

A Qualitative Examination of Disability Sport Executives' Perceptions of Sport Promotion and the Acquisition of Sponsors

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Abstract

While research exists on the marketing of disability sport (Byon, Carroll, Cottingham, Grady, & Allen, 2011), researchers have not yet examined disability sport executives' perspectives on marketing, promotion, and sponsorship. The purpose of this study was to examine three disability sport (i.e., International Wheelchair Rugby Federation, International Tennis Federation, and United States Tennis Association) executives' perspectives of sport marketability and the acquisition of sponsors. Key findings include executives' mixed-support for webcasting, television coverage, and the need to develop strategic partnerships and effective implementation of traditional sponsorship (e.g., corporate social responsibility and specific product sponsorship). Notwithstanding some reservations, executives also stated that presenting athletes with disabilities as inspirational would likely benefit visibility and market share.

Introduction

The perspectives of disability sport practitioners such as promoters and coaches have been of significant interest to researchers. For example, Van Der Ploeg, Van Der Beek, Van Der Woude, and Van Mechelen (2004) note that in most of the models related to physical activity and disability, external factors such as the effectiveness of sport recruiters and promoters can greatly impact activity levels. This was further supported by Wu and Williams (2000) who found that support systems and promotion were related to sport participation for those with spinal cord injuries. For these reasons, it is clear why disability sport research has focused on attracting and providing opportunities for participants (Cregan, Bloom, & Reid, 2007).

While this line of research is valuable to understanding sport promotion for participants, it does not address the contemporary issues of disability sport. For example, in addition to the recreational programming it was founded upon, disability sport now has elite components (Gold &

Gold, 2007). Elite sport is expensive and may not positively influence mass participation. Consequently, tension exists between resourcing traditional efforts to increase mass participation and elite sport promotion (Collins & Girginov, 2008). For these reasons, and in order to increase revenue lines to offset new expenses (e.g., funding elite disability sport), disability sport promoters are seeking ways to enhance promotion, spectatorship, sponsorship, and media coverage.

In light of new and long awaited international attention on disability, a critical need exists to better understand how to effectively promote disability sport. The recent efforts of the World Health Organization to determine the number of people with disabilities globally (Üstün et al., 2010) highlights a vital flaw of many countries that previously have underestimated the number of people with disabilities. With a global recognition that more people with disabilities exist, international disability sport organizations are hopeful of attracting more athletes. Disability sport organizations need to know how to effectively promote their

sport in order to capitalize upon globalization, the potential influx of athletes, and developing markets.

For example, the International Tennis Federation's Silver Fund program provides coaching, equipment, and organizational support to nations looking to develop wheelchair tennis. Also, the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF) has a goal to increase its number of member nations by 26 to 40 over the next four years. Further support for the growth of disability sport has been noted by the International Paralympic Committee, who identified consistent increases in the number of nations participating in the Paralympics and the number of athletes competing from member nations (IPC, 2010). However, the IPC report warns of a looming, major concern from the increased participation: "Continued funding growth is essential, if the IPC is to meet the rapidly increasing demands and opportunities of running major international events and supporting the development of its members" (p. 24). The IWRF shares a similar concern in their annual report (IWRF, 2012).

Sport researchers, executives, and activists have responded to these concerns through four distinct tracks aimed at garnering greater funding for disability sport. Based upon social justice, the first track argues that additional resources should be allocated to disability sport (Eleftheriou, 2005; Hums, 2002; Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2003). Indeed, this argument has helped to increase the funding of national sport governing bodies for disability sport (Havaris & Danylchuk, 2007; Jones, 2008), but disability sport organizations have come to realize that in order to acquire additional resources, they must continue to market their product more effectively (IPC, 2009; IWRF, 2010). In other words, some have realized that while social justice is a worthy ideal and has led to positive contributions, it is still insufficient.

The second track focuses on the imagery associated with disability sport promotion. Significant research has emphasized the use of the 'supercrip image' which is the presentation of an athlete with a disability as a superhuman overcoming adversity (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). Both of these studies also examined the perspectives of athletes with disabilities who were aware of being marketed as supercrips, and had some reservations associated with such promotion. Similarly, other research has focused on the hyper-masculine presentation of male athletes with disabilities as a related but different variation on the supercrip theme (Gard & Fitzgerald, 2008; Lindemann & Cherney, 2008). To date, no research exists on disability sport executives' perceived value or strategic use of promoting the supercrip or hyper-masculine image.

