



Review

Analysis and Research on the Going Viral Phenomenon of City Marathons

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Abstract: Urban marathon events have become increasingly popular in recent years, gradually presenting a new sports cultural landscape. During urban marathon races, the psychological needs of participants and their physical and mental experiences are aspects that are worthy of our attention. Based on this, we further analyze the physical culture behind urban marathons and the significance of urban marathons for our school sports activities. The research found that the psychological needs of urban marathon participants are diverse, mainly including health, completing challenges, and a sense of achievement, "interactive experience", social needs, stress relief, and emotional expression, etc. The physical experiences of participants mainly include fatigue, excitement, and a sense of teamwork. In contrast, the physical culture contained in urban marathons mainly includes health culture, physical expression culture, social culture, inclusive culture, and urban spirit culture, etc. The popularity of urban marathon events also provides certain inspiration for conducting school sports activities. By using the example of urban marathons, when arranging school sports activities, attention should be paid to the development of physical and mental health, emotional expression, social skills, and teamwork skills. In conclusion, this study, based on the analysis of the "outreach" of urban marathons, explores the inspiration of urban marathons for the development of school sports activities in China, with the aim of better conducting school sports work in our country.

Keywords: city marathon; psychological needs; school sports

1. Exploration of the Psychological Needs and Physical Experiences of Marathon Participants

Marathon running is a long-duration endurance sport that places high demands on both physical fitness and psychological resilience. Throughout the event, participants experience a wide range of physical sensations and emotional responses shaped by the sustained exertion and competitive atmosphere. At the same time, marathon participation fulfills multiple psychological needs, offering individuals opportunities for personal growth, social engagement, and emotional regulation.

1.1. Psychological Needs of Marathon Participants

One of the primary motivations for marathon participation is the pursuit of better health. Many runners view long-distance running as an effective means of improving physical fitness and maintaining overall well-being. In this sense, participating in a marathon is not merely an exercise activity but also an expression of one's commitment to a healthy lifestyle.

A second important psychological need is the desire for achievement and personal fulfillment. As a long-distance endurance event, the marathon challenges participants to overcome incremental distance barriers and sustain their effort throughout the entire course. Successfully completing these challenges generates a strong sense of accomplishment, reinforcing participants' confidence and perseverance [1].

Third, marathon events function as social platforms that foster interpersonal communication and community belonging. Large-scale city marathons bring together not only runners but also spectators, judges, volunteers, and organizers. For this reason, such events are often regarded as "city carnivals," where participants can present themselves, engage with others, and build supportive social networks. This social dimension helps meet participants' need for connection and belonging [2].

Fourth, marathon running offers opportunities for emotional release and stress relief. In modern society, individuals often face considerable pressure in daily life. The extended duration of marathon running allows participants to express and process various emotions, including excitement, determination, and the release of accumulated stress. This emotional catharsis can contribute to improved mental well-being and renewed energy for subsequent work and life activities [3].

Finally, the "interactive experience" plays an important psychological role. This phenomenon, referred to as the "audience effect" or "social facilitation effect" in social psychology, highlights how the presence of others enhances performance. Although fitness apps such as Keep have introduced online marathon activities, participants generally prefer offline city marathons due to the heightened competitive atmosphere and the opportunity for spontaneous interaction with fellow runners and spectators, which generates more positive emotional experiences [4].

1.2. Physical Experiences of Marathon Participants

During marathon participation, runners undergo rich and varied physical experiences that merge with emotional responses to form distinctive mind-body interactions. As a high-intensity and long-duration sport, the most immediate physical sensations are fatigue and pain. Overcoming these sensations requires strong endurance and psychological determination [5].

Alongside fatigue, participants may also experience physical and mental pleasure. Prolonged exercise stimulates the release of hormones such as endorphins, which produce feelings of happiness, excitement, and emotional uplift. These physiological responses not only deepen the uniqueness of the marathon experience but also encourage continued engagement in physical activity.

