Going the Distance: Case Study of the Kokoda Challenge

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the motivational factors of participants in endurance events, specifically discussing the Kokoda Challenge. To develop a better understanding of the specific motives that drive people to participate in such events as the Kokoda Challenge and the impacts that the event has on a social and mental level after taking part in such a grueling event. Participants included males and females aged 15-75 from all parts of Australia. Results showed that personal, social, mental and physical were the top reasons people participated in the Kokoda Challenge and after participating in the event saw changes in themselves, mentally, physically and socially.

Keywords: social, mental, physical, motivation
Going the Distance: Case Study of the Kokoda Challenge

“Every ambitious Comrades runner wanting to achieve his potential, experiences a point in the race where pain dogs every footfall. There is no injury; it is simply the muscle damage of the previous kilometers. It is unchanging in intensity, and to continue, the mind must accept this sentence of pain until the finish line is crossed. Ultimately, your ability to meet this pain ‘head to head’ will determine your performance in the race. If it becomes the focus of your existence at the time, if you permit it to erode the importance of the task at hand, you will compromise your goal or finish time. In many respects, it is the desire to test ourselves against this mental battle that entices is to enter races” –Williamson (2003).

You know that it’s a 96km race and have only 36 hours to complete; why put your body through that? What motivates you to sign up for an event like that? This is what thousands of Australian’s have been doing for the past nine years when they sign up for the Kokoda Challenge in the Gold Coast, Queensland.

Background

The Kokoda Challenge Association was established in 2004 when the two founding members Doug Henderson and his wife Anna attended a conference relating to Australia military history specifically Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea. After learning that so few people knew the history of the Kokoda Track, Doug was determined to bring awareness to the country of Australia and “young Australians was the way to raising the profile of the story of Kokoda” (Kokoda Challenge, 2012). The Kokoda Track is the battle area where the Australians fought in World War II against the Japanese.

The development of the Kokoda Youth Program started in 2004 and was targeted to those youth who are ‘at risk’ or come from disadvantage backgrounds. The program is about “providing the opportunity for young people to learn skills and qualities that matter in life: discipline, tolerance, self-worth, teamwork, purpose and leadership (Kokoda Challenge, 2012). The youth program is a twelve month program which includes community support, in which the youth volunteer their time in the community helping others, while training for the Kokoda Challenge in the Gold Coast and then completing their final test by walking the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea. This program is widely acknowledged for having improved
confidence and self-esteem, increased social interaction, increased social interaction, basic communication skills, demonstrating leadership qualities, improved tolerance of others and respect for parents and authority” (Kokoda Challenge, 2012). In testament, completion and graduation is over 91%.

In 2004 the Kokoda Challenge event was established to bring the community of the Gold Coast together to help not only raise awareness of Kokoda but to raise funds for the Youth Program. All money raised from the event goes directly into the program. The event itself is a grueling 96km trek over the hinterlands in Queensland. It consists of a four person team and school teams are made up of four students and one leader. The teams have 39 hours to complete the trek. The 96km represents the distance of the real Kokoda Track and 39 hours represents the 38th Milita Battalion, who were the first Australian troops to arrive at Kokoda on 13th, July 1942 (Kokoda Challenge, 2012).

Acknowledged as one of Australia’s most grueling endurance events, “there is no doubt that all those participating will need to call on the ANZAC spirit, which was born at Gallipoli and held fast at Kokoda: Endurance, Sacrifice, Courage and Mateship (Kokoda, 2012). To this day the Kokoda Challenge has been a successful event and now has expanded to Brisbane and Melbourne with a 30km course. 2014 will mark the 10th Anniversary of the Kokoda Challenge.

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivational factors of participants in endurance events, specifically discussing the Kokoda Challenge and why an event such as Kokoda Challenge is important in the community. This study will observe the benefits participants receive by taking part in the Kokoda Challenge and why an event such as this is important to motivate people not only to raise money for charity but as a personal achievement of physical, mental and social expectations.

This is the first study exclusively conducted on exploring people’s motivation to participating in the Kokoda Challenge.

Most of the literature focuses on economic benefits and many authors suggest more research is needed on the social, physical, environmental and tourism impacts of event and their interrelationships (Resource Guide, 2007).