The third track focuses on sponsorship and its relationship to sport promotion and marketing. The findings of this track have shown that images of athletes

with disabilities in marketing campaigns are lacking, (Hardin, Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2002; Schantz & Gilbert, 2002) sponsorship of disability sporting events such as the Paralympics is a form of placation (Golden, 2002), and athletes with disabilities are aware of the limited sponsorship and lack of subsequent exposure (Hardin, 2003). An additional, and perhaps more interesting concern, is the lack of research on the process by which sponsors are acquired by disability sport organizations, teams, and athletes. An exhaustive review of related research failed to locate the strategies used by professionals in disability sport to acquire sponsors.

The fourth track has used marketing studies designed for non-disability sport spectators to examine disability sport spectators' consumer behavior (Byon, Carroll, Cottingham, Grady, & Allen, 2011; Byon, Cottingham, & Carroll, 2010; Cottingham, Chatfield, Gearity, Allen, & Hall, 2012). These studies have had direct application as disability sport organizations are undergoing a paradigm shift in which practitioners are focusing more on sport promotion in order to gain more publicity, viewership, and corporate investment. It makes sense then that a better understanding of disability sport executives' perspectives of sport promotion would address existing concerns, and possibly provide practical recommendations to stakeholders. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine disability sport executives' perspectives, their sports' marketability, and the acquisition of sponsors. The following research questions were identified and examples of the interview questions were posed:

- R1. What are the current marketing plans of each executive's sport organization?
How are you currently marketing your sport?
What promotional strategies are you using in marketing your sport?
What marketing strategies have you found to be most effective at attaining your goals?
- R2. What are the executives' perspectives on marketing the disabilities of the athletes?
Do you actively promote the disability of the athletes? Why or why not?
Is promoting the disability of the athlete an effective means to market your sport?
- R3. What are the executives' perspectives on current and future media coverage?
What forms of media are most receptive to your sport?
Why and how are these forms more receptive?
What forms of media are you looking to expand into or develop relations with further?
Why are these forms of media important?
What forms of media are most effective in promoting your message and why?

- R4. What are the executives' perspectives on the acquisition and promotion of sponsors?
What types of sponsors have you found to be most likely to support your sport and why?
What strategies have you used in order to attract sponsors?

These findings may provide multiple benefits. First, this study identifies specific strategies, which can be utilized by other disability sport practitioners. Second, these results can be compared to quantitative studies on disability sport consumption (Byon et al., 2011; Byon et al., 2010; Cottingham et al., 2012) in order to access congruency between promotion strategies or practitioners and known consumer behavior. Third, future research may test hypotheses gleaned from this study or extend theory and research in novel ways.

Methods

Design and Data Collection

This study utilized an exploratory qualitative research design, which is best suited when little is known about a topic and the researcher needs to understand more from the participant's perspective before designing more predictive or causal studies (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009). Institutional Review Board approved this study before the data were collected. Three disability sport executives were purposively selected and asked to participate in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, each of which lasted between 30-45 minutes. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for small scale studies where few participants possess knowledge of the topic under investigation and when a basic understanding is required before larger, more causal studies are conducted (Maxwell, 1996). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The participants of this study were John Bishop, the president of the International Wheelchair Rugby Federation (IWRF); Mark Bullock, International Tennis Federation (ITF) Wheelchair Tennis Development Officer; and Dan James, United States Wheelchair Tennis Association (USTA) National Manager of Wheelchair Tennis. As leaders of prominent disability sport organizations, of which there are few, they possess unique knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. Based on the exploratory purpose of this study, the limitation in potential participants, and available resources, purposeful sampling was delimited to three participants (Patton, 2002). Each participant waived confidentiality and agreed to have their name used in the conduct of this study. All three participants have been in their current positions for over five years and each also has over 15 years of experience in their sport, respectively.