Additionally, the sense of teamwork and collective identity constitutes an important physical and emotional experience. Throughout the marathon, participants may feel the exhilaration of competition as well as the satisfaction of cooperating or pacing with others. These shared experiences enhance runners' enthusiasm and contribute to a stronger sense of collective participation.

In conclusion, city marathons, as comprehensive sporting events, satisfy the diverse psychological needs and physical experiences of participants. Elements such as personal challenge, achievement, social interaction, and health maintenance intertwine to shape a positive mindset and deliver well-rounded physical and emotional fulfillment. This combination of factors helps explain why the city marathon has evolved into a widely embraced sports and cultural phenomenon in contemporary society.

2. Analysis of the Physical Culture Embodied in City Marathons

The contemporary physical culture presented through city marathons is characterized by complexity and diversity. It reflects not only individuals' pursuit of health and personal development but also society's growing emphasis on widespread participation in sports and the embodied expression of physical vitality. The physical

culture manifested in city marathons contains multiple layers of meaning and represents a multifaceted social phenomenon.

2.1. Health Awareness and Physical Management

City marathons, as increasingly popular public events, illustrate participants' heightened attention to their health and physical condition. As noted earlier, many runners join marathon activities to enhance their physical well-being. This reflects broader contemporary concerns with lifestyle management, including exercise, diet, rest, and overall health maintenance. By choosing to participate in marathon events, individuals practice positive and proactive approaches to life, making the marathon an important means of physical management, a tool for sustaining health, and a pathway toward improving quality of life.

2.2. Physical and Mental Expression

During marathon participation, runners experience emotional release and stress reduction, which are manifested through both physical and mental expressions within the event environment. On one hand, marathon participation allows individuals to challenge themselves, demonstrate physical strength, and continually explore their physical potential. These actions embody a spirited and resilient form of physical expression. On the other hand, the marathon provides a valuable outlet for relieving accumulated stress and emotional tension. Through sustained effort during the race, participants can release emotions and restore psychological balance. This dual function highlights the significant role marathons play in enabling physical-mental expression.

2.3. Sociality and Group Needs

Human individuals have always relied on collective cooperation and social interaction for development. Within physical culture, the need for sociality and teamwork is particularly prominent. As large-scale public events, city marathons offer a shared space in which urban residents can participate together. Individuals with similar interests in distance running build close social networks during the event and form a community united by common goals and aspirations. The widespread popularity of marathon participation reflects the importance placed on social connectedness and collective culture in modern society.

2.4. Diversity and Cultural Inclusiveness

The diversity and cultural inclusiveness of city marathons are reflected in the broad range of participants. Individuals of different ages, genders, occupations, and cultural backgrounds join the event, creating a vibrant and open atmosphere. The inclusiveness embedded in contemporary Chinese cultural traditions—often described as gradual and harmonious—supports the formation of a diverse and welcoming marathon community. This inclusiveness encourages participation across groups and enhances the cultural depth of city marathon events.

2.5. Physical Health and Urban Spirit

Physical health represents a micro-level expression of urban spirit, while urban spirit itself emerges from the collective vitality of individuals who value health and active living. As awareness of physical health continues to increase, it becomes an integral part of the identity and dynamism of modern cities. The integration of city marathons into urban life demonstrates not only the degree to which people value health but also their expectations for the quality and vibrancy of contemporary urban living.

In conclusion, the physical culture embodied in city marathons reflects individuals' pursuit of health, self-actualization, and bodily experience. Through elements such as sociality, diversity, and urban vitality, city marathons demonstrate modern society's

concern for widespread participation in sports, physical expression, and community building. Beyond serving as competitive events, city marathons have become important cultural practices that enable urban residents to seek balance, connection, and shared meaning through physical experience and social engagement.

3. Inspiration and Discussion on School Sports Development from City Marathon Activities

The widespread popularity of city marathons provides valuable inspiration for the development of school sports. Many aspects of marathon organization and participation can serve as useful references for improving school sports programs and advancing the educational objectives of physical education.

