



THE PREDICTORS OF SPORTS TOURISM INVOLVEMENT IN MALAYSIA: AN EXTREME SPORT OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Purpose of Study: Malaysian tourism sector has widened its scope by venturing into extreme sports tourism. With this new development, tourism opportunities are created and boosting the Malaysian tourism industry growth. The study highlights the development of extreme sports destination that closely related to international and tourists' involvement and preferences in Malaysia. The purpose of this paper is to determine the predictors of sports tourism involvement in Malaysia from the extreme sports perspective. Specifically, it is going to investigate the possible significant predictors that possibly influenced the international or local tourists' preferences in choosing Malaysia as their preferred extreme sports tourism destination. This study is restricted to international or local tourists who participated or going to participate in extreme sports activities in Malaysia.

Methodology: This study proposes a theoretical framework that is developed based on the review of past researches and literatures. We identified five factors that possibly influenced international tourists or local tourists to choose Malaysia as their extreme sports tourism destination simultaneously involved in such activities. Those predictors are event popularity and entertainment, economics (costs and expenses), facilities and infrastructures, social, and environmental impact.

Results: The proposed hypotheses predicted a significant and positive relationship exists between event popularity and entertainment, economics (costs and expenses), facilities and infrastructures, social, and environmental impact towards the tourist involvement and sports tourism development in Malaysia. For the future research, we proposed to further conduct an empirical analysis to test these hypotheses.

Implications/Applications: This study could help tourism sectors to explore opportunities for development particularly in the extreme sports sectors in Malaysia. This study is also useful for researchers, students, tourism operators, tourism sectors, government and society because it could increase the involvement of international tourist or local into the extreme sports activities in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Extreme Sports Tourism, Tourism Marketing, Tourism Involvement, Malaysia*

JEL Classification: *M10 Business Administration: General*

INTRODUCTION

The number of international tourists visited Malaysia has changed drastically for the past 12 years since 2001. The statistics by Tourism Malaysia in 2013 (Habibi, 2017; Pazil, 2018) recorded a 43% growth in income from 12.7 million in 2001 to 24.7 million in 2013. This statistics shows that the number of tourists visited Malaysia is consistently increasing. Romiti and Sarti (2016) described different levels of tourist engagement in participants between active tourist and passive tourists and most of the active tourists are engaged with sports tourism. Nevertheless, past research had failed to distinguish between active sports and extreme sports tourists (Brymer *et al.*, 2009). The Malaysian tourism sector has widened its scope by venturing into Extreme Sports Tourism (EST). With the availability of natural locations to perform all the extreme sports activities, more tourism opportunities are created with this new venture. Extreme sports have become a new attraction in tourism sectors which amplify the growth of the Malaysian tourism industry. Besides offering more job opportunities and act as an income generator, this newly found sector will strengthen Malaysia's status as the pearl of Asia. Furthermore, the development of this newest tourism sector brings positive effects towards the development of Malaysian economy. Extreme sports tourism sectors are currently contributed more than RM6 billion annually to the tourism industry. Therefore, Extreme Sports Tourism (EST) known as the best growing sectors in the tourism industry in Malaysia (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2013).

THE EXTREME SPORT TOURISM (EST)

This small part of the tourism sector is a part of Sports Tourism Industry (STI) around the world. In Nepal, the major contributors to the economics of the country generated from EST Sectors via the Everest Climbing Program (Moktan, 2017). In Malaysia, this sector is recently proliferating. The EST is defined as sports tourism activities which generally harsh and extreme in nature that attracted the involvement from local or international tourists (Brymer *et al.*, 2009; Moktan, 2017). This sport is considered risky and dangerous for some people (Brymer *et al.*, 2009). Thus, it requires special tactical skills and extra efforts from the participants to successfully perform the activities.

