

Are the motivations of a 5km runner defined by individual ability?

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5.2 million US citizens participated in 5km races in 2011 and 12,500 5km events were held in the US during the same time period. New research in the *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* aims to find out what motivates 5km race participants and outline how race organisers can use the findings to their advantage when planning events.

Past research has identified the key stages experienced by a person leading up to them participating in a [race](#) to be, awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. However, there are also many potential reasons why participants progress to the crucial 'attachment' stage, ranging from social interactions, need to compete, escapism, and improvement of self-worth through charity. The article "Variation in motivations by running ability: using the theory of reasoned action to predict attitudes about running 5K races" by Nicolette Bell and Amber L. Stephenson segments the target market into participants' aims, age, skill, and ability, all of which help organisers achieve the maximum potential for their event and ensure future loyalty. This is then assessed in light of the variety of events available to both experienced and casual runners, ranging from charity fund-raisers right through to recreational challenges.

The authors conducted a study on 512 Pennsylvanian runners, who were divided into three ability levels and surveyed as to what motivates them most: competition, altruism, health or social affiliation. These influences were compared against other factors such as intention and level of

participation. The results were interesting, with altruism shining through as the main motivating force throughout all ability levels of runners. Beyond that, those with greater ability were driven by the need to compete, while the less experienced runners were more concerned with improving health and making social connections. Medium ability runners were found to have a combination of all four motivators, all of which seems to indicate that motivations do indeed differ according to ability. Event organisers can use the findings about motivational segments to effectively tailor their event according to the needs of different participants. For example, the more competitive athletes may be enticed to compete by time recording chips and prizes, while focusing on health benefits may be more successful for more casual competitors.

This information is compounded by the discovery that runners who intended to run a race were almost one hundred times more likely to run that race than those who did not intend to participate. It seems that, ultimately, the way to get a runner to participate is to get them to preregister for the race. The authors observe that combining this with discounts, attractive prizes and other incentives can have a drastic impact on encouraging people to sign-up in the future. This article can be a valuable resource for a race organiser when trying to create a balanced and attractive event, as well as giving an insight into how people think when considering signing up to a 5km race.

More information: "Variation in motivations by running ability: using the theory of reasoned action to predict attitudes about running 5K races." Nicolette Bell & Amber L. Stephenson. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*. [DOI: 10.1080/19407963.2014.933227](https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2014.933227)

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