Data Analysis

In general, qualitative research is well suited for studies focusing on individual, unique sites, and areas of limited inquiry (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of this study and the small sample size, data were analyzed using idiographic techniques (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Thus, it was outside the scope of this study to use nomothetic or generalizing data analysis methods (Pollio et al.; Strauss & Corbin, 1988). The primary investigator, who has completed formal education in qualitative research, read and coded each transcript individually, starting with line by line analysis, then memo writing, and finally selecting exemplary quotes to summarize each executives' perspective. A co-researcher, who is an experienced qualitative researcher and university level instructor of qualitative research, provided peer-debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is enhanced through the use of multiple, competent researchers (Lincoln & Guba). The peer-debriefing process improves dependability (sometimes called reliability) through an independent, critical, and constructive analysis of the primary researcher's interpretation. Inter-rater coding or reliability was not performed since the number of participants was low and other rigorous and established procedures were used. Thus, the findings represent the primary researcher's interpretation of the participants' experiences and are used to answer the research questions posed earlier. Trustworthiness was enhanced by researcher familiarity (i.e., conducting interviews and multiple iterations of analysis), peer debriefing, and member checking (Merriam, 2009). To help ensure accurate interpretation, the authors debriefed the other researchers (i.e., peers) regarding interpretation of the emerging findings throughout the data collection and analysis process. Member checking involved the authors taking the interpretation back to the participants for critical evaluation; they indicated no changes were warranted.

Findings

The findings are presented in order of the research questions identified earlier. In addition to the researchers' interpretations, exemplary quotes are used from the participants to answer each research question, respectively.

R1. Current Marketing Plans

The ITF has perhaps been the most active in marketing planning as well as the least constrained by budgetary issues. Bullock explained that the ITF is focusing on two primary strategies. The first is the promotion of the grand slam events. These are the able-bodied grand slam tennis tournaments which host a wheel-

chair division. These events are well attended by spectators who may not have come specifically to see wheelchair tennis but were nonetheless exposed to the sport. Bullock believes this exposure will develop interest from tennis enthusiasts. The second strategy is to work with wheelchair tennis only tournaments to engage in promotion of the event. Some event organizers have historically been more passive than proactive in event promotion, focusing their efforts instead on raising prize money through sponsorship and attracting athletes to the event. Yet the importance of promoting grass roots tennis has not been lost on Bullock, who commented, "...if anything, promoting recreational wheelchair tennis is more important to us than elite wheelchair tennis, but we can't neglect either responsibility."

The USTA has more budgetary constraints than the ITF and actively focuses on promoting both grass roots and elite wheelchair tennis. As James explains:

Current policies with marketing of wheelchair tennis are based upon participation at the grass-roots level and keynoting marquee players for our lead level. Examples of this [promoting keynote marquee players] are placing athletes like David Wagner, Nick Taylor, and John Rydberg side by side with the Brian brothers, Andy Roddick, and the Williams sisters. We do more of a grassroots level marketing campaign through email and our website for grassroots participation, including grassroots grants, current programs, success stories, and trying to place wheelchair tennis in the forefront of tennis readership.

Just as James noted the benefits of successful partnerships between wheelchair tennis and able bodied tennis, Bishop and the IWRF consider the applications of such partnerships in the sport of rugby. While rugby and wheelchair rugby do not share any rules or governing bodies, they share a name and the aggressive nature of the sport. Bishop has worked actively with the International Rugby Federation (IRF) to develop a strategic partnership which he hopes will foster new sponsorship and a more diverse fan base. Bishop admits that the IWRF is behind with respect to sponsorship and marketing, but is making strong efforts to progress:

We're in the process of putting together a marketing and sponsorship committee... that we know we got a great sport and that it's eye-catching. People who've seen the sport love it. It's a very competitive, fast-paced game. The problem is, especially here in the United States, that there is just no marketing of disabled sport within the country, and it's difficult to get your product out in front of the general public.

Due to the difficulties of promoting wheelchair rugby in the U.S., Bishop and the IWRF have looked at the best practices for promotion internationally in order to identify which methods are most effective. One such example was the organizing committee of the 2010 World Wheelchair Rugby Championships held in Vancouver:

The organizing committee created an educational program for schools and they've got a teacher's plan where they put together a course over a period of several weeks where they'd teach the students about the sport. They'd incorporate geography and arithmetic and science into the learning plan and then at the end they had more than 6000 grade school students introduced to wheelchair rugby. So they brought the real championships feel to Vancouver and it was fantastic for the kids. It was a great experience for them and at the same time, by exposing children to [wheelchair] rugby at a young age, they're more apt to try to follow it as they get older.

R2. Executive's Perspectives on Marketing the Disabilities of the Athletes

Interestingly, executives' perspectives on marketing the athletes' disabilities focused on the importance of promoting athletes as just that: athletes, separate of their disability, and not merely inspirational 'supercrips or people with disabilities who overcome expectations society places on them in an inspirational fashion.' Bullock commented about the image of athletes with disabilities:

Esther [Vergeer] is getting a much higher profile. Her profile in the U.S. was very high around this year's US Open, but you know, perspectives on disability vary around the world. South Africa, for example is very positive, I think largely because of Oscar [Pistorias] and that's spreading. So we [ITF] have an event there next year. It will be interesting to see how that's received.

