Examining the Effects of Tourism Attraction and Event Satisfaction on Behavioral Intention of a Road Race in a Small Town

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The number of road races has increased more than 1,000% in the past decade and reached the record high of 740 races in 2015 in Taiwan. However, like the trends in the United States (Running USA, 2016), runner population and the number of races are gradually approaching a maturity stage with slowing-down growth rates in Taiwan (Ko, 2016; Running Biji 2016). To survive in this competitive industry, race organizers need to identify the major determinants of runners’ behavioral intention, and develop appropriate strategies. Road races were frequently used to promote the host destination by attracting a large number of runners and tourists (Chalip & Costa, 2006). However, whether this strategy does the same work in the countryside, less-developed, low-attraction small towns was rarely examined in previous studies. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the effects of attraction and event satisfaction on runners’ behavioral intention in a small town road race event in Taiwan, and wish to answer the organizers whether promoting the tourism attraction or focusing on satisfying the runners would have a better effect on runners’ intention to participate again.

A total of 1,776 runners of the 2015 Tianzhung Marathon participated in the present study, including 221 finished the paper-based questionnaire for the pilot study and 1,446 finished the web-based survey as the formal sample. Tianzhung is a small town without specific tourism attraction in middle Taiwan where planting rice is the major economic activity. The capacity of the 2015 Tianzhung Marathon was 15,000 with three competing distance of marathon, half-marathon and 8.3K, and the registration became full within seconds.

The questionnaire consisted demographics, tourism attraction, satisfaction and behavioral intention. All items were scored on the 5-point Likert scale, except demographics. The pilot study examined the reliability and factor structures, and then the modified questionnaire was used to collect the formal data. The exploratory factor analysis in the pilot study extracted two factors of satisfaction as tangible environment and personal service, and this factor structure was further confirmed (CFI = .976; PCFI = .678; TLI = .966; RMSEA = .063) with the formal data. Attraction and behavioral intention were also confirmed as unidimensional.

More runners were male (67.1%), age 30-39 (46.1%), unmarried (50.9%), from northern Taiwan (47.4%) or local (41.1%), with a collegiate degree (63.4%), white collar (41.8%), and had monthly salary USD 1,000-1,600 (40.0%). Three highest rated satisfaction items were “Local residents’ attitude to the runners” (M = 4.75, SD = .48), “supply” (M = 4.61, SD = .58), “medal, certification and souvenirs” (M = 4.50, SD = .63); while “planning and managing of the route” (M = 4.04, SD = .87) was rated the lowest. The highest rated attraction item was “I like the local culture and humanity” (M = 4.35, SD = .66); while “I want to have a tour or some sightseeing nearby in this area” (M = 3.81, SD = .81) was the lowest. Runners’ behavioral intention were generally high with “I would recommend others to participate in the Tianzhung Marathon” (M = 4.58, SD = .63) as the highest item and “I would like to participate in the Tianzhung Marathon every year in this season” (M = 4.28, SD = .89) as the lowest.

T-test, ANOVA and MANOVA were used to examine the differences of attraction, satisfaction and behavioral intention by demographics. The results indicated: (a) runners who were female, younger, half-marathon and 8.3K runners, had lower monthly income, member of running clubs and registered with a group rated attraction higher; (b) runners who were from local and 8.3K runners rated tangible environment satisfaction higher; and (c) runners who were from local, blue collar, running experience less than one year and half-marathon and 8.3K runners had higher behavioral intention.

A control model was conducted to examine the effects of attraction and satisfaction on behavioral intention with AMOS 21.0. The model did not have any offending estimates, and fitted the present data (CFI = .97, PCFI = .77,
TLI = .96, RMSEA = .60). Tangible environment satisfaction, personal service satisfaction and attraction all have significant positive effects on behavioral intention, and tangible environment was the most important determinant (γ = .447, p = .000), followed by personal service (γ = .18, p = .003) and attraction (γ = .10, p = .003). Race organizers should first focus on creating a satisfying environment (i.e., route design, traffic control, venue planning, competition managing).

For the small towns with low tourism attraction, the present study suggested that as long as the organizer can create a satisfying race, runner may come, again. Marathon runners rated lower on tangible environment satisfaction, attraction and behavioral intention. These differences might be because of that marathon runners experienced the full route (which was not experienced by the half-marathon and 8.3K runner), emphasize the essentials of the race, and pay less attention on tourism attractions. Managers, especially of the events in which marathons are the most participants, need to be aware of these differences and planning the preparations accordingly. Future study shall examine the equivalence of the SEM models across marathoners and other runners in order to fully understand runners in different distance groups.

Besides, based on the general agreement of the positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction, the present study applied formative model to measure satisfaction. The CFA results suggested that the factor structure of satisfaction consisted of two level-one factors (i.e., tangible environment and personal service) fitted better than unidimensional models (i.e., level-one and level-two). Future study shall continue to examine the appropriateness of combining service quality and measuring satisfaction in a formative model.