

Community Engagement

London Marathon

Supporting breast cancer

Penka Murdzheva

Student ID 2122606

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Lecturer Anita Nan

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Introduction

London marathon is one of the largest events engaging different stakeholders from local community in order to support breast cancer initiatives. It has been organised at a massive scale and runs for years. The marathon is considered as one of the best examples of a project which unites so many different parties of interest with the aim of achieving a common good; hence, its exploration could be of value in understanding the principles of community engagement in practice.

The current report discusses and evaluates current activities related to London Marathon and the tools used for engaging different stakeholders. It also identifies and assesses the areas for improvement and the methods which can be applied, so that strong relationships with different stakeholders are established and they are engaged. Relevant avenues, which can be used for promoting community participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion to enable socio-cultural integration and multi-culturalism, are also assessed. London marathon is an exemplar community project and the current report would be quite valuable for evaluating its significance as an event which brings different parties together to improve social welfare.

Main body

Evaluation of current activities

London marathon is one of the largest in the world and unites many different parties in fighting breast cancer and raising awareness regarding prevention and treatment. The marathon also collects donations for beating cancer, research, treatment, initiatives to increase awareness and many more. In 2021, the marathon itself collected £2.11 million only on the day of the run itself (May, 2021). During the week before the race, £8.2 million more were donated (May, 2021). In total, for the whole 2021 event, more than £19.9 million was collected and donated for the cause. The donations and money raised are allocated among different projects related to cancer treatment and prevention. Over the last 12 years, the

marathon has collected more than £237.3 million (May, 2021). The donations are mainly raised by entry fees of volunteering runners, as well as sponsorship fees. For 2022 the entry fee is £100 and the minimum sponsorship fee is £2,500 (Prevent Breast Cancer, 2022). Planned number of participants in the marathon is 50,000 (Prevent Breast Cancer, 2022). The event is held at October 2, 2022.

This year, the marathon organisers also deliver the opportunity for entering a virtual marathon on the date (TCS, 2022a). Entry fees are £28 for UK residents and £35 for non-UK residents and the running will be real-time reported through a mobile app developed for this purpose (TCS, 2022b). This allows community members, who are not in close physical distance to the event location, to still participate and contribute to its scale and positive impact.

As a direct consequence of the pandemic, the use of digital tools to engage communities and different stakeholder groups is crucial and tends to lead to better results and greater achievements of community projects. London marathon is not an exception. The use of such tools accesses a large number of viewers by providing them with higher convenience and allowing more people to join the event despite physical geographic boundaries. All this leads to a massive increase in the scope of the marathon event, its popularity, awareness and donations collected as more entry fees are raised. The use of such digital channels and tools allows more people to get involved by boosting participation and encouraging a higher level of collaboration, especially when it is implemented through a common shared mobile app. This allows various stakeholder groups to work and put efforts to the common goal and improves social welfare. As discussed by Homeland Security (2020) in a recent report, this also encourages more community and volunteer efforts, saving resources and time by leveraging existing networks and encouraging information sharing by users. Moreover, the addition of the virtual run increases the credibility of the event and its organisers by providing opportunities for more collaborations and cooperations beyond the borders of London and the UK. All this is considered to be very effective in encouraging different parties to participate in any form.

London Marathon also has different profiles on social media networks, including Facebook and Twitter. As also outlined in assignment 1, social media in general has the power to deliver numerous benefits supporting the management of large community-based events. As assessed by Community Councils (2022), the proper use of social media can lead to a higher

engagement rate with larger audiences and thus, enjoy greater support and the inclusion of more stakeholder groups in the project. It also allows different members to interact with each other and exchange ideas, recommendations and different areas in which they can collaborate with the aim of supporting the initiative even more (Community Councils, 2022).

Many people already use social media to discuss various social issues and challenges and this can be used for connecting and relating stakeholders and users to the diverse perspectives of an issue. The use of social media for community engagement also allows councils and/or event organisers to access large amounts of information which can further support organised initiatives (Community Councils, 2022). London Marathon mainly uses social media for providing information to interested parties, such as participants, volunteers, sponsors, cancer foundations and many more.

The marathon also have volunteering pacers, who are keen or experienced runners completing the 26.2 mile course in a pre-planned time, so that runners around them have an idea on how they are doing (TCS, 2022c). Their role also encourages and motivates runners by helping them in case of need; thereby, ensuring that they are safe and well (TCS, 2022c). An important note is that the team of pacers is quite diverse – a key aspect for achieving diversity and inclusion. In 2022, 43% of participants are female and more than 25% have a background related to under-represented communities, such as LGBT (TCS, 2022c). Pacers are also of different age and come from various backgrounds. This is essential to ensure that diversity is celebrated and, in this way, it will be easier to reach out various stakeholders and encourage collaboration and inclusion.

