

FACTORS INFLUENCE VISITOR'S EXPERIENCE IN A SMALL-SCALE SPORTS EVENT

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Abstract: *In order to provide the memorable experience and maintain the sustainability, event organizers should have knowledge and understanding regarding factors that influence the decision to attend an event. Limited understanding of these factors will influence the visitors' decision to attend an event. In this respect, the purpose of this study is to identify factors (event image and satisfaction) which influence visitors' decision to attend an event in the context of small-scale sport event. A total of 468 questionnaires was collected from visitors at the Pesta Sukan Sungai and Pesta Angin Timur, which held in the northern state in Malaysia. This study finds that, attraction and experience (event image) has the significant influence on the visitors' decision to attend this small-scale sport event. Meanwhile, excitement and games attraction becomes the highest factor in visitors' satisfaction. Thus, the managerial implications for marketing purposes are suggested and could be used as a reference for event marketers and organizers.*

Keywords: *Event Experience, Event Image, Satisfaction, Small-Scale Sport Event*

Introduction

Sport event is known to play more important roles for the destination. Organizing an event as one of the attractions for a destination can derive economic benefits besides providing more choices for visitors' activities. This is due to the sport event category which come in all shapes and size such as hallmark event, mega events and small-scale event. These types of events have been found to generate significant impact especially on the economic on the various countries who are involved (Koo, Byon, & Baker, 2014). Mega events have been recognizing as the successful sport events which organize in a short-term but giving the long-term benefit to the host country. Regardless of the event size, hosting a sport event can gives valuable benefits to the destination especially for the community. In recognizing the

significance of sport events, many of efforts has been done by the previous researchers on the important topics such as event loyalty (Lu & Cai, 2011), the visitors' behaviour (Crompton, Mckay, & Society, 1997; Koo, Byon, & Baker, 2014) and so on. Thereby, understanding the visitors' event experience through event image and satisfaction becomes important in understanding the visitors' behaviour especially in small-scale sports events (Koo et al., 2014; Tzetzis, Alexandris, & Kapsampeli, 2014).

Higham (2005) stated that a small-scale sports event also gives benefits to the host community whether it was organize using the existing infrastructure, a smaller budget but more manageable in terms of crowd congestion. *Pesta Angin Timur* and *Pesta Sukan Sungai* are one of the examples of small-scale sports events. This small-scale sport events are well known among the local community in Northern part of Malaysia and has been organized one's a year. As the visitors' intentions are more focused on the mega sporting events, this small-scale events getting low popularity compared to other sporting events. Thus, there is an important action should be taken by the organizers to promote this events as this events also can gives benefits to the host city and community (Yusof, Omar-Fauzee, Shah, & Geok, 2009). This is due to the increasing numbers of the small-scale sports events that has been organized by the state government in order to attract visitors' and tourist for the tourism purpose. Hence, the demanding of understanding the visitors' behaviour should be taken by the organizer to fulfil the needs and demands besides planning for the effective marketing strategies (Koo et al., 2014). This has been agreed by Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) which stated that the importance of sports events in generating the development of the host city and communities.

Despite the positive effect that has been mentioned above, very a few studies have been mentioned about the important determinants of understanding visitors' experience through event image and satisfaction in small-scale sports events. This lead to the limitation of the effective marketing strategies due to the different location and types of small-scale events and the finding cannot be consumed in the other study. Study on the visitors' behaviour especially in small-scale sport event also has been agreed by Hallmann and Breuer (2010) who stated that the knowledge on the influence of an event image towards the visitors' behaviour need additional and further research. Meanwhile, Kim, Kim, Ruetzler and Taylor (2010) found that satisfaction is the important key component to predict visitors' repeat and repurchase intention. Previous studies (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2010; Wicker, Hallmann, & Zhang, 2012) tend to focus on the marathon events to identified the important cause of the post-decision behaviour. For example, event image has been found to become a significant predictor of satisfaction by Allameh, Pool, Jaberi, Salehzadeh and Asadi (2015) and Koo et al. (2014). Hence, further study need to be carried out to investigate visitors' event image and satisfaction especially in Malaysia to understand the Malaysian behaviour in attending this

small-scale sports event. In line with the previous studies, investigation on the visitors' event image and satisfaction in this area might reveal the new antecedent to determine the visitors' experience in attending this small-scale sports event.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence the visitors' experience in the context of small-scale sports events through event image and satisfaction. The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To examine the event image and satisfaction factors of visitors' which influence the event experience
2. To determine which factors influence the decision to attend the small-scale sports events.

