Chapter 41

Sports Tourism Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Research dealing with the motives of sports tourists from a marketer’s perspective remains underdeveloped. This chapter describes the phenomenon of sports tourism and aspires to examine with an empirical study the motives of winter and summer sports tourists. The first sample (n=339) was comprised of active as well as passive summer sports tourists. The second sample (n=477) only focused on active participants being winter sports tourists. Both samples were sharing a particular profile of consumers: The respondents were predominantly male, medium-aged, well-educated, and affluent. Cluster analysis based on the items of involvement and strengths of motivation revealed the clusters Casual and Committed. The Committed cluster showed a higher level of involvement, whereas sport motivation differed between the two clusters. Implications for marketing are presented.

INTRODUCTION

A buzz is made about living in a globalized world in which every individual is flexible and mobile, looking for one’s identity. This societal phenomenon is often referred to by journalists and it is also increasingly prevalent in academia (e.g., Williams & Shaw, 2011). Mobility and identity play a key role in sports tourism – as also acknowledged by Higham and Hinch (2009) who indicated that 1) tourism is an important manifestation of contemporary mobility; and 2) sport activity can function as personal narrative to express an individual’s identity. In addition, defining sports tourism, Weed and Bull (2004) concluded that it consists of a triad of activity, people and place. This triad is closely linked to identity (people) and mobility (place). The triad implies that different entities need to be taken into consideration when analyzing sports tourism.

Sports tourism includes active and/or passive participation (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2004). Thus, sports can be actively performed while being on vacations (e.g., skiing holidays) or
Sports are watched, (e.g., attending a major sport event like the Olympic Games). Sports tourism consumers are consequently very heterogeneous, which depends to some extent on the purpose of their journey.

This chapter will present important themes and trends to be applied when conducting marketing for sports tourism. The importance of involvement (e.g., Funk, 2008) and motivation (McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002) for the sports tourism experience will be outlined. In particular, a brief overview about current trends relating to experience research and sports and serious leisure will be presented. These will be used to study and segment consumer profiles of active and passive sports tourists. Thereby, research from sports tourists taking part in a mass participation event in cross country skiing \((n=482)\) on the one hand and sports tourists watching a beach volleyball event \((n=339)\) on the other hand will serve as examples for active and passive sport tourists and analyzed. The focus will lie on deriving practical implication for sports tourism marketing and their link to theory.

**SPORTS TOURISM**

In the last two decades the sports tourism sector has developed into a significant contributor to the economy (Daniels & Norman, 2003). As a symbiosis of the most important industrial sector worldwide, tourism, and the most important leisure activity, sports, it established a niche market with constantly rising growth rates (Hudson, 2003). Accordingly, academics increasingly paid attention. The sheer number of studies dealing with different aspects of this topic has increased in the last twenty years. Researchers from both domains, sport science and tourism science, after having answered the question of what actually constitutes sports tourism, just started their enquiry of the effects yielded by this unique relationship (Gibson, 2005; Weed, 2005).

It can be argued that the tourism sector’s rise occurred, on the one hand, because this relatively new field of research has just started to describe the underlying phenomenon and, on the other hand, that people had already traveled to sport events in previous times. Hinch and Higham (2011) deemed this progression to be driven by economic and political forces and the change of social attitudes and values. Therefore, the concept of experience economy developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998) has to be considered. It describes how consumers are not valuing purchases for their rational utility, but rather for their emotional and motivational perceptions that are evoked by and associated with the product. This principle is likewise applicable to the selling of services, which appears to be of higher relevance for the context of sports tourism. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argued that experiences do represent a real, tangible item similar to any other good, service or commodity. People are exchanging valued resources like money, time or physical safety for motivational and emotional experiences that are staged by the organizations offering the respective service. In respect to sports tourism, the tourism provider is staging the experience as part of the offered service.

Further, they distinguished two components within the aggregate experience: First, the consumer must be transformed from a passive observer into an active, engaged participant, thereby enhancing experiences. Second, the consumer has to be sufficiently immersed in the experience so as to make it feel authentic to the greatest extent possible, requiring a certain connection between the customer and the event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). For the sports tourism sector both dimensions are relevant.

According to a popular definition provided by Standeven and de Knop (1998), sports tourism may be described as “all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organised way for non-commercial or business/commercial reasons, that necessitate travel away from home and work locality” (p. 12).