Reflecting on areas for improvement

As already discussed, London marathon for breast cancer is one of the most popular events in the world. However, there are still some areas for improvement, which can be considered, so that the impact of this event is maximised. As it has been explained in details in assignment 1, social media can be used as tools for greater engagement. The organisers of the marathon have made profiles on Facebook and Twitter but they are mainly using the platforms for providing information and increasing awareness. This can be further improved. For example, Twitter has options and functionalities for event reminders, updates, road closure announcements and many others (Asset Works, 2022). Both Facebook and Twitter can also be used for live broadcasting of the marathon on the day of the event. This would further

raise awareness and can be used at a later point for statistics regarding audience reached and live viewers. This information would be valuable to engage more sponsors for future marathons.

The social media platforms can also be linked to the mobile app used for virtual participants and updates can be published on Facebook and Twitter accordingly. This would help the building of relationships between participants and would lead to greater collaboration and inclusion. Social media platforms can also be used to integrate e-store for paying entry fees, which would further increase convenience of those community members who want to participate. It would also increase awareness of the event by potentially reaching greater audiences. Different discussion forums can be organised on social media platforms, so that various stakeholders can express their views, opinions, concerns and feedback. In order to increase participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion of different parties of interest, social media can be used to organise meetings with various experts, researchers, doctors, survivors and many other groups' representatives.

Apart from using social and digital media, on the event itself, different public meetings can be organised by placing various stands. For example, every organisation, which would receive a part of the donations, can have its own kiosk, so that participants, audience and other members of local community can understand more about its activity, projects, aims, plans on using funds received and many more. This would not only increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the event, but would also help community members better understand cancer-related issues and challenges, as well as the ways they can help. This is considered to be a very effective way to encourage more parties to get involved in various initiatives for fighting cancer; thereby, increasing collaboration between various stakeholder groups.

Avenues for increased participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion

Participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion are essential for achieving high levels of community engagement. Apart from the efforts placed by London marathon's organisers to contribute to these pillars, some of the main tools, which are commonly used, also include volunteering, organising support groups and meetings with the common aim to help the community and increase social welfare.

Volunteering, as discussed by Stukas et al. (2014), is a form of prosocial behaviour which is based on a freely selected decision to commit a sustained amount of time and effort to help

another person, group, cause or initiative which is believed to increase the social wellbeing in the community. In the specific case of London marathon, there are many volunteers in the event and pacers are only one of the examples. Volunteering is claimed to be a main foundation of community engagement, as it tends to lead to greater participation and collaboration based on the shared willingness to work together to achieve a common goal (Stukas et al., 2014). In the case of London marathon, volunteers are selected in a way to represent and celebrate diversity and this is further contributing to a greater level of inclusion and easier reaching out of intended audiences and different stakeholders.

As the event is focused on fighting cancer and increasing awareness of the issue, the organisation of different support groups for victims of cancer, survivors, families and friends and other vulnerable members of society is also considered as a very good tool for increasing participation, collaboration and the overall impact of the project. As discussed by Zhu and Stephens (2019), social support groups encourage more effective communication mechanisms and tend to increase participation and collaboration between different parties in regard to a certain social problem, such as breast cancer. Such groups can also be organised online after the event of the marathon and be promoted by organisers and partners, so that awareness is increased and those in need can join accordingly. Support groups are recommended to include diverse range of members, including therapists, doctors, psychologists, survivors, counsellors and many more, so that different needs of those seeking help can be addressed and the impact can be maximised.

Conclusion

In the light of research findings, community engagement is considered as one of the main drivers of social welfare. Events like London marathon, which engage so many different individuals, organisations and partners, are a proof of this claim. The event is significantly large in scale and enjoys sufficient popularity, participants, sponsors and various partners. Collected donations are used for different breast cancer-related initiatives and projects related to research, treatment, prevention and support. Based on the conducted analysis, it can be stated that the event is a good example of community engagement; however, there are still areas, which can be further improved, so that greater participation, collaboration, diversity and inclusion are reached. In addition to the application of various social media tools, the use of more volunteers and support groups are also avenues for achieving better collaboration and inclusion. If implemented properly, these methods and techniques can have a considerable

positive impact on the scale and achievements of future marathons, as well as their contribution to tackling with breast cancer problems faced by community.

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