By understanding the important factors, researchers can use the framework to identify the specific factors which contribute to the visitors' decision to attend this sports event. Meanwhile, for the marketing perspective, this study is important to help the organizer to build more attractive strategies in order to attract visitors' besides improved the marketing strategies for the future successful. The following section provides a more detailed explanation regarding each variable that has been used in this study.

Sports events in Malaysia

The rapid growth of event sport tourism has influenced Malaysia to actively promote itself to become as an organizer and host diversified of world-class sports events. This is because event sport tourism is one of the leading sectors that contribute to the economy and provide profitable incomes in Malaysia. Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) has been appointed as the agency that responsible in planning and organizing sports tourism while the Ministry of Tourism responsible for the marketing and promotion strategies in order to attract sport visitors' (<http://www.motac.gov.my/en/programme/tourism/sport-tourism>). Instead of mega sporting events, Malaysia also offers a wide selection of sports tourism such as spectator sports, traditional sports and adventure sports. For example, the adventure sports tourism offers a broad of outdoor adventure sport such as mountain running, motorcycle racing and base jumping. Besides that, the geographic location of Malaysia that enrich with flora and fauna becomes as an attraction for the visitors. For example, Lake Kenyir in Terengganu actively organized Kenyir 4x4 Challenge and Kenyir Mountain Bike Challenge. Hence, according to this fact that Malaysia is a developing country and the development of the sport tourism as an attraction should be defined. The present research aims to provide information on the event sports tourism, which can help to develop the development and strategies for sport tourism in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Event Experience

The growth of sports event has become the foundation for event organizers in order to organize an event that influences memorable experience. According to Getz (2007), as an event organizer, they should know the meaning of event experience and how to plan and design an experience. This is because if the organizer fails to understand the experience of the event, it can become important to visitors. Event experience consists of three behavioural attitudes which are conative, cognitive and affective. Conative refers to the actual behaviour of the visitors; cognitive refers to the awareness, memory and also the understanding of the sense of event meanwhile affective dimension refers to feelings and emotions of the visitors.

Event experience can be defined as enjoyable, visitors' engage with the memory by using personal ways (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that event is different to the normal norms in a day of living (Ayob, Wahid, & Omar, 2013).

It seems that event organizers have strengthened their business strategy in order to apply event experience in organizing an event. Nowadays visitors are not engaged with the product offered but they tend to explore the experience in attending an event (Musa & Kassim, 2013). This was agreed by Cole and Chancellor (2009) who stated that the value of experience is greater compared to the service offered by the organization. For instance, past study in the food image agreed on the importance of experience which can yield a high level of satisfaction and moreover influencing visitor's intention to return (Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2014). Hence, the concept of event experience has been discussed by the preceding study (e.g., Ayob et al., 2013; Gallarza, Arteaga, Floristán & Gil, 2009) in order to meet the memorable

experience of the visitors. Taking consideration between an experience and buying goods or services is totally different because event experience is something that makes visitors interact, especially on the attributes such as environment, facilities or the staff.

In addition, with the demand of the visitors who seek for a memorable experience in attending an event, event organizers should focus more on designing the events. Failure to comply with this request will make visitors turn to other events which are similar (Shanka & Taylor, 2004). According to Getz (2007) who insist that offering a memorable experience to the visitors is more important compared to other attributes because achieving memorable experience will remain in the visitor's memory and the emotion can be recalled later.

Event Image

The development of event sports tourism for the economic growth has lead researcher to discuss the importance and the component of the event image. An image will be influenced by cognitive, affective and conative and this has been accepted by the previous researcher Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012). The conative component of an image gives important implication the visitors' behavioural intentions. This has been agreed by Kaplanidou and Vogt (2006) who found that visitors' will do a decision whether to participate in the sports event based on their perception towards an image. On the other hand, understanding what are the characteristic that influence visitors' perception toward an image also should be investigated (Gibson, Qi, & Zhang, 2008).

