

Philanthropic Motivation

Undergraduate participation motivations
at BuckeyeThon

Center for the Study of Student Life

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

According to Giving USA (2012), charitable giving in the U.S. totaled \$298.42 billion in 2011, and marked a 4% increase from 2010 donations. With the growth, researchers have dedicated attention to the reasons people support philanthropic causes, to better understand the giving process.

BuckeyeThon is a student organization at The Ohio State University, and its mission is to raise money and awareness for childhood cancer (BuckeyeThon, 2013). Every year, the organization hosts a dance marathon to aid its cause. In 2013, the 24-hour BuckeyeThon raised \$608,623.29.

The Center for the Study of Student Life (CSSL) completed an assessment of the 2013 BuckeyeThon held February 8 through 9, using both a Pre-Event Survey and a Post-Event Survey. A total of 3,726 people had registered for BuckeyeThon by January 25, from which a random sample of 1,200 participants was drawn. The Pre-Event Survey was distributed via email January 27-February 8, and the Post-Event Survey was distributed February 28-March 8. A total of 536 surveys were completed, but 206 cases were removed for non-consent, duplicate or improper completion of a survey, or for not being an undergraduate student. Seventy-eight participants completed both the Pre- and Post-Event surveys.

Several items in the survey were based upon the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996). The Volunteer Functions Inventory's (VFI) 30-questions form six different factors to represent participants' different motivations: Protective, Values, Career, Social, Understanding, and Enhancement. Analyses of the student responses thus indicate the primary motivating factors. The questions, included in full in Appendix A, were adapted to reflect respondents' participation in a philanthropy-based program.

This brief explores the patterns related to students' philanthropic involvement, focusing specifically on the motivations for participation. It uses the data from both the Pre-Event and Post-Event surveys.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Participants placed more importance on strengthening current relationships (*People I know share an interest in BuckeyeThon* **58.5%**) than gaining new friendships (**28.4%**) through participation in BuckeyeThon.
- Females gave more importance than males to ideas related to BuckeyeThon's role in aspects of the Enhancement factor, including its effect on feeling important (males **55.4%**; females **76.4%**)
- Individual differences – including employment, previous attendance, gender and Greek involvement – drove many motivational and leadership interests.

DEMOGRAPHICS

While there were 330 total responses used between the Pre-Event and Post-Event surveys, 78 people completed both surveys. Thus, there are many demographic similarities between the respondents of the Pre-Event and Post-Event surveys. The respondents were mostly females and of White/European American descent. About one quarter of respondents were members of social Greek organizations, just under two-thirds were financially dependent on their parents or guardians, and over half reported that they worked. About two-thirds were first-time BuckeyeThon participants. Other demographic information for each survey is depicted in the charts.

Responses	#	Response Rate
Part 1	200	16.7%
Part 2	130	10.8%
Parts 1 & 2	78	6.5%

Gender	T1 %	T2 %
Male	23.5	25.4
Female	76.0	74.6
Transgender	0.0	0.0
Self-defined	0.0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	0.5	0.0

Rank	T1 %	T2 %
First-year undergraduate	39.0	30.8
Second-year undergraduate	22.5	30.8
Third-year undergraduate	26.5	30.0
Fourth-year undergraduate	9.0	5.4
Fifth-year undergraduate	3.0	3.1

Item	T1 %	T2 %
Social Greek organization	25.0	26.9
International student	1.5	0.8
Varsity-level athlete	0.5	1.5
Financially dependent	65.0	65.4
Employed	61.3	58.5
First-time participant	68.5	65.6

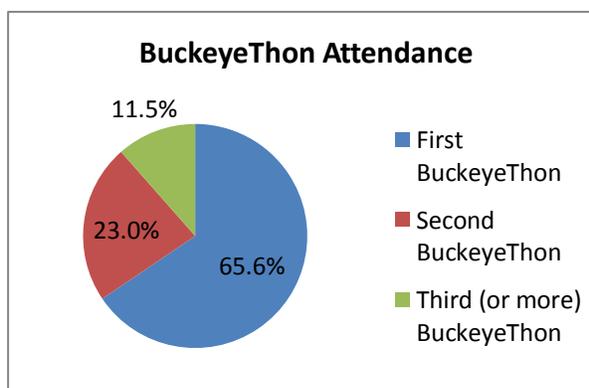
Race/Ethnicity	T1 %	T2 %
African American/Black or African descent	2.0	2.3
Asian American/Asian (East, South, Southeast)	4.0	7.7
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0
Latino(a)/Hispanic American	0.5	0.0
Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.0	0.0
Middle Eastern/Arab American	0.5	0.8
White/European American	85.0	81.5
Other	0.0	0.0
Prefer not to answer	1.5	0.0
Multiple Races/Ethnicities	6.5	7.7

PARTICIPATION

Data from the Post-Event Survey depicted students' previous attendance and leadership with both BuckeyeThon and other organizations.