This study is explorative and seeks to add to the relatively small body of knowledge surrounding participant’s motivations and the social and mental benefits in endurance events.
It will attempt to confirm the hypothesis; the impact of endurance events on participants, specifically the Kokoda Challenge, proves to be positive on their social, physical and mental abilities.

**Research Objectives**

The following research questions will guide the study and literature review:

1. Gaining understanding on participants motivation to participating in endurance events, specifically the Kokoda Challenge
2. Understand the importance to having an event like the Kokoda Challenge on participant’s social, mental and physical well-being. What is in it for the participants?

**Rational of the Study**

The study was conducted to get an enhanced understanding as to why people are participating in events that are not only grueling but take a physical and mental toll on the body. Is there a psychosocial benefit to have events like the Kokoda Challenge?

In the literature motivation refers to those personality factors, social variables, and/or cognitions that come into play when a person undertakes a task, at which he or she is evaluated, or enters into competition with others to attain a standard of excellence whether personal or against others. At such times, it is assumed that the individual is responsible for the outcome of the task and that some level of challenge is inherent in the task (Robert, 1992).

People are motivated to watch or participate in a sport or sport event because the behavior has certain attractive outcomes. Motivation is an internal factor that arouses and prompts goal-directed behavior (MacInnis, Morrman, & Jaworski, 1991).

Do the benefits out weight how much time and money goes into putting an event together? According to Funk (2008) sport and events can influence a number of aspects in a person’s life. They influence health and well-being, build social cohesion and communities, impact the economy and help shape national and cultural identities.

There are multiple studies examining the physical and economic benefits but far fewer on how events affect people on a social and mental level. It is my belief that the Kokoda Challenge,
as an extremely difficult event both physically and mentally, provides an excellent basis with which to further study social and mental impacts involved in endurance events.

**Significance of the Study**

It is my belief that this study will benefit event organizers with marketing of the event and provide them an understanding how the Kokoda Challenge affects the people who participate.

It will also provide event organizers with feedback from competitors in how improvements can be made to the running of the event but also in preparation; for example pre-event mental strategy workshops.

Importantly it will also look specifically at the differing motivations behind both the organizers of this challenge and the participants and how this could potentially lead to changes in the way that this event is managed.

The study of event impacts has driven by a need to examine the positive and negative impacts of holding events in order to justify public spending on events (Faulkner, Chalip, Brown, Jago, March & Woodside, 2003) and with “a need to leverage the best possible benefits for communities that host events” (Ritchie, 2000)

**Literature Review**

The physical and mental toll that an event like Kokoda Challenge has on one, it’s difficult to understand what encourages or motivates over 1200 people to register for the challenge. A similar study begged to answer the same question, “why thousands of non-elite or non-professional athletes are willing to participate in endurance events” (O’Neil, 2006).

O’Neil describes that people are not by nature made to live in comfort. People were made with the ability and need to be physically active. Not only a need and have potential to be active, but they need to test this ability. O’Neil goes on to state that people have a need to place themselves in situations of risk where they must use their own skill and resources to survive and overcome the challenges to achieve success. This certainly could be the reason behind why thousands of Australians participate in the Kokoda Challenge.
A quote by Bob Gries owner of NFL (Williamson, 2003) sums up nicely taking on the challenge of the Kokoda.

“To venture into the unknown,
To search for your maximum potential
To achieve the impossible or highly impossible is life’s greatest satisfaction,
It takes intense preparation, total dedication, and the risk of failure.
If you have paid the price and give 100%, you’re a WINNER”.

Motivation

There are several definitions and theories to explain motivation. Helms (1987) explains motivation in the following characteristics:

- It is an activation drive that forces people to behave in certain ways;
- It is a purpose driven process that forces behavior into a specific direction;
- It is a feedback process that relieves inner tension when the direction of behavior is successful, when the behavior does not relieve inner tension, this process changes behavior in a different direction.

Motivation is therefore neither behavior nor performance (Helms, 1987). Motivation is the internal and external forces that influence peoples’ choice as well as the intensity and direction of behavior.