Despite the significant numbers of studies on events, there are still unexplored questions regarding the image of events towards the visitors' perception (Valle, Mendes, & Guerreiro, 2012). Ryu, Han and Kim (2008) stated that there is a limited research on significant roles of the image that explain the post purchase of visitor's behaviour. The strong reputation of the image should be recognized by the organizers in order to influence visitors in attending the event sports tourism. By conceptualizing the image of the sport event, it will help for the event branding besides helping visitors' in the phase of to recall the previous experience. The importance of image towards the visitor's prediction is also supported by Ryu et al. (2008) which stated that it is difficult to maintain the image of the restaurant because the image is enduring in the consumer's mind. Therefore, event organizers should have an in-depth understanding of the image of the event because the good image will be kept as a memorable experience.

Satisfaction

In the tourism industry, understanding of the visitors' satisfaction is the key component to predict the visitors' repeat and repurchase the product because it includes expectation and perceived reality of experience (e.g., Kim et al., 2010; Ko, Kim, Kim & Lee, 2010; Lee & Beeler, 2009). Satisfaction has generally been linked to the marketing strategies, positive word of mouth besides as a factor that influence visitors' to have the intention to return and recommend the positive things to others. In the sports tourism context, the essential of satisfaction has been examined by several of studies (e.g., Ramírez-hurtado, 2014; Tzetzis, Alexandris & Kapsampeli, 2014). However, the same prediction on visitors' behavioural intentions cannot be affirmed in the sports tourism literature, particularly between active and passive event sports visitors'. For example, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) investigated the active sports visitors' on the likelihood to have repeat visitation after completing participating the event. Meanwhile, Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) examined the active sport behavioural intentions towards past participation, attitudes, satisfaction and destination image in small-scale event sport tourism.

Thus, as the satisfaction has been recognized as determining factor that influences the future behaviour of visitors, studying visitors' satisfaction in the context of sport event tourism should be undertaken to gain better understanding of the visitors' experience. Figure 1 shown the conceptual framework of this study:

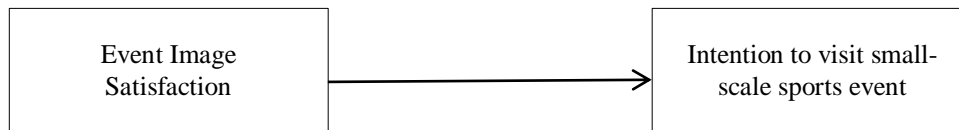


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Measurement

For this study, a quantitative research was chosen. A survey was undertaken at the *Pesta Angin Timur Perlis* and *Temasya Sukan Sungai* in the north state in Malaysia, using a standardised self-administered questionnaire, which was developed based on previous work in the field of event image (Deng, Li, & Shen, 2013; Kiki Kaplanidou, 2010) and satisfaction (Huang, 2011). It contained 29 closed-ended questions and consisted of different sections investigating event experience (using a seven-point Likert scale). Moreover, socio-demographic data of the respondents were gathered using age, gender, education and income.

Data Collection

The study population involved visitors' who attend the *Pesta Angin Timur* and *Temasya Sukan Sungai* which was chosen because of the uniqueness besides a quite popular among visitors' as one of the local tourism product in the north area. The survey was conducted in March 2016 by assistant researchers. Visitors' was approached at the event area due to the diverse range of the event activities. Thus, a simple random sampling was used. Approximately 600 questionnaires were handed out to the visitors' who visit these events. Of the questionnaires handed out, 132 questionnaires were found to be incomplete and were discarded. Finally, 468 questionnaires were considered to be valid for the analysis, which leading to an effective response rate of 78%.

Data Analysis

In this study, frequency analysis and reliability analyses were calculated by using SPSS 19.0. In order to assess the reliability of measurement scales, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used. As suggested by Nunnally (1967), a Cronbach alpha values greater than .70 or above indicates adequate reliability of measurement scales. Moreover, the measurement of validity was test by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The average variance extracted (AVE) and convergent validity was tested. AVE values greater than .50 are deemed sufficient, meanwhile the indicator loading that greater than or equal .70 also indicated as acceptable (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach alpha values greater than the cut-off value of 0.7, ranging from .946 for event image and .918 for satisfaction. In terms of AVE values, these two variables have exceeded the suggestion value which .50 and ranging from .759 for event image and .587 for satisfaction. Furthermore, all the factor loading has attained the suggestion from Hair, Babin, Anderson and Black (2010) which are .50. The composite reliability values are within the recommended thresholds (.873 and 1.05). Therefore the measurement scales of these items were reliable and valid.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Sample