Types of Extreme Sport Tourism

All extreme sports activities under EST Sectors is categorized into three (3) main types which are land extreme sports, air extreme sports and water extreme sports. All extreme sports activities that were performed on the ground far from water and received participation from tourist (locally and internationally) are considered as Extreme Land Sports Tourism (ELST). The most popular ELST categories in Malaysia with high participation from local and international tourists are mount climbing, jungle trekking, rock climbing, martial arts, extreme caving, mounting running and motorcycle racing. On the other hand, all extreme sports activities that being performed above the ground, on air or high hanging elevation) is known as Extreme Air Sports Tourism (EAST). Among EAST categories that received high participation from local and international tourists in Malaysia are paragliding, parachuting, windsurfing flying foxing and building, antenna, span, and earth (cliff)jumping or better known as BASE Jumping. As for the Extreme Water Sports Tourism (EWST), all of its activities are those activities that were performed on water or underwater and received participation from tourist (locally and internationally). EWST categories in Malaysia are scuba diving, water rafting, beach kite surfing, beach windsurfing, kayaking and tubing.

Characteristics of Extreme Sport Tourism (EST)

The EST activities required extra elements that differ from the ordinary sports activities (Brymer *et al.*, 2009). The participants in those activities usually are well experienced and had excellent health (Moktan, 2017; Saeed and Kayani, 2018). Generally, all EST activities are considered as sports tourism. However, not all sports activities can be categorized as extreme sports tourism. Brymer *et al.* (2009) and Moktan (2017) highlighted seven major characteristics of EST that significantly distinguish it from ordinary sport tourism activities. They are extremely challenged the mental and physical of the participants which require extra efforts and energies to successfully perform the activities. All activities under EST are harsh and normally turned the participants to be extremely exhaustive. Therefore, proper preparations need to be made prior to the actual event to avoid unwanted incidents. Complete equipment, medications and training are compulsory if the participants want to enjoy these adventurous sports. Furthermore, the EST activities generally riskier than other types of tourism sport activities. High elevation, deep water and rugged landscape exposed participants to the risks of injuries and could contribute to the fatal accident. This high risk element made these EST activities unique and only able to be performed by participants with ample technical skills as well as good tactical skills. The EST activities are also considered dangerous yet adventurous. Therefore, it needs to be performed according to proper processes, procedures and guidelines with the assistance of certified or licensed instructors, trainers or guiders. Ignoring these will turn these extreme activities into a life threaten activities (Nezakati *et al.*, 2013).

FACTORS INFLUENCED TOURISTS INVOLVEMENT

The participation and involvement in the sports tourism particularly in the EST activities is believed to be influenced by various antecedents. Past researchers and literature found various predictors that contributed to the burgeoning of this sector. Although most of the research conducted was in the western setting, however, it's also applicable to East-Asia environment. Nevertheless, only a few predictors are important and possibly influenced the tourists' involvements in the EST activities in Malaysia (Burgan and Mules, 1992; Delamere, 2001; Chalip *et al.*, 2003; Fredline *et al.*, 2003; Richards, 2013).

Event popularity and entertainment

Based on Richards (2013) the impacts of the event popularity and entertainment become the factors that influenced people to involve in sports tourism. The popularity of the event will become an attraction to lure people to come and participate in any EST activities. This impact was found positive and significant to the intention of people engaging in extreme sports programs (Richards, 2013). The wide publicity of the event as well as the involvement of popular public figures or world athletes could increase the interests of tourists to get involved into any sports event (Nyikana *et al.*, 2014; Zhang, 2018). Furthermore, the special ceremony to celebrate athletes of extreme sports event with the appearance of popular celebrities in the concert, lucky draw, exhibition or parades increase the interest of tourists to participate (Tichaawa, 2017; Sandy, 2018). The entertainment is considered by tourists as the ceremony to celebrate their success in facing all the difficulties and hurdles throughout the activities. The tiredness and exhaustiveness seem paid through the celebration. These are good examples to explain the antecedent. All these bring huge impacts in influencing and attracting tourists (locally or internationally) to get involved in such an extreme sports event. Therefore, this paper predicted that event popularity and entertainment could influence the involvement of tourists in the EST activities in Malaysia.

H₁: There is a positive and significant relationship between event popularity and entertainment and sports tourism involvement in Malaysia.