External or extrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is motivated by the external rewards associated with that activity. So, stated simply one is motivated by a way of enjoyment and self-satisfaction.

Internal or intrinsic motivation would include factors such as the satisfaction of winning, feelings of success, feelings of achievement a mastery of skills, self-knowledge, self-actualization and self-control/discipline (Bakker, Whiting & Van der Burg 1990).

Potgieter (2003) also identified the following three aspects of motivational behavior:

- Direction or choice of behavior;
- Intensity or the level of effort that is displayed in a specific action;
- Persistence or the duration of time that an individual would spend on a specific activity.
Researchers James, Trial, Zhang, Wann, & Funk (2006) outlined the motives behind people participating in endurance events by proposing the SportWay Motives which will help sport marketing in measuring basic motives to participating in events. This document explores the core set of needs and benefits provided by participating. These motives include socialization, performance, excitement, esteem and diversion.

**Socialization** represents a desire for social interaction. Individuals are motivated to seek sport event experience due to opportunities for the enhancement of human relationships.

**Performance** represents a desire for aesthetic and physical pleasure.

**Excitement** Individuals are motivated to seek a sport event experience due to opportunities for mental action and exploration from the atmospheric conditions created with the uncertainty of participation and competition and the spectacle of associated activities.

**Esteem** Individuals are motivated to seek a sport event experience due to opportunities for achievement and challenge that produce a sense of mastery and heighten a send of personal and collective self-esteem.

**Diversion** represents a desire for mental well-being.

Mannell and Isl-Ahola (1987) have also sourced many of the same reasons for participating in events as many of the other researchers, reporting that recreation and leisure activities are sought, because they provide opportunities for self-determination, sense of competency or mastery, challenge, learning, exploration, relaxation and social interaction.

Researchers O’Sullivan and Spangler (1998) input into reasons why people participate in event experiences involve the following:

- Participation and involvement in the consumption
- The state of being physically, mentally, socially, spiritually or emotionally engaged
- A change in knowledge, skill, memory or emotion
- The conscious perception of having intentionally encountered, gone to or lived through an activity or event
- An effort directed at addressing a psychological or internal need.
Getz (2007) contribution into the need of events is based on humans need to discover, learn and fulfil their aesthetic ambitions and attending events provides these benefits. He states the involvement in, or commitment to a particular pursuit, the more it will shape expectations and future participation.

Getz discusses both the terms motivation and motives. ‘Motivation’ is to think of a need or ‘disequilibrium’ which is accompanied by expectation that action will reduce it. If the expectation is met satisfaction will result. The experience of or failure to attain satisfaction influences future behavior. ‘Motives’ by contrast, are specific reasons for doing something and they have to follow from underlying needs and motivation. For example, people who are ‘highly involved’ in a sport or lifestyle pursuit has a strong ‘motivation’ to attend events when their specific needs can be satisfied. But their ‘motives’ for deciding to attend a specific event might include consideration of who else is attending, the entertainment opportunities and the attractiveness of the location (Getz, 2007).

Social

In an article written in the National Geographic News (Shyr, 2013), psychologist Justin Anderson was asked why he thought endurance events like Tough Mudder (a 15 km obstacle endurance course) had become so popular.

“There’s the community; we get to interact with folks like ourselves who are high achievers and that can be a really attractive thing”.

Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser (2001) state that humans are by nature social beings. In trying to determine what makes us feel satisfied, psychologists have found that a feeling of social connection or relatedness is near the top of the list of what we need to experience. People who exercise in groups may experience more positive mood states associated with participation compared to those who exercise alone (Gauvin & Rejeski, 1993).

Sport and sport events have considerable social impact. Social impacts are consequences to human populations of any public action that alters the ways in which people live, work, play relate to one another, organize to meet the needs and generally cope as members of society (Funk, 2008).

Social cohesion is the degree to which the members of a team like each other and enjoy personal satisfaction from being members of the team (Cox, 2007).
Mental

Another concept that’s closely related to Bakker et. al (2003) description of intrinsic motivation is psychological hedonism. Psychological hedonism refers to the tendency of people to do what they intrinsically find pleasurable and to avoid unpleasant or painful experiences. This pleasure-pain principle served as the basis for several theories of motivation (Anthony, 1996).