The results of the demographic profile of this study (Table 1) showed that 52.8 % of the respondents who are attending this sport event are male while 47.2 % respondents are female. Majority visitors' who are attending this SSEST comes from the age group of 21-30 which consists of 38.9%, following by 26.3% respondents from the age group of under 20 years. Regarding the education level of the respondents, 42.9% of the respondents have completed the primary and secondary school, following by 33.8% respondents holds certificate or diploma and 15.6% had a degree.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent %
Gender		
Male	247	52.8
Female	241	47.2
Age		
< 20	123	26.3
21-30	182	38.9
31-40	82	17.5
41-50	54	11.5
Over 51	27	5.8
Education		
Primary-secondary school	201	42.9
Certificate or diploma	158	33.8
Degree	73	15.6
Master or Phd	11	2.4
Others	25	5.3
Occupation		
Student	200	42.7
Government officer	68	14.5
Professional	23	4.9
Business owner	96	20.5
Unemployed	36	7.7
Retiree	13	2.8

Descriptive statistics

Event Image

These measurement items consist of 13 items reflecting the event image. The attributes of perceived event image consist of the facilities provided by the event organizer, the benefits and the management of the event itself. The answers of this question are on the seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 being "strongly disagree" to 7 being "strongly agree". According to the finding, visitors' believed that this SSEST can become as a tourist attraction (M = 5.24) and this item also the highest mean score, followed by "This visit broadens my horizon by providing the opportunities to experience different scale of sports tourism" (M = 5.16), "The organizer has provided choices of food and beverages for visitors" (M = 5.06), "The staff/volunteer is friendly and helpful" (M = 5.04), "This event has a good reputation" (M =

5.03) and “The staff/volunteer is professional” (M = 5.00). Meanwhile, the lowest range for the mean score of perceived event image is “The location of this event is near to the accommodation” (M = 4.63). The results of the exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 2, with the reliability test for each items. All of the items has achieved the rules of thumb by Hair et al. (2010) based on the sample size needed.

Satisfaction

The measurement scale of visitors’ satisfaction consists of the importance of attraction of games, facilities and convenience and promotion. These items include entertainment, excitement, transportation, restroom, sign and directions and the promotion tools. Respondents were asked to answer for their level of satisfaction during attending the SSSE on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 being “very dissatisfied” to 5 “very satisfied”. According to the mean score of each item, the highest mean score is “I truly enjoyed with the attraction of the games in this event” (M = 4.04), followed by “excitement” which got (M = 3.99), “games attraction” (M = 3.99), and the lowest scores were “clean restroom” (M = 3.04). However, the result from the exploratory factor analysis has indicated that three items was deleted due to the low factor loading. Three items that have been deleted are transportation, clean restroom, signs and directions.

Table 2. Factor loadings, Cronbach’s alpha (α), composite reliability and AVE values.

Items	Mean	Factor loadings	Cronbach’s alpha (α)	CR	AVE
<i>Event Image</i>					
This event has a good reputation	5.03	.813	.946	.873	.759
This visit broadens my horizon by providing the opportunities to experience different scale of sports tourism	5.16	.786			
I learn about new things during attending this event sports tourism	4.95	.750			
The organizer has provided good security	4.99	.761			
The organizer has provided choices of food and beverages for visitors’	5.06	.729			
Parking facilities are sufficient	4.66	.735			
The location of this event is near to the accommodation	4.63	.679			
The location of this event close to the public transport	4.49	.651			
The staff/volunteer is professional	5.00	.824			
The staff/volunteer is friendly and helpful	5.04	.821			
Registration counter is convenient	4.73	.805			

Waiting lines are orderly	4.77	.766			
This event can become as a tourist attraction	5.24	.754			
Satisfaction					
Excitement	3.99	.826	.918	1.05	.587
Entertainment	3.93	.755			
Relaxation	3.88	.720			
Games attraction	3.99	.830			
Diversity in sport games	3.98	.803			
I truly enjoyed with the attraction of the games in this event	4.04	.643			
Viewing of the event	3.82	.750			
Food and beverage outlets	3.91	.679			
Sufficient parking space	3.56	.528			
Venue of the event	3.72	.527			
I am satisfied with the facilities and feel comfortable when attending this event	3.83	.659			
Social media promotion (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	3.77	.571			
Media promotion (e.g., newspaper, magazines)	3.77	.622			

