

Sport Tourism

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We define participatory sport event tourism as travel behavior in which people use leisure time to go to a destination to achieve the purpose of participating in sport events and obtain unique experiences. The tourism process integrates competition, entertainment, experience, health benefits, among others.

Keywords: sport tourism ; participation motivations ; value co-creation ; value co-creation behavior ; participatory sport

1. Introduction

Sport tourism is an emerging form of integration of the sport industry and the tourism industry. In recent years, its industrial scope has been continuously expanded and the industrial chain has been improved. Its contribution to the local and national economies has become increasingly significant. Event tourism is a general term that captures such traveling destination activities as cultural celebration tourism, cultural and entertainment event tourism, business and exhibition tourism, sport event tourism, science and education event tourism, leisure event tourism, political event tourism, and private event tourism. As an important part of event tourism, sport tourism has attracted the attention of many scholars ^[1]. Hinch and Hingam (2001) defined the concept of sport tourism from the connotation and time attributes. They believe that sport tourism is carried out in a limited time, based on the characteristics of sport elements such as competition, regularity, interest, and leisure, and the coinciding with travel activities ^[2]. From the perspective of impact of events on sport tourism, Margaret (2004) emphasized that event tourism is the essence of sport tourism and the core of the entire industry chain, as well as a new extension of the sport event industry ^[3]. In this regard, Wang and Yang (2011) believe that sport event tourism is the main motivation for the public to visit and watch or actively participate in various sports competitions so as to achieve physical wellbeing, mental pleasure, and leisure and enjoyment ^{[4][5]}. As there are different ways the public participates in event tourism, event tourism can be broadly divided into two categories, including viewing event tourism and participating event tourism. Participatory event tourism is a way for tourists to travel to tourist destinations with participation in sport events as the primary purpose. These participatory sport events are usually grassroots and the participants are mostly recreational sport-oriented people who regularly engage in running and other sport activities, pursue an active lifestyle, and ultimately attain physical, psychological, and social benefits of sport participation.

The COVID-19 outbreak has brought tremendous stresses and interruptions to all areas of global societies and human lives, including but not limited to economic, social, political, and cultural contexts. At the same time, participatory sport tourism has become an important means of reducing anxiety, coping with stress, and dealing with mental health issues. Outdoor individual or small-group physical activities such as running, biking, hiking, and boating have become popular sport choices for people throughout the globe ^[6]. Since even before the pandemic, in recent years, road running, road races, and various forms of marathon-based participatory event tourism have been growing rapidly in China and other parts of the world. It has become a form of sports tourism with great market vitality and development potential, and has gradually changed the traditional tourism perception of tourists. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the viability of running activities and events by utilizing natural resources. With today's lasting high infection rate, lingering impacts for years to come, and getting prepared for future pandemic crisis, it would be prudent for researchers and professionals to effectively and efficiently operate outdoor individual sport events and use the events to help promote personal and social wellbeing.

In general, event sport tourism, sport tourism, and participatory sport event tourism are of progressive relationships from top to bottom. In essence, an event tourist is the most general concept that captures all individuals attending any form of events (e.g., cultural, political, professional, entertainment, sport). A sport tourist is an individual who attends a sport event as a participant of sport competitions or as a spectator to watch and witness the competition. A participatory sport tourist describes an individual who travels to participate in sport competitions that inevitably lead to some consumption behaviors as a visitor.

2. The Need for Understanding Value Co-Creation in Sport Tourism

With organizations increasing emphasis on the role of consumers, the concept of value co-creation has been applied in a variety of industries. However, to date, the application of value co-creation in the sport tourism context has not been given much attention. Tourism activities and tourist experience have a positive impact on various human life perspectives, such as individual and family wellbeing, social and cultural activities, and leisure and entertainment ^[7]. Recently, scholars have begun to adopt the value co-creation concept to advance a tourism research paradigm. Nina and Lene (2011) discussed the strategies, related countermeasures, and impacts of tourism value co-creation ^[8]. Zhang (2011) analyzed the process of co-production and co-creation of value, which divided the driving factors of tourist participation into external participation and endogenous participation ^[9]. Chouki and Peter (2013) combined tourism experience value co-creation and tourism marketing and proposed a new research framework for establishing a tourism experience network ^[10]. Liu (2016) proposed a value co-creation tourist management concept for scenic spots, including tourist preference, capacity, experience value, and tourist behavior, to build a tourist interaction platform to achieve management innovation and linkage and ultimately enhance the value of both parties ^[11]. Bao (2014) built a conceptual model of rural high-end tourism development based on the theory of co-creation of tourism experience value and demonstrated the positive correlation between tourism experience value and tourist satisfaction ^[12]. Elaine and Hyelin (2015) studied tourism experience co-creation and its impact on tourist behavior, tourist co-creation satisfaction, and tourist loyalty ^[13].

According to Cabiddu et al. ^[14], tourism scholars should incorporate the concept of value co-creation because of the following two reasons. First, value co-creation involves not just service providers and consumers, but also various stakeholders in the entire industry. Here, the roles of stakeholders become important because value is not created merely by presenting service to consumers. Value is co-created through the interactions among consumers and all stakeholders by integrating reciprocal resources and knowledge ^{[15][16]}. For example, sport event organizers have begun to digitalize their venues by adopting smartphone applications ^[17]. This allows spectators and stakeholders to get connected and co-create entertainment value with each other. Second, value co-creation allows for a thorough examination of the tourism industry's characteristics, such as the interaction of stakeholders and the core role of consumers. Therefore, the concept of value co-creation helps participatory sport tourism integrate the demands of the government, sport organizations, and consumers by considering consumers as an important part of the value creation process in sport tourism. Li ^[18] highlights the need for more personalized tourism experiences, for which the value co-creation concept can be used to incorporate tourists' pursuit of personalized sport tourism, experience, and desire to actively participate in tourism product development.