According to this principle, people would repeat behavior that they derive pleasure and reward from. Furthermore, behavior that is not rewarded, incurs punishment or pain is likely not be repeated.

Alongside their merciless assault on athlete’s bodies, endurance events also engender a profound psychological challenge. “Endurance athletes train their minds to develop psychological coping skills which will lead to improved performance and being forensically prepared for every eventuality should allow you to squash the anxiety which risks sabotaging your performance (King, 2013). King continues to state “that some would say that suffering is the very essence of endurance competition. That’s why we participate and to test our mental and physical limits and see what we are truly made of”.

In addition, to the article in the National Geographic News (Shyr, 2013), psychologist Justin Anderson indicates why people participate in endurance events; “Humans always want to continue to push the envelope. People tend to feel most content when they’re growing and hitting or exceeding goals. There’s also this identity factor of being someone who’s tough and a go-getter”.

Methodology

The methods section highlights the participants, procedures and materials used for data collection. The Kokoda Challenge event that was used for the study was located in Gold Coast, Queensland and took place in July 2013.

Table 1 indicates the percentage of participants based on age, location and how many times they have or have not participated in the challenge in previous years.


Participants

Males 56.6%
Females 43.4%

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th># of Times doing the event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 17- 24.1%</td>
<td>Gold Coast- 36.8%</td>
<td>1st time- 60.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20- 0.04%</td>
<td>Queensland- 54.9%</td>
<td>1 time- 0.065%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-29- 10.7%</td>
<td>NSW-0.04%</td>
<td>2 times- 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39- 23.1%</td>
<td>ACT- 1 person</td>
<td>3 times- 10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49- 26%</td>
<td>Victoria- 7 people</td>
<td>4 times- 0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59- 10.5%</td>
<td>South Australia- 1 person</td>
<td>5 or more times- 0.025%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+- 0.015%</td>
<td>New Zealand- 2 people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Information is the combination of all participants from the interview (20ppl), completed the survey (566ppl) and focus group (13ppl). The overall number of participants’ registered in the event was 1200 which eliminates 50.08% from contributing to the study.

Materials/Procedure

Prior to the study permission was obtained from the Kokoda Challenge Association to conduct interviews prior to and post event, and opportunity was given to volunteer during the event weekend.

Two weeks prior to the event a briefing night was held over two nights, organized by the event’s organization. During one of the evenings interviews were conducted and participants were chosen at random. The interview included the following questions:

1. What is the main reason for taking part in the Kokoda Challenge, based on social, mental, personal, physical and charity?
2. How many times have you done the challenge before, or is this the first?
3. How important is an event like this for the community?

Due to the limited time available for the interviews, it was difficult to get a complete description from participants to receive a true outcome on their answers to the questions.
The Event Coordinator was involved in preparing questions for the post event survey to ensure that appropriate information was obtained for both the purpose of the study and the needs of the Kokoda Challenge Association. The survey consisted of 26 questions in three areas of assessing:
   (a) Motivation
   (b) Changes
   (c) Event Logistics

Areas A and B were used for the purpose of the study.

Survey Monkey was the chosen survey company software used to construct the survey. The survey was made available online to participants a week following the event through event’s website and event’s Facebook page.

Three months post event a focus group with 13 students from one of the competing schools was conducted. A recorder was used to capture student’s experiences of the challenge. This was an open dialogue to gain insight to how important the Kokoda Challenge is for the community and the ways it changed students personally, mentally, physically and socially. The students were also given a short survey in regards to their training, reasons for participating and if they were going to do the challenge again; giving their reasons for repeating it or not repeating it.

Attempts were made to draw out lively discussion however there were only a few students who contributed significantly to the discussion.

**Results**

Analyst focuses on participant’s responses to survey questions which were based on participant’s reflections on their experience and changes that occurred by participating in the Kokoda Challenge. The research was conducted to address the following questions:

1. What were the main reasons for taking part in the Kokoda Challenge
2. The changes that participants went through after completing the event
3. How important is an event like this for the community

The aim of the results section is to visibly present the data that was collected from the interviews, survey and focus group.
The results are solely based on motivation to register and the changes participants perceived after the event. Additional information from the survey was used in the results to help get perspective on the success and importance of the event from a participants opinion.

