

CONDUCTING SPORTS STREET RUNNING EVENTS IN VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL SPACE- A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

In our modern society, participation in street running events became a phenomenon whose importance has increased greatly, becoming more and more present in everyday life.

Pursuant to the opinion poll conducted with the support of Quantix Media among participants in running events, there was a considerable decrease in the time spent running during the pandemic.

In this context, the organisers of street running events had to rethink new strategies and conducting sports competitions in the virtual environment. This is possible by respecting the current rules and regulations, while hoping to encourage the maintenance and development of the running phenomenon.

This study aims to perform a comparative analysis between street running events held in the virtual environment and physically held street running events, organized by Bucharest Running Club Association.

Keywords: sports events, street running, organization, virtual run

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1. Introduction

Street running is a widespread social phenomenon, a form of addiction, which millions of practitioners feel acutely and that they consume with tenacity, pleasure, and huge benefits (Bota, 2007).

Street running events are sports events planned and organized in order to have participants establish sports performances based on pre-established formal

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rules. It also presupposes a situation of achievement, social affirmation and the acquisition of material satisfactions.

Sports events are a significant moment in the life of an individual, group or community, which is based on a project and is meant to highlight personal skills, local opportunities in order to meet needs and economic prosperity.

Sports and sporting events can be considered very important socialising tools and, therefore, any state has a great responsibility in promoting and developing them. It has been shown, over time, that participation in sports events has a beneficial role in terms of self-esteem, efficiency in daily activities, reduction of mental tension and stress, manifestation of well-being. Sports events are seen by their consumers as one of the main ways to spend free time, to socialize and have fun. (Constantinescu M., Gheorghe C.D. 2015).

In modern society, participation in street running events is a phenomenon whose importance has increased greatly, becoming more and more present in everyday life.

According to the opinion poll conducted with the support of Quantix Media among participants in running sports events, there was a considerable decrease in time spent running during the pandemic.

In this context, the organisers of street running sports events had to rethink new strategies for conducting sports competitions in the virtual space. This is possible by respecting the current rules and regulations, while hoping to encourage the maintenance and development of the running phenomenon.

Virtual racing is considered to be a satisfactory alternative, a model that offers more versatility and independence than physical racing. A virtual run is an event where one can participate alone, where they are from and at their convenience.

➤ **The purpose of the study**

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis between virtually conducted street running events and physically held street running events, organized by Bucharest Running Club Association.

The topicality of this theme lies in the novelty factor represented by the organization of running sports events in the virtual environment, but also by the impact they have among the active population, with such events being adapted to the needs of the sports consumer.

The organisation of events in the virtual environment created the opportunity for the participation of all interested runners, who thus have the opportunity to run in different locations, at a predetermined time. This has been possible thanks to the technology using interactive applications and platforms.

➤ **Research methods used**

- Method of bibliographic study: necessary in order to prepare the theoretical substantiation;



- Graphic representation method: useful to highlight the differences between the subjects in terms of the share of physical exercise, of the free time budget in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The main method used is that of the comparative study, based on the information gathered since the first edition of the Bucharest Marathon organized and conducted and the 11th edition of the Bucharest Marathon held in 2019, physically.

- The analysis of the results was made based on the statistical-methodical method performed through My Laps registration platform. The data belongs to the Bucharest Running Club Association.

The subjects are the participants in the events organized by Bucharest Running Club, namely: Bucharest Marathon 2019 and Bucharest Marathon 2020-Virtual Run.

➤ **Results**

The results of the statistical analysis were organized on several categories of descriptive data.

Regarding the number of participants, there is a difference of over 75% between the number of runners during the physical event in 2019, and the virtual sporting event in 2020. If in 2019, the number of runners was 11628, at the virtual event the number of participants was considerably lower, with only 2151 runners participating. It is found that people continued to do sports, although there is a relative decrease compared to a physical event.

➤ **Descriptive data of the participants in events organized by Bucharest Running Club**

The distribution by age groups, of all the participants, at the two events organized by Bucharest Running Club, shows us that 50% of the participants are young, with ages between 15 and 32 years old, 45% are adults aged between 33 and 50 years old and only 4.8% are elderly people.

Regarding the division into age categories, at the 2 sporting events, there is an equal participation of runners in the age groups 15-32 years old and 33-50 years old. It is found that the target population, namely, the participants in the running sports events, adapted to the conditions of restrictions imposed by Covid-19 and participated in the sporting event, even if it took place virtually.