BuckeyeThon Involvement

A majority (65.4%) of the 2013 respondents reported attending BuckeyeThon and staying for the duration of the event. Of the respondents in the Post-Event Survey, most were first-time participants (65.6%).



Approximately 22% of post-event respondents took on a leadership role in BuckeyeThon, as either a member of the steering committee or as a team captain.

Employment

There were some statistically significant differences in the reported leadership of working students and non-working students. A greater percentage of employed students (32.9%) than non-employed students (7.7%) reported holding a leadership role in BuckeyeThon ($p < .01$).

Previous Attendance

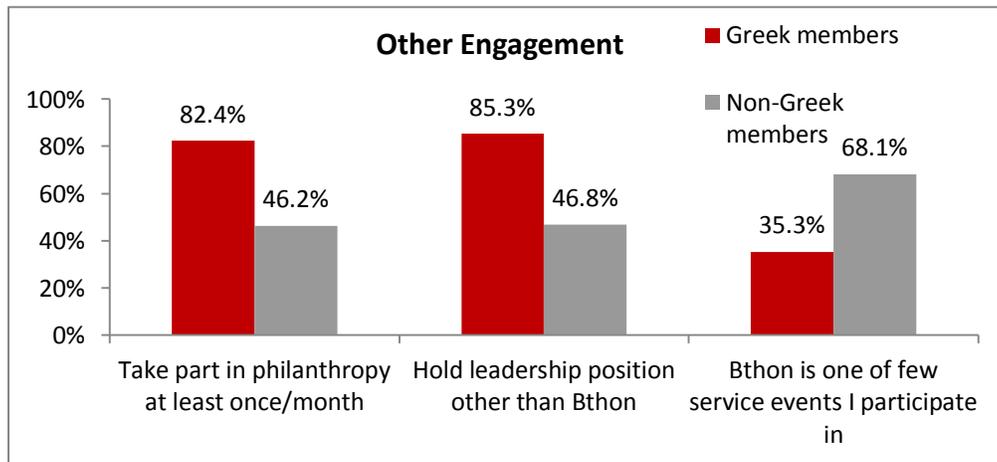
BuckeyeThon involvement was also statistically significantly different among new and repeat participants. Specifically, a smaller portion of new participants (16.3%) decided to get involved in BuckeyeThon as a member of the organization as compared to 40.5% of repeat participants ($p < .01$).

Philanthropic/Service Interest

A majority of students reported consistent involvement in service or philanthropic events. Nearly 54% indicated involvement in service events at least every two weeks and 55.9% reported taking part in a philanthropy event at least once a month.

Social Greek Organizations

Statistically significant differences emerged between Greek and non-Greek participants. Members of social Greek organizations were more likely to take part in philanthropy at least once per month ($p < .001$) and to hold leadership positions in organizations other than BuckeyeThon ($p < .001$). In contrast, non-Greek participants were more likely to report BuckeyeThon as one of the few service events in which they participate ($p < .01$).



Employment

Statistically significant differences between working and non-working students also emerged. Half (50.0%) of employed students reported that BuckeyeThon was one of the few service/philanthropy events in which they participate while 73.1% of non-working students reported the same ($p < .01$). In addition, employed students (64.5%) were more likely than non-employed students (46.2%) to report holding a leadership position in a student organization other than BuckeyeThon ($p < .05$).

MOTIVATION

Participants in the Pre-Event Survey answered questions regarding their motivation to participate in BuckeyeThon. Thirty items – measured on a seven-point scale ranging from *Not at all important* to *Extremely important* – corresponded with six factors: Values, Career, Enhancement, Protective, Social, and Understanding. Cronbach’s Alpha indicated that each factor was high in reliability ($\alpha > 0.8$).