Executives discussed the issue of athletes being perceived as inspirational. The question of whether or not the use of inspiration was an effective and important mechanism for promoting disability sport provided three distinct answers. Bishop stated of wheelchair rugby, "We have an exciting sport with athletes who have interesting stories. Their disability and how that influences them is part of the product." Bishop further explained that the promotion of inspiration is what makes the sport attractive to more mainstream audiences, "There's been a number of different TV programs that have highlighted wheelchair rugby in some cases, dramatic shows like Friday Night Lights. They actually put wheelchair rugby into part of the ongoing

script for the show for a number of years connected to a storyline.” James, however, had reservations about promoting inspiration:

We need to start marketing campaigns and awareness campaigns, public relations that are much more specific to results, the sport, in making us a viable product rather than a nice story... so using both [inspiration and athletic achievement], it's never a bad thing as long as the critical part of that is a result of a great athlete.

Continuing on with this thought James asserted, “...people see wheelchair tennis at the US Open, but if they just focus on the inspiration they watch, are amazed and walk five minutes later. Inspiration doesn't make a fan out of them; it's not enough.”

Bullock noted that imagery is somewhat organic and should not be entirely directed. He suggests:

Certainly something we've talked about is starting to make personalities of our players, so getting their stories out there or helping to get their stories out there. Now whether they're inspirational stories or not, we've argued on that. We sorta kinda let the public decide what they think is inspiring or not. So, our main focus is to promote them as good tennis players but obviously there's a little twist for most of them.

R3. Perspectives on current and future media coverage

During the interviews the participants touched on the rise of 'webcasting' or streaming live coverage of sport to computers and the fact that additional satellite channels has made TV coverage more attainable. These topics, coupled with some brief discussions of social media and website viewership, were the focus of answer to this. Bullock stated that many ITF events have recently been webcasted but he also expressed:

My feeling, well, it's a gut feeling I have to say at the moment 'cause I haven't seen the figures, is that's a great platform, but tends to be reviewed by people within the community. Family and friends type scenario rather than a broad audience. So, that's something we're asking the IPC if they can provide stats on... On Paralympic sports TV to explore how effective that's been at attracting new fans.

In addition Bullock observes:

Through the ITF we have our own magazine, Take 2, we get featured in publications and across the board, we have our own website which is part of the ITF ... and we're now exploring much more television and having a strategic approach to television.

When asked about his goals for television coverage, Bullock replied:

I'm an optimist. I firmly believe in 5-6 years time, certainly in the next Paralympic cycle, we will be hopefully selling some TV packages. I think we moved from an era of a few years ago, if we wanted TV, we had to pay for the production. Now we're in an era where we're not selling the rights but the TV broadcasters are prepared to cover the production costs in some parts of the world. I firmly believe in a few years time, that we will be able to possibly sell some of the rights. I think in 2012 is going to be another step change for Paralympic sports as a whole. The awareness in the UK is already very high. Channel 4 is already doing regular programming.

James, who through the USTA, assisted in garnering significant coverage of wheelchair tennis on The Tennis Channel, noted the importance of consistent coverage rather than sporadic presentation:

You know, as you watch ESPN or as you read tennis magazine you see the same stories about the same people and same things all the time. This is why people are aware of them. I think we need more consistently that we are in different pieces with the media the more likely people are to be aware of who everyone is.

Speaking very pragmatically, James asserted:

Wheelchair tennis with the USTA is at a point where we are getting more television coverage, more live streaming coverage, and begin more at the forefront of print coverage. And my expectation is not being equaled to our able-bodied counterparts but I don't think it's unreasonable to gain a higher percentage of marketing space.

While the USTA and ITF have made efforts to utilize webcasting, the IWRF and wheelchair rugby have invested additional time and resources. As Bishop explained:

The first time there was any webcasting for wheelchair rugby with any serious effort was done in 2006 out in New Zealand in World Championships... and the production itself was amazing... The downside of it was in 2006 the webcasting ability itself was not as advanced as it is today, so that the feed was difficult for people to watch in different places around the world where now it's a lot better and it continues to get better. By Vancouver [2010] the bandwidth was increased to accommodate larger audiences... Now the precedence has been set. Webcasting needs to be in any bids for world championships... I think that this [webcasting] is a good market point, I think there's better way that we can utilize it as we move forward.