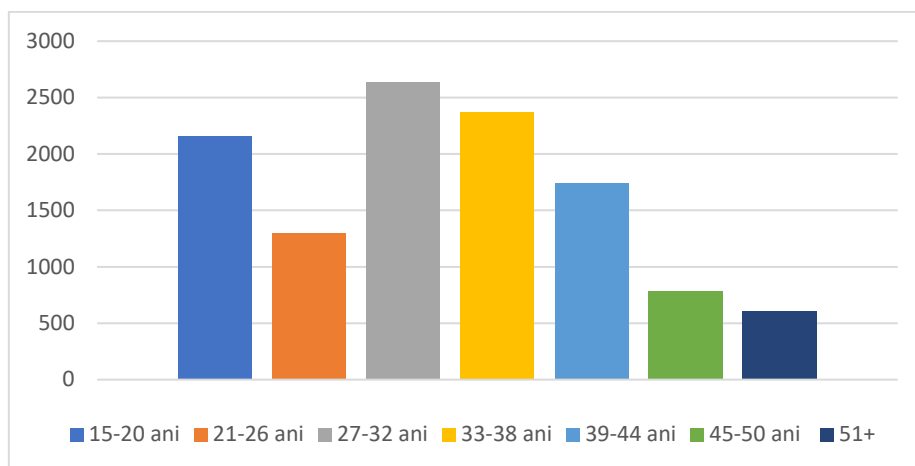


Figure 1. Distribution by age groups for the Bucharest Marathon 2019 event - physically held

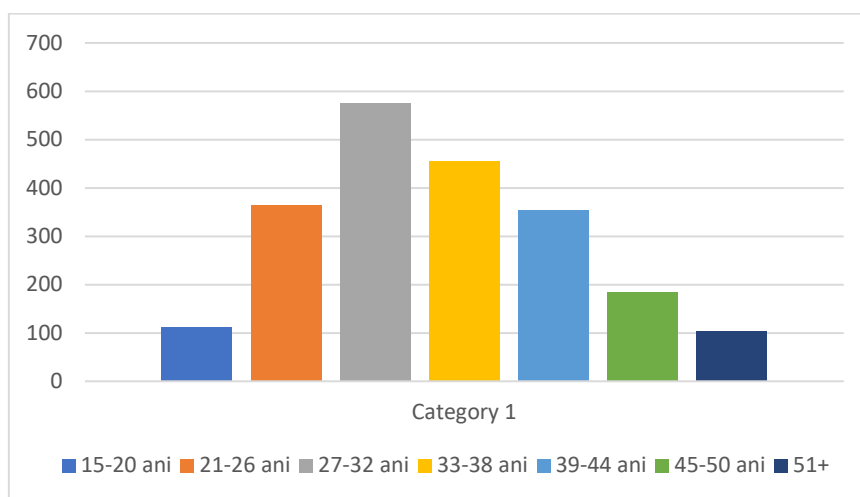


Figure 2. Distribution by age groups for Bucharest Marathon 2019 event - Virtual Run