Factor	Cronbach’s Alpha	Mean
Values	0.898	6.20
Social	0.839	5.20
Understanding	0.825	4.95
Enhancement	0.853	4.28
Protective	0.881	3.40
Career	0.889	3.10

As shown in the chart, the Values, Social, and Understanding factors garnered the highest means from pre-event respondents.

Relationships

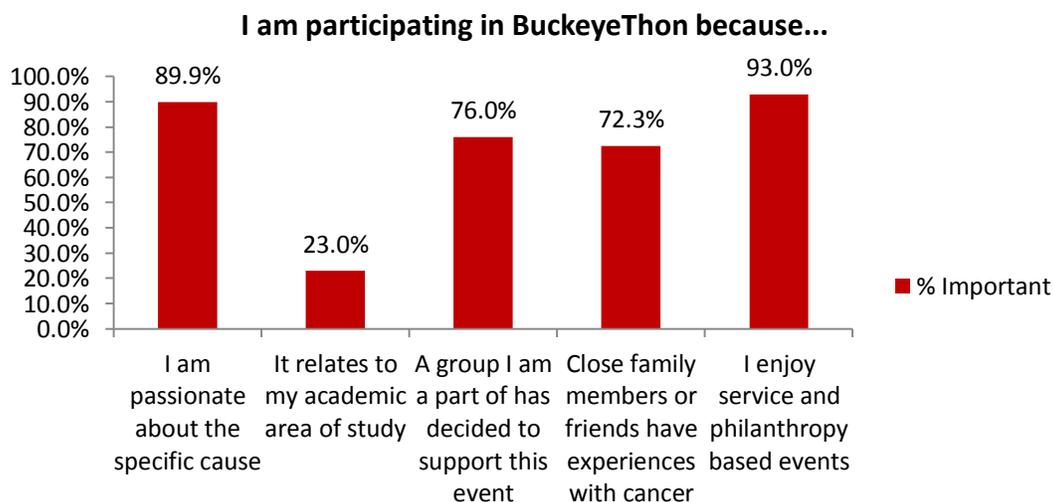
Though students reported relationship-strengthening as a whole to be an important motivator for registering for BuckeyeThon, they seemed to give greater importance to building existing relationships. As shown in the table, students assigned less importance to creating new friendships at the event.

Item	Extremely Important/ Very Important (%)
People I know share an interest in BuckeyeThon	58.5
My friends are participating in BuckeyeThon	58.0
Others with whom I am close place a high value on participating in BuckeyeThon	49.0
People I’m close to want me to participate in BuckeyeThon	43.0
Participating in BuckeyeThon is a way to make new friends	28.4

In addition, students did not report BuckeyeThon’s ability ease loneliness as a strong motivator. Just 20.5% of respondents gave some level of importance to the concept.

Philanthropic Interest

Participants also rated items related to both general philanthropy and the specific cause with high levels of importance. As shown in the graph, the vast majority of students cited enjoyment of service/philanthropy events and the BuckeyeThon cause as important on some level.