Discussion and Conclusion

The objectives of this study are to determine factors that influence the visitors' decision to attend the small-scale sport events in northern state in Malaysia on their perceived event image and satisfaction. Through this understanding, event organizer and event marketers can gain a better understanding of the visitors' option, needs and preferences. In general, among the 13 items on the perceived event image, visitors' believed that this small-scale event can become as attraction although it was a small-scale. In addition, the attraction that this event received can become as a benchmark for the state government to consider this event as a tourism product for the state. This is due to the lack of collaboration that received from this type of event compared to mega sporting events, which believed that can give a lot of benefits. The descriptive analysis has revealed that besides attraction, visitors' make a decision to attend to experience the different scale of sport event. As mentioned above, visitors' always be presented with the mega sporting events and denied the uniqueness of the small-scale sport event which also can give a similar benefit but in a small segment especially to the local residents.

Meanwhile, besides the event image, satisfaction also becomes as an influence factor for visitors' to attend this event. Visitors' who attend this event really enjoyed with the attraction that have been offered to them. This is due to the uniqueness of this event which offered

traditional or local sport that has been forgotten by people nowadays such as *futsal bendang* and *perahu panjang*. In addition, visitors' can feel the excitement during their visit and satisfied with the facilities provided during attending this event. This finding is driven by the location and activities of the event that suitable for family togetherness. However, in terms of the hygiene, the event organizer should improve the cleanliness of the restroom.

This study has attempted to contribute to the body of knowledge, especially in event sport tourism, which focusing on the perceived event image and satisfaction as the factors that influence the visitors' decision to attend the sport events. This study tries to find out the factor that affects the visitor's decision to attend these small-scale events. Finding from this study has indicated that event image as an important factor that influences the visitors' decision to attend the event. This has been agreed by Lu and Cai (2011) who agreed that visitors' loyalty is affecting by the different image of the event such a the location, facilities and the event itself. Kaplanidou and Gibson (2012) in their study of travelling parents' intentions to sport event also found the positive effects of event image towards parents' attitude and intentions. Visitors' will have the positive attitude if there is a positive event image. With regards to the visitor's decision on the importance of event image, event organizers should understand the element of the event image as stated by Koo et al. (2014) consists of cognitive image (e.g., event organization and destination characteristics) and affective image (e.g., emotional and social aspects) and both of these elements contribute to the event image evaluation.

Moreover, the positive event image also related to the visitors' satisfaction. Previous studies have indicated that several of previous studies (e.g., Deng & Pierskalla, 2011; McDowall, 2010) tend to measure the visitors' satisfaction based on the overall measurement. Focusing on the visitors' overall satisfaction leads to the lack of understanding regarding the visitors' need. Bauer, Law, Tse and Weber (2008) agreed that the insufficiency of what influence the visitors' satisfaction to attend an event particularly in the Asia context should be acknowledge. Their previous study found that accessibility and security becomes the higher attributes for visitor satisfaction. Meanwhile, this study found that the visitors' satisfaction is affected by the attraction of the events, the excitement and also the diversity of the activities.

From the finding, the event organizer should consider those attributes in order to attract visitors attend the event. Attractions are one of the important attributes that the visitors' will always look for and choosing the right attraction will be given the benefit to the visitors' and event organizers.

This study has investigated the event image and satisfaction factors in the small-scale sport event in the north area in Malaysia. While the findings of this research are limited to the event image and satisfaction, it also offers useful insights for event organizers and state government policy makers to planning future the events. The unique attraction of this event should be further acknowledged by the event organizer and local state government for the associated economic returns. Hence, event organizer should collaborate with the local state government to develop appropriate strategies accordingly to accommodate this growing event. Thus, future research might include other additional factors such as motivation to find the interaction and influence of those variables. These additional variables might allow the event organizer to understand what factors that motivate visitors' to attend the small-scale sport event besides the event image and satisfaction. Future research also can conceptualize and propose the new model based on the event image, satisfaction and motivation in order to better understand the visitor's behaviour.

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