The results are presented first with the question to reason for signing up for the event, putting social, mental, physical, and personal, and charity in the order 1-5. This is illustrated in Table 2 from survey responses and Table 3 from focus group responses. Secondly, looking at the changes participants experienced or felt after the event. This is illustrated in Table 4. Third, looking at the mental exhaustion of participants after completing the event, scoring out of 10. This is illustrated in Figure 1. Finally, brief outline to the number of people willing to do the challenge again and how many would encourage others to participate. The question was any lasting relationships built will be summarized and results to the question regarding why the Kokoda Challenge is an important event to have in the community.

Tables

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ranked 1</th>
<th>Ranked 2</th>
<th>Ranked 3</th>
<th>Ranked 4</th>
<th>Ranked 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>28.62%</td>
<td>24.04%</td>
<td>18.72%</td>
<td>11.56%</td>
<td>17.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
<td>24.82%</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
<td>15.94%</td>
<td>13.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>27.14%</td>
<td>25.32%</td>
<td>19.55%</td>
<td>16.76%</td>
<td>10.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>36.35%</td>
<td>28.03%</td>
<td>10.35%</td>
<td>28.03%</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>26.03%</td>
<td>27.53%</td>
<td>21.35%</td>
<td>15.98%</td>
<td>10.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Results for Table 2 not fully accurate due to mis-understanding of ranking system of putting the 5 choices in ranking of 1-5, instead some participants put a ranking of 4 out of 5 or 5 out 5. Comments were added to participant’s survey which indicates this and they verify what choices were important to them. The percentages were calculated by Survey Monkey.*

The main point coming from Table 2 is the relationship between the top 5 reasons for participating. The number of responses to this question was 552.
Table 3

Top 5 Reasons for Participating (focus group results)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ranked 1</th>
<th>Ranked 2</th>
<th>Ranked 3</th>
<th>Ranked 4</th>
<th>Ranked 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* This result is based on 13 responses from youth aged 14-17.

The results show a high response to physical being the main reason to participating in the event, with personal and social not far behind.

The results to reasons for participating in the event from the 20 interviewees (they were not asked to rank them in the top 5; just top reason):  

Physical- 60%
Charity- 20%
Personal – 15%
Social – 10%
Mental- 10%

This result has place physical has the top reason and surprisingly social and mental in the bottom two. Some participant comments to the question:

“*Just doing it to keep fit*”

“*I want to join the army*”

“*Doing something that most people wouldn’t or couldn’t do*”
Table 4

Did you see any changes in yourself after the event?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socially</th>
<th>Physically</th>
<th>Mentally</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Answered simply Yes</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>Overall Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.40%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Each change was tallied to the comments made from each respondent; socially with wording such as bonding with teammates, new relationships built during and after the event. Physically was based on wording such as built more strength and specifically indicated the word physical or indicated sore knees, blisters. Mentally was determined with words such as built confidence and the ability to do anything I put my mind to. Personal was described as happy to finish the impossible and the ability to set goals. Other was respondents indicating weight loss. Several respondents described more than one of the above changes.

The results show that after completing the event mental was the biggest change people saw in themselves. Physical was also indicated high on the list but due to the information of participants indicating that physical was sore knees and blisters doesn’t truly indicate a long term change from participating in the event. Further research could be conducted to see changes people have made in their everyday lives due to participating.

The following quotations are examples of the responses in regards to participants seeing changes after the event:

“*Becoming more positive and motivated*”
“*Felt fitter and mentally stronger*”
“*More confident and a more optimistic outlook on life*”
“*Pride in myself*”
“*My parents saw a huge maturity and confidence growth*”
“*My mental attitude towards school work and when I play sport has improved*”
“*Seeing that other people can support and help to get through challenges- not just everyone for themselves*”
“*Better self-esteem*” ‘*Felt I could achieve much more. Can set bigger goals now*’
Figure 1 indicates how participants rated their feelings of mental exhaustion at the end of the event, with 10 being extremely exhausted.

