

THE SPORTS EVENT'S QUALITY TOWARDS ATTENDANCE OF TOURISTS AT SPORTS EVENT HOSTED AT NORTHERN ZONE OF MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Sports tourism is an essential part of world tourism and is trendy in Malaysia. Malaysia recorded about 25.83 million tourist arrivals in 2018. Efficient delivery of hospitality services to the sports tourists will contribute to the multi-billion-dollar sports tourism business. In a competitive sports tourism market, offering sporting event requires being deeply acknowledged with the reasons that attracts tourists' choice of specific sporting event and the degree of satisfaction that these sports tourists perceived from the service provided. As so, this present study discusses on the sports event's quality towards attendance of tourists at sports event hosted at northern zone of Malaysia. The objectives of this study are answered based on survey research conducted among 351 sports tourists at the sports event organized at northern zone of Malaysia. The study reveals that the intangible aspect of sports event's quality highly affects tourists' attendance at sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia, compared to the tangible aspect. Growing economy plays an important role in ensuring the quality of sports event. Findings reveal dissimilarities on perception of quality towards sports event between the gender groups, with the male tourists displaying higher sensitivity. Further study on sports events hosted in other region of Malaysia could contribute to development of quality sports events in promoting Malaysia as an international sports tourism destination.

Keywords: sports tourism, tangible aspect of sports event's quality, intangible aspect of sports event's quality, Northern Malaysia

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Introduction

Sports tourism as identified by Gibson and Fairley (2011, p. 229) is a leisure-based travel that makes individuals temporarily being away from their home communities to involve in physical activities [active sport tourism], to watch physical activities [event sport tourism], or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities [nostalgia sport tourism]. Being a hospitality and service business, there has been considerable discussions pertaining to the quality of hospitality and service available. For sports tourists, quality service is associated to sociable and fast service (Bob & Swart, 2009).

The sports tourism industry is regarded as a hospitality and service industry. Malaysian travellers are interested in sports tourism and are excited in venturing various destinations in terms of the internationally complimented sports events. Events such as the F1 Grand Prix, Royal Langkawi International Regatta, Le Tour De Langkawi, Standard Chartered KL Marathon, and Ironman Langkawi are platforms to showcase the destination. Sports tourism market is growing because destinations are creating a lot of more local sporting events and not relying to dominate the sector. It is a global opportunity for destination branding through sports event. Sports tourism in Malaysia is poised to gain huge importance and popularity. Sporting event has been known as a strong component of sports tourism. Malaysia provides its tourists wide varieties of sporting events. The sports event offered enable destinations to compete with their competitors, thus sharpening their competitive edge through attracting travellers who seek for sports-based holidays. Sports tourists always hope to attain a high-quality experience in their travel (Ko et al., 2011).

Sports tourism arises from the unique interaction of activity, people and place (Weed & Bull, 2009). Within the tourism industry, sports tourism constitutes the most rapidly growing segment in recent years (Brown et al., 2010). Sporting events can be used as tourist attractions by destinations that seek to attract large numbers of tourists to their locale as sport is one of the common factors for creating passion for tourists (Taleghani & Ghafary, 2014).

The quality of sporting events is one of the strategies in attracting participants to sports event. Many cities are interested in hosting sporting events that could benefit the local economy, commercial, and infrastructure. Indeed, the sporting event quality contributes to sports tourism (Moon et al., 2011). Sporting events could be differentiated by the quality service provided in complying with customer's satisfaction (Gi, 2009). This service quality included the ability to help, provide, and coordinate a bundle of high-quality services that are expected by the tourists. Hence, the organization of a high-quality sporting event could attract sports tourists' attendance as they are happy with the sporting and travelling experience. Two of the most relevant issues regarding the tourism sector are those of why people travel and what they expect from their destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Consumers' service quality perceptions have been positively related to key consumer variables such as customer satisfaction (Ko & Pastore, 2004), and customers' expectations (Chelladurai & Chang, 2000). In the field of tourism, service quality has been studied extensively from a consumer perspective as it is related to satisfaction and the intent to return of tourists (Kouthoris & Konstantinos, 2005). It can be defined as the difference between the customer's expectation of service quality and services that they received (Al-Ibrahim, 2014).

Sports tourists are different compared to other types of tourists in terms of their motives for visiting a destination and the sporting events they engage in during their travel. They are passionate, high-spending, and enjoy new sporting experiences. The direct benefit to a destination is the money spent by these visitors while the indirect benefit can be years of follow up visits. Some additional benefits can include the development of new infrastructure and service industries, increased employment and a stronger national economy. Effective approach of hospitality services towards sports tourists will promote the multi-billion-dollar sports tourism business, one of the fastest growing areas of Malaysia's booming RM55 billion tourism industries. Furthermore, in a competitive sports tourism market, providing sporting event involves deep acknowledgement of the interests of tourists' selection of sporting event instead of other alternatives, and the degree of satisfaction that these sports tourists perceived from the service provided. It is important to show that the concept of truth in sports tourism lies in understanding tourists' motivation and experiences (Lamont, 2014). The increasing popularity of sports has encouraged many tourism destinations to provide quality services in order to attract more customers. Numerous researches have examined the benefits and impacts associated with hosting a sport event and explored who sport tourists are. However, the associated sports event's quality that influence sports tourist's experience while visiting a destination has not been widely considered. Nor has much of the research focused on sports tourism in northern zone of Malaysia. This study examines the effects of sports event's quality towards attendance of sports tourists at sports event hosted in northern zone of Malaysia.