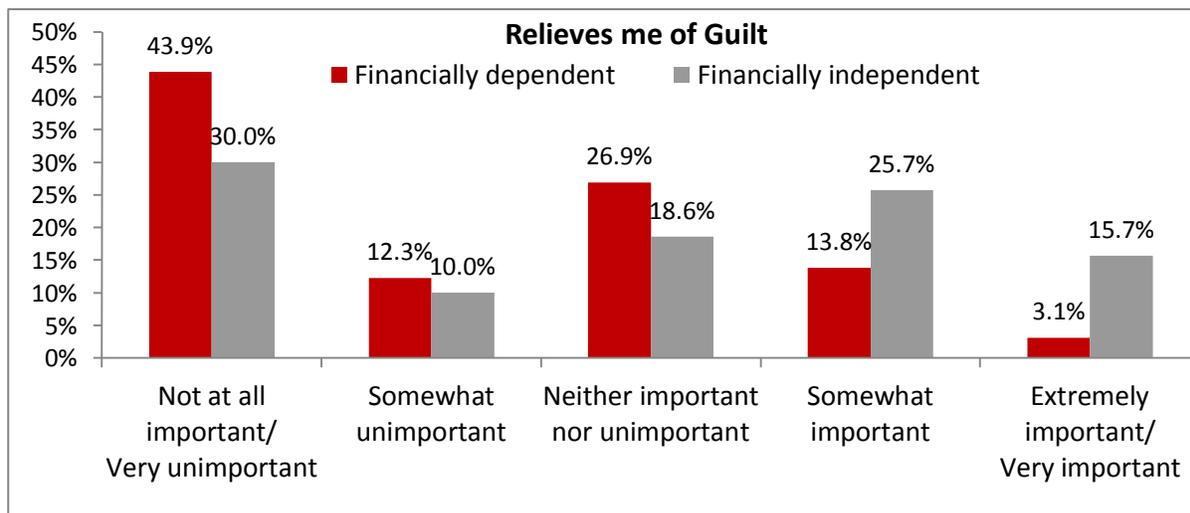
Gender Differences

Statistically significant differences emerged in the motivations of male and female participants. Females assigned greater importance to the ideas that BuckeyeThon: *Makes me feel important* ($p < .001$), *Increases my self-esteem* ($p < .05$), and *Makes me feel better about myself* ($p < .05$). In addition, female students also placed greater importance on the idea that *BuckeyeThon is an important activity to the people I know best* ($p < .01$).

Item	At least somewhat unimportant		Neither Important Nor Unimportant		At least somewhat important	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
BuckeyeThon makes me feel important	34.1%	6.6%	10.6%	17.1%	55.4%	76.4%
BuckeyeThon increases my self-esteem	47.9%	22.4%	15.2%	27.6%	36.9%	50.0%
BuckeyeThon makes me feel better about myself	40.4%	27.9%	14.9%	22.5%	44.7%	49.7%
BuckeyeThon is an important activity to the people I know best	31.9%	11.3%	21.3%	20.5%	46.8%	68.2%

Financial Dependency

Financially dependent and financially independent students reported statistically significant differences for two motivational factors. Financially independent students awarded more importance in using BuckeyeThon to relieve guilt of being more fortunate ($p < .01$). In addition, 48.4% of financially dependent student said using BuckeyeThon to escape from their own troubles was unimportant at some level, while only 35.7% of financially independent students reported the same ($p < .05$).



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of the study provide insight into undergraduate students' participation in and attitudes toward BuckeyeThon. Respondents indicated that they attended BuckeyeThon as a result of their personal values and existing relationships. Further, those students who indicated they were repeat participants were more likely to report that they sought out leadership opportunities within BuckeyeThon. Statistical differences were evident between Greek and non-Greek students, male and female identified students, as well as financially independent and dependent students. Though the trends may not be generalizable to other events or causes, this brief provides an initial look at undergraduates' motivations and leadership in relation to fundraising events.

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APPENDIX A

Adapted VFI Items

1. Participating in BuckeyeThon can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.
2. My friends are participating in BuckeyeThon.
3. I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.
4. People I'm close to want me to participate in BuckeyeThon.
5. Participating in BuckeyeThon makes me feel important.
6. People I know share an interest in BuckeyeThon.
7. No matter how bad I've been feeling, my involvement in BuckeyeThon helps me to forget about it.
8. I am genuinely concerned about children with cancer.
9. By participating in BuckeyeThon I feel less lonely.
10. Through my involvement with BuckeyeThon, I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.
11. Participating in BuckeyeThon relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.
12. Through participating in BuckeyeThon, I can learn more about children with cancer.
13. Participating in BuckeyeThon increases my self-esteem.
14. Participating in BuckeyeThon allows me to gain a new perspective on things.
15. Participating in BuckeyeThon allows me to explore different career options.
16. I feel compassion toward people in need.
17. Others with whom I am close place a high value on participating in BuckeyeThon.
18. Participating in BuckeyeThon lets me learn things through direct, hands on experience.
19. I feel it is important to help others.
20. My involvement in BuckeyeThon helps me work through my own personal problems.
21. Participating in BuckeyeThon will help me to succeed in my chosen profession.
22. By becoming involved with BuckeyeThon I can do something for a cause that is important to me.
23. Participating in BuckeyeThon is an important activity to the people I know best.
24. Participating in BuckeyeThon is a good escape from my own troubles.
25. Through my involvement in BuckeyeThon I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.
26. Participating in BuckeyeThon makes me feel needed.
27. Participating in BuckeyeThon makes me feel better about myself.
28. Participating in BuckeyeThon will look good on my resume.
29. Participating in BuckeyeThon is a way to make new friends.
30. Through my involvement with BuckeyeThon I can explore my own strengths.