

Running away from the pandemic. Virtually.



(Ellis, 2020)

The Covid-19 pandemic brought physical sporting events to an abrupt stop. Alternatives like Virtual Running Events (VREs) were introduced as a new way of participating in a sporting event. These events could be completed on the runner's own time (unless the event specified otherwise) and at the location of their choice. VREs allowed runners and walkers to continue their exercise and competition regimes during a time of uncertainty and loneliness. But now that the pandemic has diminished, the question stands: Are VREs still relevant and what factors make them satisfactory enough for runners to participate again?

A research study was conducted by Marlie Viljoen, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to identify the factors that result in runners being satisfied from their participation in a VRE. The study then went on to determine whether this participation satisfaction could possibly lead to runners engaging in repeated participation in VREs with the hopes of increasing their life satisfaction. The study was conducted within a South African and Namibian context as participants needed to complete the Spar Ladies Virtual Event Challenge 2022.

Secondary data from a similar previous study was used (after consent was given) with 842 respondents. Findings revealed that immediate happiness factors like "fun" and "achievement" contributed the most towards participants' satisfaction from participating in the VRE. This means that organisers should include prizes and fun

factors when creating VREs. Factors like price paid for the entry fee and the sense of growing as a person had less influence on participants' satisfaction. The study also revealed that enhanced satisfaction with life can be experienced due to the positive experiences and the psychological involvement in physical activity related to repeatedly participating in VREs.

Now, the Covid-19 pandemic has become less of an influence, the need for VREs reduced. Physical events were again allowed due to the removal of social distancing restrictions. The findings of this study are crucial for sport event organisers and marketers to get insight towards the relevant factors that people look for in successful VREs. The study revealed that VREs can open a whole new market segment and should be utilized because of the uniqueness of the type of event. This study also made theoretical contributions towards the literature and means-end theory in the context of VREs.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management 2023 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Marlie Viljoen under the supervision of [Dr Bianca Frost](#) and [Prof Yolanda Jordaan](#).