A key aspect of the value co-creation theory emphasizes that consumers are no longer the recipients of product compliance or the selection of simple comparisons of products. Their role has changed to become the creator of the product, integrating their own needs, knowledge, skills, and resources into the product. In the production process, if one is willing, one can participate in any link of product production. The degree of participation, the manner of participation, and the form of participation are flexible. In the value co-creation of participating sports products, due to the organization of the events and the participants being a group of people who are relatively fixed on a certain sport tourism sport, value co-creation moves the consumption part of sport tourists forward to attain objectives of tourism. Progressing from pure experience of participating in sport activities in a sport tourism destination, sport tourists can participate in the selection and design of sport activities in a sport tourism destination.

3. Conclusions

Similar to pandemics like the 1918–1919 influenza outbreak, COVID-19 could be a once-in-a-century crisis. COVID-19 has affected people of all demographics and locations throughout the world ^[19]. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought all business organizations of all industries and contexts fluctuation, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity ^[20]. Resource constraints are a hallmark notion of COVID-19 ^[19] and participatory sport tourism resources are no exception. While outdoor individual sports provide relatively safe options for people to engage in physical activities, having participants involved in value creation for organized sport events would be a wise initiative for event managers and marketers, particularly when resources are scarce ^[6]. Affected by the prevailing virus, there has been a cliff-like loss of sport tourism globally since 2020.

Over a short period of two years, the loss of sport tourism is unprecedented. From the perspective of sport tourism consumption recovery, development of popular ecological sport tourism destinations, utilization of outdoor and natural resources, cooperation of spectator and participatory sport events, and reconstruction of sport heritage programs would be reasonable options to boost the recovery and growth of sport tourism in the coming years. While the world is still battling the pandemic, efforts need to be made redesign, revise, and readjust sport tourism products and program, pay

attention to the value creation of participants in terms of both VCCP and VCCB, realize diversification and uniqueness of sport tourism products and services through high-quality programming and delivery, make careful and sufficient preparations for staging sport tourism events, and become better prepared for future epidemiological outbreaks. Other effective elements of better preparedness can include hallmark event development, destination image building, strengthening intellectual property, improving industrial support of environmental protection, ensuring consumer participation, promoting effective interactions within the industry, and forming an industrial culture that highly emphasizes value co-creation as the core components of sport tourism operations.

From merely having the ability to control whether to participate in the competition event to being able to contribute to detailed designs of sports tourism events, sports tourists have more voices and choices; in this process, their sense of experience and engagement have been strengthened, leading to a deeper level of participation. In the context of marathon tourism, event organizers should jointly create experience value through continuous interactions and dialogues with the event participants. The focus of attention should shift from the organization and operation of marathon tourism to interactive quality and an interactive environment for the participants to create a good experience. Prahalad (2014) pointed out that in value co creation, direct interaction with consumer groups is very important. Producers must understand consumers' inner thoughts as much as possible through rich dialogues and stimulate their feedback so that producers and consumers can jointly shape consumers' expectations and experiences. In the whole process of value creation, there can be multiple interaction points at any time and place, which means that all points of interaction between producers and consumers are very important for value creation, such as before, during, and after marathon tourism, and via online and offline procedures. The task of the event organizer is to create a strong consumer experience environment and focus on the quality of interactions ^[21]. Without a doubt, value co-creation is a useful concept that can help better understand tourists in participatory sport tourism.

First, the idea of providing standardized services might need to be reconsidered, and instead offering personalized products and services should be expanded. Tourists' cultural and educational backgrounds, work experiences, and expectations of event services are heterogeneous. Tourists who have a deeper understanding of events' products and services usually tend to pursue their uniqueness through event participation. Therefore, event organizers and operation managers should introduce creativity and innovation into event tourism and create environments and channels that encourage tourists to express their need for uniqueness to the fullest, thereby driving the participation and co-creation motivations forward.

Second, event tourists generally have a strong need for social interaction and want to interact with other stakeholders, help one another, and share event-related knowledge. Therefore, online and offline event communities should be established to promote communication between tourists and also organize a series of activities that enhance the tourists' sense of belonging, thereby satisfying their need for social interaction.

Third, event organizers should focus on creating memorable experiences for tourists and provide them with an "entertainment treasure box." The fast-paced lifestyles of modern society have increased people's stress levels, and thus the need to release life stress has intensified. As a leisure activity, event tourism has become an important channel for people to meet leisure and entertainment needs. Therefore, event organizers should pay considerable attention to usefulness, convenience, enjoyment, timeliness, responsiveness, and innovation aspects of event management and service provision processes. New technologies and methods should also be incorporated to satisfy tourists' needs for leisure and entertainment and to help tourists experience the pleasure of their participation fully.

Finally, event organizers should take the initiative and interact with tourists effectively to make the most of the positive effect of VCCP on in- and extra-role behaviors. According to the findings in the present study, in-role behaviors had a direct effect on the development of the event tourism industry, which is manifested as financial contributions. Extra-role behaviors play an important role in promoting event tourism and generating social value. Because of the importance of in- and extra-role behaviors that jointly influence the sustainability of event tourism, event managers should strive to create an environment and opportunity that encourage tourists to participate in VCCP.

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