3.1. Focus on Students' Physical and Mental Health Education

The success of city marathons is closely related to public attention to physical and mental well-being. Marathon participation promotes physical fitness while also offering opportunities for emotional release and psychological adjustment. Accordingly, in designing school sports activities, attention should be paid not only to enhancing students' physical exercise but also to integrating basic theories of sport and health to teach appropriate methods of emotional expression and stress management. Such integration helps students achieve a balanced development of physical and mental health through sports, thereby contributing to the overall goals of school physical education.

3.2. Promote Individual Development and Teamwork Ability

As a large-scale sports event, the smooth operation of a city marathon relies on coordinated efforts among multiple groups, including athletes, judges, volunteers, and spectators. This highlights the importance of both individual performance and team cooperation. When planning school sports activities, educators should also emphasize the cultivation of teamwork. By incorporating team-based projects alongside individual sports, students can strengthen their personal athletic abilities while also developing collaboration, communication, and collective problem-solving skills.

3.3. Cultivate Students' Inclusiveness and Diverse Ways of Thinking

As previously noted, city marathons are open, large-scale events that attract participants of diverse ages, genders, occupations, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity underscores the inclusive nature of marathon culture. In school sports activities, this inclusiveness can be reflected by encouraging students to appreciate differences, respect others, and cultivate diverse perspectives. Schools may design a range of sports programs that accommodate varied interests and abilities, while also organizing team-based activities to nurture collaboration and inclusiveness across student groups.

3.4. Strengthen Students' Social Skills

City marathons function as extensive social platforms that enable participants to meet new people and develop shared interests. Drawing on this feature, school sports activities should also consider how to enhance students' social abilities. On one hand, schools can introduce varied sports festivals, themed activity weeks, and exchange events to provide students with more opportunities for interaction. On the other hand, strengthening moral and behavioral education can guide students to develop healthy social habits, ultimately supporting the improvement of their social skills through sports participation.

3.5. Foster Students' Competitive Spirit and Rule Awareness

The guiding principle for many city marathon participants is to "enjoy participation, experience the process, and challenge oneself," rather than solely pursuing rankings.

While some participants aim to improve their performance, such goals are based primarily on self-challenge and personal growth. In school sports, educators should emphasize similar values by reinforcing rule awareness, promoting respect for fair competition, and encouraging students to adopt a healthy competitive spirit. This helps students understand both the meaning of competition and the importance of adhering to rules.

In summary, the inspiration drawn from city marathons for school sports lies in strengthening students' physical and mental health, social abilities, inclusiveness, competitive spirit, and awareness of rules. By absorbing the successful practices derived from city marathon events, school sports programs can better meet students' developmental needs and promote their comprehensive physical and mental growth.

4. Discussion

The development of city marathons, as discussed in earlier sections, reveals not only a flourishing sports activity but also a complex cultural phenomenon that mirrors contemporary social values and collective aspirations. This provides an important lens through which the relationship between public sports events and school sports development can be reconsidered. The marathon demonstrates how physical activities can transcend the boundaries of sports themselves, extending into domains such as emotional expression, social participation, cultural interaction, and the shaping of communal identity. These characteristics offer meaningful insights into how school sports may better respond to the developmental needs of students in the modern era.

First, the city marathon highlights the significance of integrating health education with emotional well-being. The psychological needs demonstrated by marathon participants-such as stress relief, emotional expression, and the pursuit of balanced physical and mental states-indicate that contemporary sports are no longer limited to physical conditioning. For school sports, this suggests that physical education should expand its scope toward holistic development, guiding students to understand the relationship between exercise, emotional regulation, and personal growth. This holistic orientation can help school sports adapt more effectively to the developmental characteristics of youth.

Second, the strong social attributes of city marathons underscore the importance of community building in physical activities. The formation of supportive networks among participants, spectators, volunteers, and organizers illustrates how sports can serve as a platform for social interaction and collective experience. For school sports, this implies that activities should not only focus on individual performance but also create environments that encourage cooperation, communication, and mutual support. Such environments can enhance students' sense of belonging and foster the development of healthy interpersonal relationships.