Figure 1 results assist in grasping how people rated their mental state after completing the event. The results suggest that the event was very tough mentally with over 50% of the participants rating 7 or higher.

Some comments in regards to Figure 1:

“Tired, drained emotionally, happy that I completed it”

“Mentally it was harder for me this year”

“I did have some self-doubt, but I fought through it”

“I was really overwhelmed, not much exhausted. Although, I was a little mentally challenged but it was worth it”

“Saddened that wasn’t able to finish was the biggest mental aspect”
Additional data that was collected from the survey:

A. Why did you choose this particular event? 546 responses
   Event Date 2.38%
   Event Concept 67.7%
   Event Location 14.47%
   Supporting Charity 36.45%
   Other 30.22%
   The results uncovered that out of the 212 comments made, 50% remarked it was the challenge of the Kokoda for the reasoning to choosing that specific endurance event and to get a better understanding to what the diggers went through.

B. Would you encourage others to do the challenge? 566 responses
   96% Yes
   0.01% No
   0.03% Maybe
   The results describe a strong experience from the participants, to the point that almost every participant would recommend the event to family and friends.
   “Takes a lot of mental and physical fitness and you can’t tell how people are going to get through that”
   “No, only mentally strong people can complete the challenge”
   “No, isn’t a challenge to be taken lightly, it requires serious thought and commitment”
   “Yes, good test of endurance and mental stability”
   “Yes, as it is a great way to learn more about yourself and to make strong relationships with the people you walk with”
   “Yes, for the personal challenge and achievement and support of a deserving charity”

C. Did you achieve what you set out to achieve by doing the event? 539 responses
   87.75% Yes
   12.24% No
The result indicates that the event was a great success for 87.75% of the participants. Those that responded No revealed that it was due to not completing the challenge because of injury or illness. 30% who responded No indicated it was due to not accomplishing the goal of crossing the finish line with all team members and 10% stated No due to not completing their goal of finishing the race within a certain time.

D. Would you do the challenge again? 546 responses
   64.3% Yes
   17.7% No
   17.9% Maybe

The result suggests that even after the physical and mental pain of the challenge 64.3% would go through it all over again.

“Yes, I liked the mental and physical challenge that came with the trek. I learnt about myself and the limits I could reach”

“Yes, I will because it was a beautiful adventure and challenge, you meet wonderful people and I just love it”

“No, it was mentally and physically one of the hardest things I have done”

“No, 3 is enough, it’s becoming too physically damaging to the body”

“Yes, it’s a great experience and a great way to bond with your team and your support crew”

“No, just did it to support friends”

“Maybe, it was a really positive experience but very challenging too”

E. Did you build any lasting relationships by doing the event? 523 responses
   Yes- 85%
   No- 15%

This result shows a strong social aspect to the event but also could be due to the event being a team event. Several teams were made up with members they didn’t know prior to the event. The number of these teams is not determined.

Some of the comments from the respondents that answered no:

“Knew team members well beforehand”
“I found it so challenging that most of the time I have my head down just physically trying to get through”
“No difference”
“All ready friends”
“They’re lucky my walking poles had blunt ends as they may have wound up getting stabbed”
“Only team member to finish”
“Hindered a previously existing relationship with the team”

F. How important is an event like Kokoda Challenge for the community? 33 responses

This question was asked only to the interviewees and focus group. The following were examples of what participants stated:
“The ability to meet new people”
“Parents see changes in their kids”
“Brings everyone together”
“What it gives to the youth”
“Sense of identity”
“It’s about the history”

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore and acquire a better understanding as to why people participate in endurance events; specifically looking at the Kokoda Challenge and the benefits participants receive from taking part.

The main focus on people’s motivation proved to be related to Personal (36.35%), Social (28.62%) and Mental (27.14%). This was true for the participants who took part in the survey but according to the results from the focus group of youth aged 14-17 years indicated Physical (46%), Personal (38%) and Social (15%) as their top reasons for participating. The two groups shared social and personal but physical and mental were different. This result suggests that for youth physical is more of an important aspect of motivation then mental. Further research would be suggested to explore the perception between youth and adults when it comes to motivation to participating in endurance events. As this is was an explorative study the results point out overall
reasons of motivation and the benefits received from participating in the Kokoda Challenge and not dividing participants into two categories for the purpose of this study.