Following Bitner's (1992) *SERVESCAPE*, Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) classified service quality into tangible and intangible factors. It has been suggested that tangible sports aspect is the most important dimensions of service quality (Lee et al., 2011). Tangibility refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, communications material, and other customers in the service facility (Moon et al., 2011). The tangible aspect of event quality can include the physical environment variables such as ambience, space, and signage. On the other hand, service product itself is intangible and cannot be tested before it is produced. Parasuraman et al. (1988) classified the dimensions of service quality as reliability, responsiveness, security, credibility, communication, and assurance. Using the framework of Moon et al. (2011), this study focuses on tangible sports aspects of event quality, namely infrastructure and ambience, and the intangible aspects of sports event quality, namely communication, credibility, and assurance.

Investigating these aspects could assist in providing additional data in understanding the theoretical perspective of effects on sports tourism development towards the hosting destination. Besides that, the information gathered could also increase the likelihood for residents' support in attracting the attendance of sports tourists, which indirectly could enable policymakers to enhance the quality of life for the community. Perceptions involving different gender groups display the demographic of the populations. In order to understand the sports tourist's demand, it is better to study the sporting event quality perception experience by tourists in relation to the gender groups.

The hypotheses generated are:

- (i) There are differences on the effects of sports event's tangible aspect of quality towards attendance of tourists at sports event in terms of gender groups.
- (ii) There are differences on the effects of sports event's intangible aspect of quality towards attendance of tourists at sports event in terms of gender groups.

Methods

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 315 samples drawn from the sports tourist attending the sports event of Perlis Marathon 2018, Royal Langkawi International Regatta 2018, and Jerai International Duathlon Kedah 2018. The items in the questionnaire were a combination of questions adopted from the measurement scales developed by Moon et al. (2011) in their studies on influences of sports tourist's event quality perceptions on an international sport event on destination image, and Yu et al.'s (2012) study on the impact of mega event on the host city and satisfaction by visitor. The statistical significance of both hypotheses was tested using Independent Sample t-Tests. A significance level $p < .05$ was adopted to decide the significance level of each research hypothesis.

Result and Discussion

Factor Analysis and Reliability of Measurement Scale

The value of item loading for the measurement scale was greater than .40, with eigenvalues-greater-than-one for the three subscales, while the value of item-total correlation for each subscale was more than .45. The value of skewness and kurtosis was located within the range of -1 and 1.

The Tangible Aspect of Sports Event's Quality Towards Attendance of Tourists at Sports Event Hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia

Table 1. Mean and percentage of frequencies of tangible aspect of sports event's quality towards attendance of tourists at sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia (N = 315)

Sports Tangible Quality (Ambience)	Event's Aspect of	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage of Frequencies			
				1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Remarkable location.		3.09	.698	1.3	16.0	54.7	28.0
Great functional and aesthetics designs of sports facility.		3.09	.679	2.7	10.7	61.3	26.3
Shielded resting area.		3.07	.757	4.0	13.3	54.7	28.0
Usage of volunteers.		3.00	.742	3.3	17.3	55.3	24.0
Overall		3.07					

Sports Tangible Quality (Infrastructure)	Event's Aspect of	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage of Frequencies			
				1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Public area has enough directional and informational sign of the events.		3.06	.762	4.0	14.0	54.0	28.0
Road signs are clear and easy to follow.		3.02	.790	5.3	14.0	54.0	26.7
Offers varieties of high-quality food and drinks.		2.94	.735	2.7	22.0	54.0	21.3
Accommodation of different levels is appropriate.		2.85	.784	8.0	15.3	60.7	16.0
Restaurants of my choice are available.		2.84	.705	2.0	38.0	54.0	16.0
Overall		2.94					

The factors related to ambience highly influence sports tourists' attendance, followed by the infrastructure factors. The environment setting preferred by sports tourists are remarkable location of destination, great functional and aesthetics designs of sports facility, shielded resting area for sports tourists, availability of volunteers. The infrastructure factors that attract sports tourists are enough directional and informational signage of the events at public places, clear and easily access road signage, availability of varieties of high-quality food and beverage, availability of accommodation choices, and availability of restaurants-of-choice.