Economic (costs and expenses)

Malaysia is one of the nations that allocated yearly funds to support various tourism activities under its visit Malaysia program including the extreme sports activities. This allocation of funds is in the form of sponsorship and financial supports to organize such extreme sport program. This important assistance from the government made Malaysia among the most affordable EST spots in Asia. Burgan and Mules (1992) describe that economic (costs and expenses) is one of the

factors that give the impact to people who involved in sport tourism. They found the strongly positive significant relationship between both factors. An impact from low cost expenses actually influences another sector to growth such as construction, export and import activities, and external investment. The greater value of European and American dollars against Malaysian Ringgit also contributed to the increase numbers of international participants in the EST activities organized particularly in Malaysia. Thus, having the elements of affordability and low cost seems crucial to attract more tourists to get involved in the EST programs in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper predicted that the cost and expenses could influence the involvement of tourists in the EST activities in Malaysia.

H₂: There is a positive and significant relationship between economic (costs and expenses) impact and sports tourism involvement in Malaysia

Facilities and infrastructures

The public facilities become one of the factors that influenced people to involve in extreme sports events and activities (Delamere, 2001). Delamere (2001) claimed that public facilities and infrastructures have positive and significant relationship in influencing people to involve in the sport events. For example, the event organizer provides public transportation from the airport to the event location, accommodation, food and beverage, parking lot, securities, souvenir booth, tour guides, location maps, and medical assistances are important to international and local tourists during their involvement in any extreme sports programs organized in Malaysia. The availability of good sports facilities and public infrastructures will ease the daily activities of participants while away from home and family simultaneously reduces the daily expenses of tourist while staying in the country (Chalip *et al.*, 2003). Thus, having the elements of infrastructure and facilities seems crucial to attract more tourists to get involved in the EST programs in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper predicted that the facilities and infrastructures could influence the involvement of tourists in the EST activities in Malaysia.

H₃: There is a positive and significant relationship between facilities impact and sports tourism involvement in Malaysia.

Social Impacts

The social impacts also will trigger people's attention to contribute (in the form of participation) to an extreme sports event particularly the programs that associated with the charity or social responsibility program. International or local tourists prefer to get involve into the extreme programs that have the elements of environmental and societal protection. Instead of participating into the extreme activities, they also will be able to get to know the life of society nearby the venue of the program. Organizers usually will put such program of helping the local society in the event tentative. This attracts the interest and desires of tourists not only involve in the extreme sports but also help the nearby or local society. The society can get a lot of benefits from such programs. Fredline *et al.* (2003) concur that social impact has positive significant on the involvement of tourists into any tourism activities organized by any country. It is a current trend nowadays where any extreme sport activities conducted will be blended with the element of social responsibility. Thus, having the elements of social responsibility seems crucial to attract more tourists to get involved in the EST programs in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper predicted that the social impacts could influence the involvement of tourists in the EST activities in Malaysia.

H₄: There is a positive and significant relationship between social impact and sports tourism involvement in Malaysia.