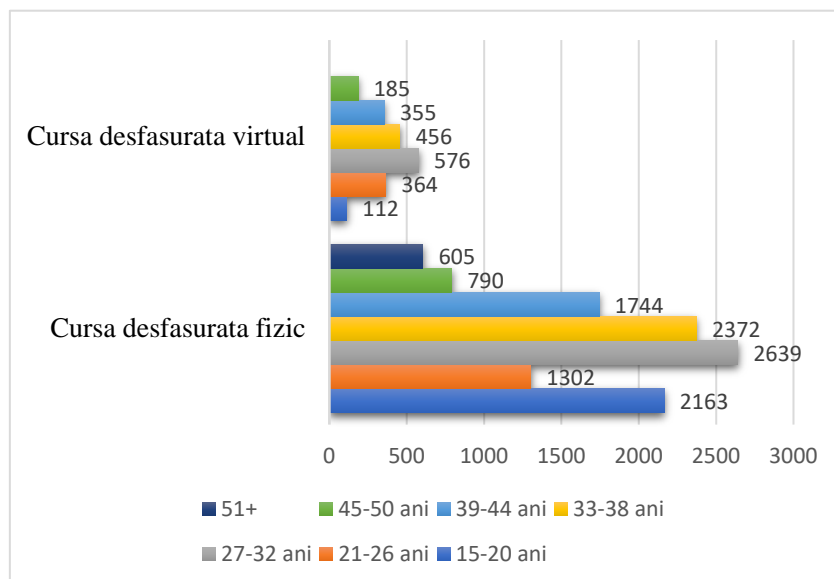


Figure 3. Comparative analysis – Distribution by age groups

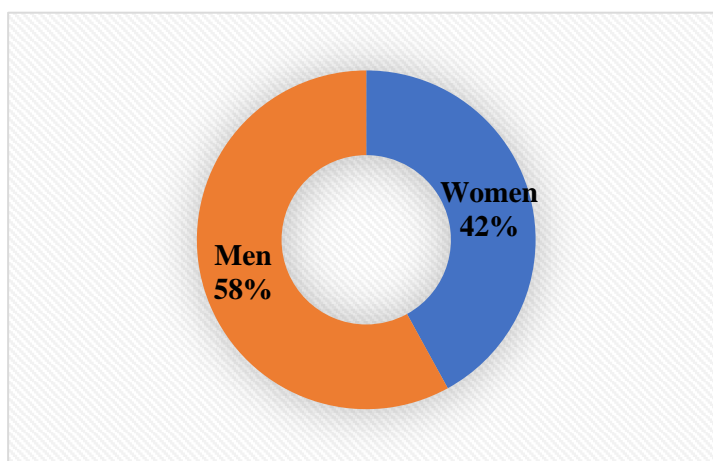


Figure 4. Distribution by gender groups for Bucharest Marathon event held in 2019

Of the total participants, it is found that 58% are men and only 42% women. This aspect is also confirmed by the specialised literature which shows that men are more active and interested in participating in this type of event.

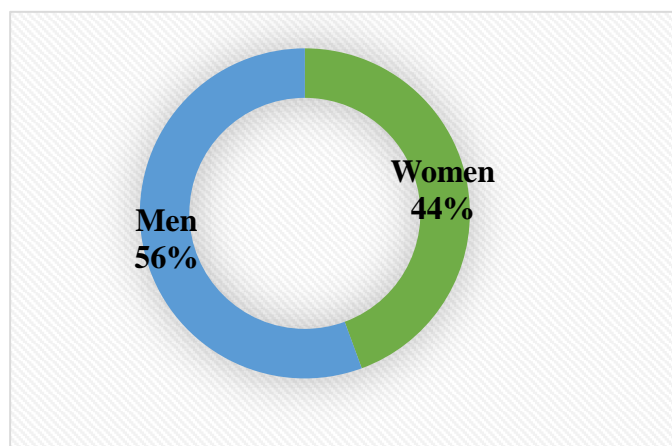


Figure 5. Distribution by gender groups for Bucharest Marathon 2020 event - Virtual Run

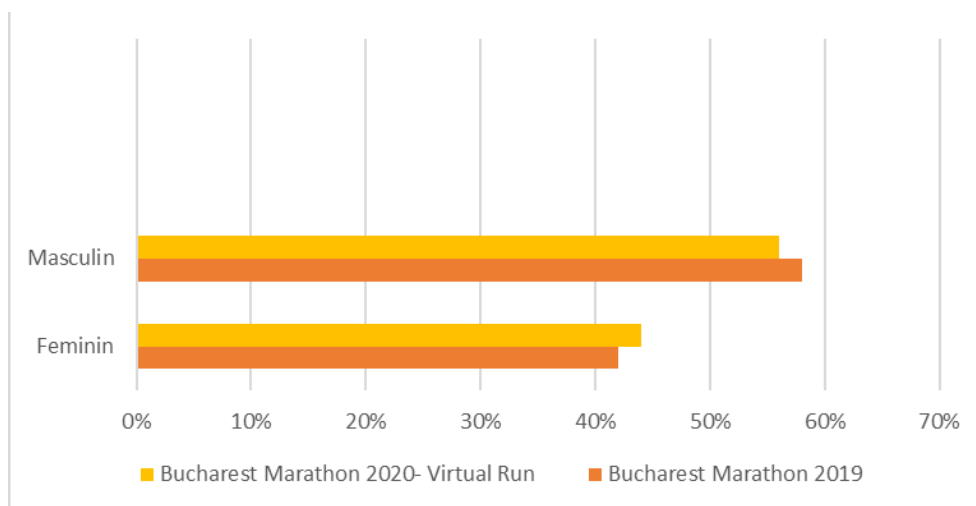


Figure 6. Comparative analysis – Distribution by gender groups

From figure 6 we can see that at both events the presence is higher among men compared to women, the values being quite close, namely: 56% and 58% men and 42% and 44% women, respectively.