Another important point to the results on motivation comes from the interview participants. The results showed people who were interviewed prior to the event put Physical (60%), Charity (20%) and Personal (15%) as the top reasons for participating. The analyses described here raises additional questions for future research because this group was asked prior to participating in the event and the other two groups were asked after the event. It is hard to determine if people who answered after the event were influenced by what they experienced during the event and answered based on those influences and not how they felt prior to the event.

Looking back at Bakker et al (1990) internal and external forces, the present study confirms such behavior of motivation is determined by the internal and external forces. Those who were motivated to participate for social reasons are examples of external or extrinsic motivation. It was the influence of family and friends and the opportunity to bond with teammates that motivated people to participate. The choice of mental motivation is an example of internal or intrinsic motivation. It’s the feeling of achievement that motivated those to participate.

The aim of the study was to explore how much social aspects play a role in a person’s motivation but also the benefits they receive from participating in the event. The results described that social was within the top three reasons for motivation to participate and this was true for both survey responses and the focus group. When participants were asked if they built any lasting relationships 85% stated yes. This result is expected considering the Kokoda Challenge is a team event. On the contrary, an interesting result showed that social change post event was experienced by a low percentage of participants, although a high percentage of participants indicated social reasons as a reason for participating. It is hard to determine the reason to this almost contrary result but it could be suggested that the challenge itself was so mentally and physically demanding on participants, that those issues would be higher on the list of the changes that they felt. The ability to complete the challenge is an accomplishment in itself and the ability to get through the physical and mental pain is a successful change. It is still believed that social aspects played a role in participants success of completing the challenge with several participants indicating the encouragement of teammates throughout the challenge and how they would not have made it through without their help or that of the community who
followed along the trek with words of encouragement and support crew with food and drinks. The event is certainly felt to have a real sense of community and mateship.

What motivates people to take part in these extreme events? In one notable study conducted in the United States the biggest factor influencing potential participation in an endurance event was not physical health but charity, with 34% of Americans naming raising money for a good cause as a top motivator, versus 27% who claimed weight loss as an inspiration. The results also showed that 32% was to increase health and 28% in it for the challenge (Eventbrite, 2013). This is interesting as this finding is not born out in this study of a mainly Australian population for whom the greatest motivator being personal reasons with 36.35% and 28.62% saying social was a main motivator. This raises many questions with regards to relating to where people are from and how to market and conduct events in different nations.

Charity is certainly the event organizers main motivator for people to take part in the Kokoda Challenge which is slightly at odds with these studies results of participant’s motivations.

In relation to the benefits received from participating, Table 3 expresses that overall 74% of participants saw changes in themselves after completing the event. Due to the mental and physical demand of the challenge it was not a surprise that 26.6% of participants experienced a mental change and 19.4% a physical change. It is important to note that participants commented that it was not just a change after the event, it was changes they made in their everyday lives:

“I know have the confidence now to do anything if I put my mind to it”

“Exams are not as stressful because mentally I’m much stronger after completing the challenge”

“Everything I do at the gym now is easy. I am looking for new challenges”

“Ability to withstand long hours of endurance, greater admiration for other competitors”

“Felt mentally stronger to tackle other issues in life and could look back on and draw from the stresses of the challenge knowing you can accomplish things that are mentally and physically demanding”

This result contributes to Bakker et al (1990) description of intrinsic motivation of feelings of success, feelings of achievement and mastery of skills.
“We often assume that if we enhance achievement, we have enhanced motivation. In other words we associate achievement with motivation. This is because we assume that success is what other people strive for and success is often defined in the terms of achievement or accomplishment” (Nicholls, 1989).

A suggested extension to the present study would be to explore participants who have done the Kokoda Challenge more than a couple times and see if the changes that they experience after the event plays into how their motivated to do the challenge again. As it was suggested by Anthony’s (1996) principle of psychological hedonism people would repeat behavior that they derive pleasure and reward from, but behavior that is not rewarded, incurs punishment or pain is likely not be repeated. This study has proven that this principle is not necessarily true because the results from the present study revealed that 64.3% of participants would do the challenge again and 96% would encourage others to participate despite this challenge pushing people to extreme pain. It seems that reward of a job well done is enough to override the mental and physical anguish. Participants are inclined to do it again and tell people they need to experience that pain.