R4. Acquisition and Promotion of Sponsors

Due to the limited non-existent revenue procured from television rights, ticket sales, and a niche market

of apparel, much of the funding for disability sport comes from sponsorship. Furthermore, as Bishop confirms, many of the sponsors are focused on serving participants more than spectators:

Currently, a lot of different organizations that are involved as sponsors of our sport [wheelchair rugby] are companies that are related to providing services for the disabled community. For example, Coloplast [a medical supply company] is a major sponsor of wheelchair rugby throughout the world. They support U.S. national rugby, they support the club team level as well, they were a huge sponsor for World Championships up in Vancouver and so they reap the benefits of being associated with our sport because our population consumes their products.

Each executive stated that they were aware of the challenges associated with sponsors funding sports of limited fan bases. James implied the importance of strategic partnerships:

Well, I think that sponsors will look at the product and the association with the product. I think that sponsors need to also realize that they have to help in promotion, and if they are going to invest, then they also have to invest in getting people out there so their product is seen. I think that a lot of the sponsors especially in America are sponsoring currently just to make a good deed, which is going to be lower a dollar amount. Whereas if you take this as a business transaction, and they make an effort to make sure that their name and their product or place can be seen, that can actually be beneficial to both wheelchair tournaments as well as their products and their sponsorship dollar.

Of these organizations, the ITF has been most successful at acquiring large-scale sponsorships. As Bullock reported:

I think we have been very successful commercially. Some of our sponsors, perhaps motivated more of corporate social responsibility, so they're not at the moment directly trying to reach an audience through television coverage, although they're not completely disinterested in that; of course they like it if their brand appears on TV. But, I think at the moment their main motive is to be able to communicate what they're doing in this field. So, they're not looking for direct exposure, but they're using, the fact that they're doing it to communicate to their employees and in other cases, also externally, that they're doing positive activity in this field... in addition to liking the association with wheelchair tennis, they're also able to associate themselves with the governing body of tennis. So, I think they're coming in with perhaps slightly

different motives if they're sponsoring Fed Cup or something similar like that.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of disability sport executives on their sports' marketability and the acquisition of sponsors. This was accomplished through in-depth interviews with three prominent disability sport executives. Examinations of the interviews allowed a better understanding of the current status of promotion and marketing toward disability sports (i.e., ITF, IWRF, and USTA). A limitation of exploratory qualitative research is inherently a lack of statistical generalizability; Furthermore, given the descriptive nature of this study, analytic or theoretical generalizability is also limited (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2010). The discussion now turns to interpretations of our findings, as well as suggestions for future research.

Marketing Plan

Based on the participants' responses, there is clearly a relationship between sport integration (i.e., disabled sport with an able bodied counterpart) and sophistication of a marketing plan. This seems to be due, in part, to the availability of a marketing department of the umbrella organization (i.e., the USTA and ITF) and budgetary allowance. Both the ITF and USTA executives stated that partnering the images of athletes with able bodied counterparts was important, although research has yet to determine the effectiveness of this strategy. Interestingly, the IWRF and ITF executives recognized the value of examining the actions of their subsidiaries (events held by member nations) to identify best practices for marketing. This would seem to be a cost-effective mechanism to identify new strategies of sport promotion, yet little substantive research exists on this matter as well.

However, there are studies in the context of able-bodied sports that may be applicable to marketability of disability sport. For instance, scholars in sport marketing have examined spectator consumption preferences of non-revenue team and individual sports (Cooper, 2011; James & Ross, 2004), which would help marketers of the sports better formulate a marketing plan. For instance, James and Ross found consumers in three non-revenue sport teams (i.e., men's baseball, men's wrestling, and women's softball) were highly influenced by such sport-related motivations as entertainment, players' skills, and drama. These findings were also noted in Cooper's (2011) study where the author found team-related motivations (i.e., matchups and achievement) were the leading factors for attending collegiate wrestling events. Identifying such attendance motivations would be an important step for

disability sport organizations as they move forward to keeping and attracting consumers.