Third, the diversity and inclusiveness evident in marathon participation reflect the evolving landscape of physical culture. Individuals of varying ages, backgrounds, and abilities are able to participate and find their place within the event. This inclusiveness suggests that school sports should pay greater attention to accommodating diverse student needs and interests. By offering varied sports programs and creating opportunities for participation beyond competition-focused activities, schools can nurture students' open-mindedness, inclusive attitudes, and ability to appreciate diversity.

Fourth, the organizational complexity of city marathons provides a valuable model for experiential learning. The coordination required across multiple roles and systems indicates that sports events can serve as dynamic educational platforms. In school settings, incorporating event-like experiences-such as sports festivals, themed sports weeks, or collaborative team challenges-can help students understand the value of planning, cooperation, and shared responsibility, thereby enhancing their practical competence and civic awareness.

Finally, the spirit of self-challenge embodied in marathon culture sheds light on how school sports might better foster students' perseverance and internal motivation. Rather than focusing solely on rankings or external rewards, encouraging students to set personal goals and pursue self-improvement aligns more closely with the essence of sports participation. This approach can help cultivate long-term interest and intrinsic motivation, which are crucial for sustaining healthy lifestyles.

In sum, the discussion of city marathon culture illuminates the multifaceted nature of contemporary physical activities and their deeper connections with social values, personal development, and communal life. These reflections offer important reference points for advancing school sports: cultivating students' physical and mental health, strengthening social and collaborative abilities, promoting inclusiveness and diversified participation, and fostering internal motivation and rule awareness. By integrating such insights, school sports can better align with modern educational goals and contribute more effectively to students' comprehensive development.

5. Conclusion

In contemporary urban sports culture, the city marathon has become a vibrant scene where challenge, cooperation, health awareness, and social interaction converge. More than a competitive event, it represents a form of collective emotional resonance. The rich physical culture embedded in city marathons provides meaningful experience and valuable inspiration for the development of school sports. Through this widely participated activity, we can observe people's pursuit of health, their aspiration for self-improvement, and their appreciation of social connection and teamwork. Such diverse, inclusive, and health-oriented cultural values deserve to be absorbed, reflected upon, and integrated into the practice of school sports.

With ongoing social progress, the city marathon increasingly serves as a multidimensional and diversified model, offering concrete guidance for the future evolution of school sports. Drawing on the spirit and cultural connotations of marathon participation can better support students' holistic development and contribute to realizing the long-term goals and core tasks of school sports in the country.

The widespread rise of urban marathons has moved beyond the boundaries of sports competitions, evolving into a complex social phenomenon shaped by individual expectations, urban development, and cultural identity. It reflects contemporary people's deeper longing for meaningful life experiences and self-transcendence in an era of material abundance, transforming the 42.195-kilometer route into a modern ritual open to participation and shared interpretation. At the same time, the marathon has become a dynamic platform for cities to showcase their governance capacity, humanistic characteristics, openness, and vitality, while fostering a heightened sense of belonging and pride among residents.

Nevertheless, the popularity of such events calls for thoughtful examination. As more cities enter this shared "race track," the risks of homogenized event design and excessive commercialization may gradually weaken distinctive local characteristics. The success of a marathon should not be defined solely by participant numbers or short-term economic benefits, but by the sustainable cultural legacy it contributes, the extent to which it promotes the long-term development of mass sports participation, and whether the values associated with running can continue to influence daily life once the excitement of race day fades.

Looking ahead, the development of marathons should shift emphasis from expansion in scale to improvement in quality, and from one-time festivities to everyday cultural integration. Future city marathons need to be more thoughtfully embedded into urban life, reach broader communities, and better balance enthusiasm for competition with inclusive participation. Ultimately, a truly impactful marathon is not only measured by its lively race-day atmosphere, but also by whether it encourages residents to embrace

healthier lifestyles, strengthen social bonds, and deepen their attachment to the places where they live. This embodies not only the philosophy of running, but also a perspective on urban well-being, pointing toward a more active, more connected, and more vibrant shared community life.

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