Descriptive data regarding the distribution of participants, for races, at the events organised by Bucharest Running Club in the virtual space

From the total number of participants, it can be seen that the most demanded race was the 10 km race, with a percentage of 28.7%, followed closely by the 5 km race with a percentage of 26.5%, the race “All you can run” 19.1% and the 21 km



half-marathon race with a percentage of 15.6%. The 15 km race was ranked at the opposite pole with a percentage of 5.2%, and on the last place in the runners' preferences was the 42 km race - marathon with a total of 4.8%.

Distribution by races for Bucharest Marathon 2020 - Virtual Run

Table 1

Race	42km marathon	21km Half Marathon	15km race	10km race	5km race	"All you can run" race
Number of participants	104	336	112	618	517	410
The percentage of the total number of participants	4,8%	15,6%	5,2%	28,7%	26,5%	19,1%

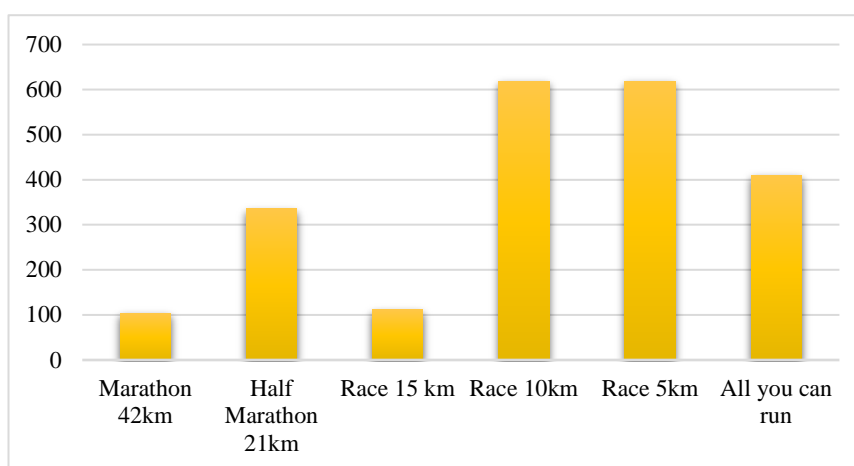


Figure 7. Distribution by races for the event

A virtually organized running event is equivalent to any physically held running event, it includes races such as 5KM, 10KM, 15 KM, the half marathon and the marathon, as well as "All you can run". However, what differentiates a virtual race is that you register online and complete the race in your own time, in your own way.

The novelty element of the event organised in the virtual space is represented by the introduction of the race: "All you can run". This race has not been present, so far, in any other event organised by Bucharest Running Club Association.

Descriptive data regarding the distribution of participants, by races, at the events organized by Bucharest Running Club

From Table 2 we can extract the following information: out of a total of 11,628 participants in the races organised in the Bucharest Marathon event, the most



popular race was the 10 km race with a percentage of 33.9%, on the 2nd place was the Half Marathon Race with a percentage of 20.4% followed by the 42 km marathon with a percentage of 16.3%. At the opposite end in the preferences of the runners is the Popular Race with a percentage of 12.0%.

Regarding the races for teenagers and children, we can see that the children registered for the 0.9 km race were the most active with a percentage of 11.8%, on the 2nd place being the 1.4 km race with a percentage of 3.6% and on the last place being the Race of the Teens with a percentage of 2.0%.

Distribution by races for Bucharest Marathon 2019

Table 2

Race	The 42km Marathon	The 21 km Half Marathon	10Km Run	The Popular Race	Teens Race	0.9km Kids Race	1.4km Kids Race
Number of participants	1892	2372	3941	1395	237	1376	415
The percentage of the total number of participants	16,3%	20,4%	33,9%	12,0%	2,0%	11,8%	3,6%