The results illustrated in Figure 1 prove how much of a mental challenge the event is on participants. It is suggested that the participants who rated their mental exhaustion below 5 are participants who have done the challenge before and are aware of the challenges ahead and it could also suggest those participants prepared themselves mentally before the event. It was not determined on the survey how many of the participants prepared themselves mentally for the event.

As 60.9% of the participants were first timers to the challenge it is not surprising that more than 50% of participants ranked their mental exhaustion 7 or higher.

The present study contradicts the principal of psychological hedonism presented by Anthony (2006) in terms with the principal stating people find pleasurable experiences and avoid unpleasant or painful experiences. The results stated that 27.14% of participants were motivated to register for mental reasons and 26.6% saw changes mentally. This suggests that participants were not afraid of the unpleasant and painful uncertainties of the challenge. The participants
were motivated to challenge themselves mentally and take on a challenge that would test their mental abilities no matter the consequences.

Contrary to the difference of this study and the American study discussed earlier regarding motivation, the American survey also proved mental benefits to having a big impact on people who participated in endurance events. “While endurance events are considered good for the body, many Americans think running is a good for the mind as well with 56% of Americans believing going on a run would be more therapeutic than talking to a therapist” (Eventbrite, 2013).

It is worth noting that the focus group stated that mental was fourth on their list as a motivator. There was not one person who ranked mental first. Even though the focus group was a small portion of participants used in the study, it is important to state the different motivators between youth and adults. This would be suggested as an extended research on the difference between youth and adults when it comes to motivators. As the focus group was such a small portion of participants doesn’t prove to indicate much because 24.1% of the overall participants of the study were under the age of 17.

There were several limitations to the study. Due to the number of survey questions and several not related to the study (Kokoda Challenge Association related questions), left participants not answering all the questions necessary for the study. On the other hand some of the participants could have decided not to answer all the questions because they didn’t feel comfortable or the question was not applicable to them. The focus group discussion was limited with the small group not contributing to the discussion as much as expected.

A further limitation included the decision to execute three different data collections which resulted in the ability to not identify which participants from the interviews and focus group also completed the survey. This could alter the percentages in the data collection by a small margin.

Conducting a study relating to social research is important to collect as much data from as many people as possible to receive the greatest possible result. This study attracted fewer than 50% of the overall participants of the challenge. It is not determined the reasons why people did not take part in the survey. It would be very useful to see if the outcomes of the results from this study would differ if the 50.08% of participants who didn’t participated, participated because that is still a considerable amount of people who could have contributed.
The Kokoda Challenge has proven that it is an important event to help people achieve their goals either it be for social, mental or physical reasons. The challenge puts participants through severe pain ending in mental exhaustion but participants finish with high sense of accomplishment, self-confidence and self-esteem. Participants claim this would be an event they would encourage others to do and 64.3% saying they will do the challenge again.

The results that were collected proved true to the studies hypothesis; the impact of endurance events on participants, specifically the Kokoda Challenge, proves to be positive on their social, physical and mental abilities.

**Conclusion**

The Kokoda Challenge is going the distance and will continue to make changes in people’s lives no matter how difficult and grueling the challenge may be. It’s an event that brings people of all ages together to achieve what other people may think is the impossible. The motivation for participating is based on individual needs and goals and after the event is over the benefits outweigh the struggle, and pain participants go through during the challenge.

Throughout this paper suggestions were made on further studies in regards to the topic of social and mental benefits, as well as motivation. The following are additional recommendations of research involving the Kokoda Challenge:

1. Mental preparation: the difference on participants who prepared mentally through mental strategies such as self-talk and imagery, compared to those participants who didn’t prepare.
2. Social/Team Cohesion: what differences among teams who trained and built strong team cohesion versus who did not. Was their performance enhanced, did they finish the challenge together and how was their relationship after the event.
3. Sustainability of event. Extending from the percentage who would do it again and who encourages others to do it.
References