Marketing the Disabilities of the Athletes

The discussion of marketing disabilities of the athletes was particularly insightful because researchers such as Clogston (1994) and Englandkennedy (2008) have stated that the most common image of disability is the inspirational 'supercrip.' Interestingly, this image was immediately identified by the executives when asked to discuss marketing of athletes' disabilities. Research demonstrates that athletes with disabilities are also aware of the inspirational supercrip image and do not enjoy the association (Hardin & Hardin, 2003; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). While each executive showed some reservation in presenting athletes with disabilities as inspirational, they also acknowledged that it may be necessary to a certain extent. This conflict may not be unlike the challenges that promoters of women's sports face when considering marketing the sexuality of female athletes (Clasen, 2001).

Media Coverage

Each executive demonstrated support for webcasting, but the degree of skepticism and excitement varied. While it has been known for some time that webcasting is an option for sport promotion and consumption (Turner, 1999), the effectiveness of live streaming sport is completely unknown. While the ITF and USTA executives expressed interest in webcasting, these executives seem to be making a more immediate push for television coverage than was shown by the IWRWF representative. The efficacy of the various strategies warrants future research, with the implications possibly extending beyond disability sport.

One study has highlighted the need to explore new strategies for media coverage. In a spectator motivation study involving wheelchair rugby, Byon, Cottingham, and Carroll (2010) found knowledge of the sport and vicarious achievement were two factors influencing online media consumption of the wheelchair rugby events. Similar results were found in collegiate wheelchair basketball events (Byon et al., 2009). In order to enhance knowledge of the sport and foster identification of wheelchair rugby and the athletes, the authors of the studies suggested a systematic change to online programming by enhancing social network marketing via Facebook and Twitter. These efforts may contribute to the popularization of disability sports, which would then lead to greater media coverage.

Sponsorship

Each executive recognized the challenges of attracting sponsors to a sport with a relatively small fan base.

Both James and Bullock remarked implicitly and explicitly, respectively, that many sponsors are motivated by corporate social responsibility (CSR). James asserted that sponsors should perceive their support as a means to a strategic partnership. Bishop noted how media outlets such as the TV series *Friday Night Lights* and the academy award nominated documentary *Murderball* (Mandel & Shapiro, 2005) have used the image of athletes with disabilities to draw consumers. Yet, sponsors, with the exception of the Hartford which has committed a line of commercials to Paralympic athletes, have not taken the initiative to use the image of athletes with disabilities to endorse their products.

Using the concept of CSR to acquire sponsors has been a popular way of developing strategic partnerships in able-bodied sports (Walker, Kent, & Vincent, 2010). Consumers are aware of sport products and services offered by pro-social responsibility companies (Walker & Kent, 2009). According to Cottingham, Phillips, Carroll, Drane, and Gearity (2011), inspiration was one of the unique characteristics associated with disability sports, which could be used for a pro-social responsibility marketing campaign. However, the findings of this study demonstrated executives' reservations with using inspiration as a marketing tactic. Future research and scholarship needs to consider the effectiveness and ethics of strategic partnerships and the marketing of disability athletes as inspirational.

Limitations

Although this study was limited to a small sample size, it should be noted that less than 40 people worldwide hold similar positions as those executives studied here. Moreover, the purpose of qualitative research is not to use large sample sizes for predictive power, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of phenomenon that is traditionally outside the scope of experimental and survey designs (Patton, 2002). Finally, as this study only involved the executives' perspectives, the findings cannot speak to the effectiveness of their marketing plans.

Suggestions for Future Research

As a result of the findings of this study, we offer a number of possibilities for future research. While participants noted that use of the image of an inspirational supercrip may be a double-edged sword, no research exists on whether or not consumers are motivated by this image, and if they are as James speculated, it may be a poor long-term marketing choice. Future research should examine consumers' perceptions of the image, and their short-term and long-term intended and actual behaviors. It will be important for researchers to determine if and how consumers'

intended behaviors align with actual behaviors. An additional concern identified by the participants was on the efficacy of webcasting. To date, no research exists to examine the effectiveness of webcasted disabled sporting events. Researchers could investigate the effectiveness of webcasting and its ability to increase spectatorship and revenue.

All of the participants noted the importance of partnering with able-bodied sport organizations. However, only one executive noted the opportunity of paring elite able-bodied athletes alongside elite athletes with disabilities. Future research could examine the value of these types of partnering strategies. Finally, researchers should examine the perspectives of sponsors and their choices to invest in disability sport, whether solely motivated by corporate social responsibility or other reasons. Researchers could then assist in an intervention plan to develop strategic partnerships with sponsors rather than to rely on the supercrip image and corporate social responsibility.

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