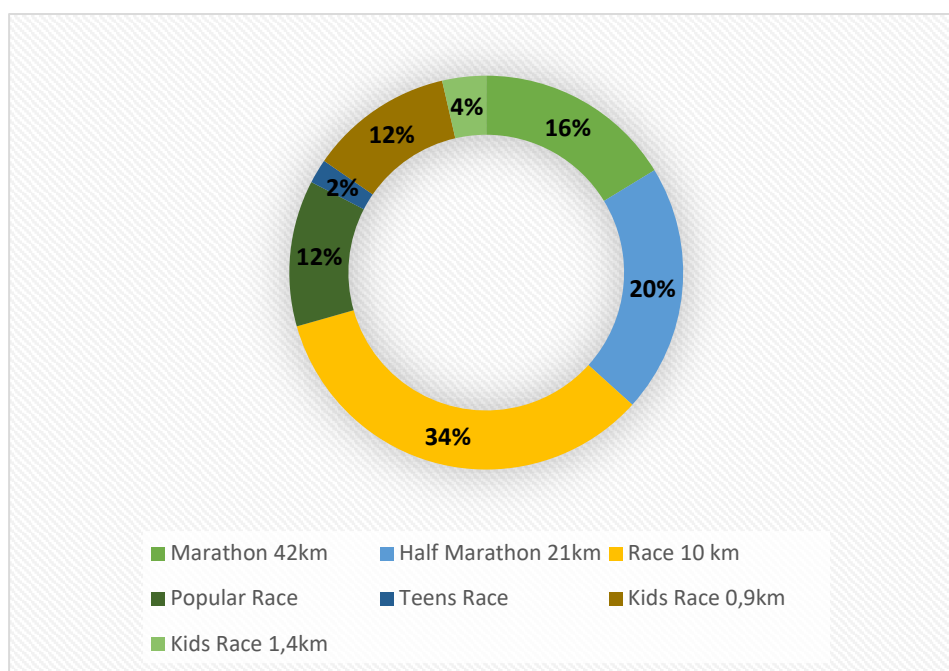


Figure 8. Distribution by races for Bucharest Marathon 2019



Figure 9. Total number of participants

As regards the number of participants in the two sporting events we can see a major difference between the 2 events, the balance visibly tilting towards the race held physically in 2019, with 11628 people, and respectively, 2151 people in the Bucharest Marathon 2020-Virtual Run. Another difference can be noticed in the percentage of participants in races, from the total participants, only 4.8% opted for the 42km race at the virtual event with 16.3% participants in the physically held event for the same race.

Distribution by races for the events Bucharest Marathon 2019 and Bucharest Marathon 2020-Virtual Run, Half Marathon Race 21km

Table 3

Race	Bucharest Marathon 2019 21km Half Marathon	Bucharest Marathon 2020- Virtual Run 21km Half Marathon
Number of participants	2372	336
The percentage of the total number of participants	20,4%	15,6%

As showed in Table 3, the same difference in the number of participants was found as in the previously presented race, the 42km one. The difference we want to bring to the fore is the one related to the percentage of runners' options of the races, namely in the virtual race there is a percentage of 15.6%, this race being ranked the



4th in the preferences of the runners, while the event carried out in physical format ranked second in the preferences of the runners.

Distribution by races for the events Bucharest Marathon 2019 and Bucharest Marathon 2020-Virtual Run, the 10km Race 10km

Table 4

Race	Bucharest Marathon 2019 The 10km race	Bucharest Marathon 2020-Virtual Run The 10km race
Number of participants	3941	618
The percentage of the total number of participants	33,9%	28,7%

The 10km race, present in both events, is the most popular, which is also confirmed by the figures in table 4. Even if the number of the runners is lower in the race held in the virtual space, the percentage of 28% and 33.9, respectively, for the 10km race held during the event in 2019, certainly indicates that this race is preferred by the runners in the events organized by Bucharest Running Club Association.

Conclusions

Considering the fact that, in the current context, we cannot organise a street running sporting event that can take place physically, with all participants on the same route, Bucharest Running Club Association, subsequent to an analysis of the needs of sports consumers at present, organized a virtual running competition, dedicated to amateur runners, in compliance with the restrictions imposed by local authorities.

From this analysis, we conclude that the average age of the participants in the physical races is of 30 years old, and 56% of the runners are men, while in the virtual races the average age of the participants is of 33 years old.

From the data presented above, we can conclude that the preferences of the runners regarding the race they opted for remain relatively the same, namely the 10 km race ranking first at both events. Regarding the race ranked second, we notice a major difference, namely at the event held physically, the 21 km half-marathon race is preferred, while at the event held in the virtual space, the 5 km race is first in the preferences of the runners.

In conclusion, the runners from the Bucharest Running Club events adjusted to the conditions of restrictions imposed by Covid-19 in the first months of 2020. People continued to do sports, although there is a relative decrease compared to the normal conditions, as only 2152 participants participated in the October 2020 event, with approximately 75% fewer runners than in the physically held events.

The conclusion of the analysis we performed is that the number of participants in sports events held physically is much higher as compared to events



held virtually, due to the route offered, the opportunities to interact with other participants and to improve human relationships.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to this study and should be considered as main authors.

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