team Fighters could siphon off fundraisers dollars and volunteer support from UCF. This presents an interesting (and generalizable) dilemma for charitable organizations. Whereas they undoubtedly support the efforts of other organizations to achieve similar missions, they do not want this to occur at their own expense. It therefore falls upon the organization to manage their subsidiary fundraising brands by actively engaging in governing practices of their fundraising organizations. The myriad of anchoring points for social identity is a complex challenge, which sport management scholars have only started discuss (e.g., Clopton & Finch, 2011; Heere & James, 2007; Heere et al., 2011), and future research should more deeply discuss the influence of intergroup relations on social identity processes.

To conclude, the event did not increase the involvement or identity of the participants with the charity, and therefore did not function as a brandfest. While we would not negate the fact that charity events have the potential to become brandfests, we would argue that the charity would have to develop mechanisms for brand community development, such as establishing particular traditions and/or rituals, showcasing the history of the organization and facilitate group experiences of the members that have the charity as its anchoring point of social identity. Without these brand community mechanisms, the charity sport event might become indistinguishable from myriad other participatory sport events, continually pursuing provisional donors in an ever increasingly crowded marketplace.

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