The Intangible Aspect of Sports Event's Quality Towards Attendance of Tourists at Sports Event Hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia

Table 2. Mean and percentage of frequencies of intangible aspect of sports event's quality towards attendance of tourists at sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia (N = 315)

Sports Intangible Quality (Assurance)	Event's Aspect of	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage of Frequencies			
				1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Economy growth contributes to the quality of hosting sports event.		3.26	.823	5.3	8.0	42.	44.7
Having sports tourist's best interest at heart.		3.17	.789	5.3	8.0	51.3	35.4
Sports event free from danger and risk.		3.10	.801	4.0	15.3	47.3	33.4
Service facilitation.		3.01	.723	5.3	9.3	64.	21.4
Overall		3.14					

Sports Intangible Quality (Credibility)	Event's Aspect of Quality	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage of Frequencies			
				1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Capable of planning and organizing sports event.		3.17	.642	1.3	9.3	66.	29.4
Gaining residents' support and recognition.		3.15	.736	3.3	10.7	54.0	32.0
Keeping sports tourists informed in language that they can understand.		3.08	.737	3.3	13.3	55.4	28.0
The event has ability to perform the promised service accurately and dependably.		3.01	.700	4.0	12.0	63.3	20.7
Overall		3.10					

Sports Intangible Quality (Communication)	Event's Aspect of Quality	Mean	Std. Dev.	Percentage of Frequencies			
				1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
Positive experience of sports event.		3.09	.741	4.0	11.3	56.7	28.0
Knowledge and courtesy of organizers and their ability to inspire trust and confidence towards sports tourist attendance.		3.07	.625	2.7	10.0	65.3	22.0
Overall		3.08					

Sports events could be differentiated by the quality provided to comply with tourist's satisfaction. Specifically, the sports event intangible aspect of quality significantly affects tourists' attendance at sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia. Findings reveal that the intangible aspect of sports event's quality highly affects sports tourists' attendance at sports event compared to the tangible aspect. Table 2 displayed the assurance component as the highest quality influencer, followed by credibility component, and communication component. Specifically, the factor reading "Growing economy contributes to the quality of hosting sports event" highly assures the attendance of sports tourists at sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia.

The influential factors of assurance component are economy growth contributes to the quality of hosting sports event, organizer's trustworthiness, believability, and honesty having the sports tourist's best interest at heart, sports event free from danger and risk, and willingness to facilitate sports tourists by providing prompt service". Growing economy, trustworthiness, believability, having the sports tourist's best interest at heart, safe event, and providing prompt service assure tourists' attendance at sports event, as agreeable with findings of Ko et al., (2010) and Macintosh and Nicol's (2012). Growing economy ensures the ability of the host destination to attract funding in developing quality sports event.

Meanwhile the list of influential credibility factors consists of capability of planning and organizing sports event, gaining support and recognition from residents, keeping sports tourists informed in language that they can understand, and ability to perform the promised service accurately and dependably. The credibility of organizer in planning and organizing sports event, with the support and recognition from residents in providing the services as promised wins the tourists' heart to participate in the sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia. Providing compulsory services for sports tourists could maximize tourists' attendance, as proven by Roche et al. (2013).

The communication influential factors included positive experience of the sports event, and knowledge and courtesy of organizers and their ability to inspire trust and confidence towards sports tourist to attend the event. Positive experience leaves the tourist with memories of favourable word-of-mouth publicity in promoting the hosted destination (Yu et al., 2012). Besides that, the knowledge and courtesy of organizers and their social ability to inspire trust and confidence towards sports tourist to attend sports event helps to promote the sports event hosted in Northern Zone of Malaysia, a finding in line with studies of Lakshmi and Ganesan's (2010).

The Effects of Tangible Aspect of Sports Event's Quality Towards Attendance of Tourists at Sports Event in Terms of Age Groups

The results of T-test identified significant mean differences between the gender groups for ambience factors, namely "Remarkable location", $t(148) = 2.129, p = .035$ (Male: $M = 3.21$, Female: $M = 2.97$), and "Great functional and aesthetics designs of sports facility", $t(148) = 2.445, p = .016$ (Male: $M = 3.23$, Female: $M = 2.96$). The attractions that inspired male sports tourists to participate in sports events were the location of the event destination and the functional and aesthetics design of the related sports facilities.

The Effects of Intangible Aspect of Sports Event's Quality Towards Attendance of Tourists at Sports Event in Terms of Age Groups

T-test extracted significant result between gender groups for credibility factors reading "Keeping sports tourists informed in language that they can understand", $t(148) = 2.477, p = .014$ (Male: $M = 3.23$, Female: $M = 2.93$). The attendance of male sports tourists at sports events was mainly because they were well-informed of the event in the language they understood. Furthermore, male sports tourists were keen to explore information related to the sports events.

Conclusion

Sporting events are major drivers for tourism as people want to feel the live buzz during the event. A quality sports event can attract actual and potential tourists to the host destination. Hence, tourist's satisfaction should be the key focus in improving the quality of a sports event. Effective event management strategies need to be implemented and developed to provide the best level of sports event's quality. Sports tourists could be categorized as athletes, fans, or spectators. Future studies could focus on understanding the effects of sports event's quality towards attendance of sports tourists at sports event in terms of athletes, fans, and spectators. Specific study on sports events hosted in other region of Malaysia could contribute to the development of quality sports events in promoting Malaysia as an international sports tourism destination.

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