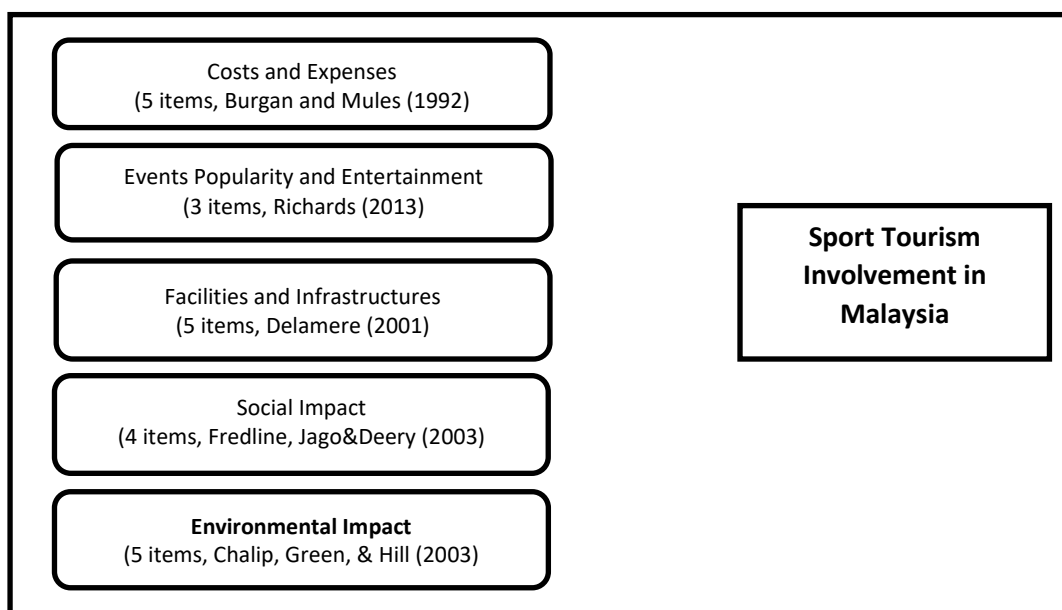


Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework

Environmental impact

The environmental impact is one of the important factors that influenced and attracted people to get involved in the extreme sports activities. As a human being, we need to protect our environment. Therefore, any event that may harm or destroy the environment will not be attractive to the public, for example, event that may require deforestation. It means that sports event should in line with environmental sanitation which is improving or maintaining the standard of basic environmental through the protection of natural habitats of flora and fauna in the venue of the extreme sports event. Organizers who organize any extreme sports activities with the spirits of environmental protection usually received high participation from local and international tourists (Hamdan and Yusof, 2014). This is because, instead of achieving dreams to fulfil the extreme desire through the extreme activities, the participants also want to protect the environment. Thus, having the elements of environmental protection seems crucial to attract more tourists to get involved in the EST programs in Malaysia. Therefore, this paper predicted that the social impacts could influence the involvement of tourists in the EST activities in Malaysia.

H₅: There is a positive and significant relationship between environmental impact and sports tourism involvement in Malaysia.

PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Proposed Items Development

In this study, all independent variables (exogenous) will be operational using multiple items on six points Likert scale that ranges from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree”. The neutral point has been deleted from the scale to avoid bias and unresponsive respondent. All items were adopted from the past related literature due to their high reliability values. The source and reliability values of all items are as follows:

Table 1: Items and Source of Items Development

Constructs	Source	Cronbach Alpha
Economic (Costs and Expenses)	Burgan and Mules (1992)	0.777
Events Popularity and Entertainment	Richards (2013)	0.8107
Facilities and Infrastructures	Delamere (2001)	0.7409
Social Impacts	Fredline <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.8119
Environmental Impacts	Chalip <i>et al.</i> (2003)	0.7953
Tourism Involvement	Havitz and Dimanche (1990)	0.7953

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper discussed the antecedents that could be the predictors of sports tourism involvement in Malaysia which also believed to be the reasons for its development. All the predictions and assumptions are based on the extreme sports overview. One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from this study is the need for Malaysia to leverage the available resources such as new destination that can be used for extreme sports. This could give more choice of locations for sport tourists to come to Malaysia. Furthermore, Malaysia should maintain or improve all the tourism infrastructures and facilities in order to stay attractive as the EST spots in the world. The government under the Ministry of Tourism should also monitor the organization of any sports tourism event to make sure that those programs have the social responsibility elements as well as environmental protection elements. This study could help tourism sectors to grow and simultaneously explore more opportunities for development particularly in the extreme sports sectors in Malaysia. It also will help to increase the number of visitors (international tourists or local tourists) to Malaysia and choose this country as their preferred extreme sports tourism destination. This study is useful for researchers, students, tourism operators, tourism sectors, government and society because it could stimulate the involvement of international tourist or local into the extreme sports activities in Malaysia. Therefore will help to develop the local tourism sectors which will be benefited all parties mentioned above. In other words is to develop the extreme sports sectors in our country and organize more extreme sports programs to encourage tourists to come to our place. The implementations also will benefit the rising of our local business. By understanding and managing the effect of the tourism sector, it helps contribute to the growth of the national economy. Ministries involved need to seriously consider the need to develop this extreme sports side. The ministries need to encourage a large target audience and convince them to stay longer in Malaysia. It is highly recommended to future researchers to conduct an empirical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses and to identify the strengths of relationship between the predictors and the sports tourism involvement. The future researchers also could enhance the model by analyzing and testing the relationship between the sports tourism involvement and tourism development.

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