

TRIATHLON: A SPECTATOR SPORT?

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Abstract keywords

Triathlon, Spectators, Sport tourism, Motivation, Socialization

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The triathlon of the 2012 London Olympic Games ended with a great success, and hundreds of thousands of the spectators filled Hyde Park. The BBC has quoted 300,000 as the figure for the men's race, but this doesn't include the large numbers at Live Sites around London and the rest of the country. Thus triathlon has a possibility of becoming the spectator sport, but there has been little research conducted on spectator behavior at triathlon competitions. In Japan, 275 official triathlon competitions were held every year and many spectators are visiting the competitions as a sport tourist. Sport tourists are visitors to a destination for the purpose of participating, viewing, or celebrating sport (Turco, Riley, and Swart, 2002). Therefore, from a viewpoint of sport tourism marketing, it is important for event owners and managers to understand spectator behavior in triathlon. Furthermore, intent of the spectators to participate in triathlon is a major concern for Japan Triathlon Union which strategically aims to increase the number of competition registration. The objectives of this study were two-fold: (1) Analyze the behavioral characteristics including demographics and motivation of spectators as sport tourist. (2) Investigate the possibility of the spectators turned to the triathlon participants.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

In this study, quantitative data were collected from spectators at 2012 ITU World Triathlon Series Yokohama which was held in the city of Yokohama, 29 September, 2012. Throughout the last several decades, theorists have attempted to identify the motivations of sport fans and spectators. Among them, Matsuoka & Fujimoto (2002) developed an instrument designed to measure ten different motives of sport fans. These are: achievement, aesthetic, drama, escape, knowledge, entertainment, skills, social interaction, team affiliation, and family. However, because of the unique characteristics of triathlon (not a team but an individual competes, ranking is more important than the recording, spectators do not buy a ticket, and so on) a new measure should be designed. The motive measure used by this study was developed from the modification of the scale used by the previous triathlon survey conducted by Harada, et.al. (2010) and Matsui, et.al. (2011) and 32 items to measure the motivation of spectators of triathlon was developed. The items added reflect the feature of a triathlon competition. These are: "It is pleasant to watch three sports simultaneously", "A powerful race can be seen at hand", and "It is impressed by a high-level race". Furthermore, in order to grasp the motive as a sport tourist, the following three items were added: "It can learn about the culture of the area", "Pleasure of a visit of a historical sightseeing area", "It becomes a good opportunity to visit various places". A seven-point rating scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) were administered to all participants and data were collected from 427 individuals. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to confirm the validity of the factor structure of spectator motivation and the relationship between five motivational factors and the intention to participate in triathlon were analyzed.

Results, discussion and implications

The average age of the sample was 44.1 years; male-to-female ratio was 62.1% and 37.5%. Spectators who are currently participating in the triathlon competition is 29.3% (n=115), and the rest was non-participants (n=277). For questions about the intention to participate in triathlon competition, 41.2% of non-participants answered either "want to do very much" or "want to do a little". The three largest constraints to participate in triathlon were "no time", "expensive", and "not good at swimming". From exploratory factor analysis by maximum likelihood estimation and promax rotation, five motivational factors were extracted. These are "competition", "friends/family", "aesthetic", "tourism", "achievement". In adopting these factors, a cumulative contribution ratio of 61.4% was obtained using eigenvalue of 1.00 or more and a factor loading of .40 or more as a baseline. A better understanding of spectator motives promises to help marketers develop better communications with their consumer base via promotions.

Relationship between intention to participate in triathlon and spectator motivation revealed that higher the intention to participate in triathlon, a significantly higher factor scores of "achievement", "aesthetic", "competitive levels". This result indicated that spectators who are highly motivated to participate in triathlon understand the essence of the competition, beauty of the race, and the performance of the elite triathletes.

Conclusions

The analyses of the collected data show that spectator motivation of triathlon competitions consist of five factors. Among them, “achievement” and “tourism” are two factors reflecting the characteristic of the triathlon event. For the triathlon spectator, the image of the tourist destination of the venue is a strong motive factor; it is important for event organizer to consider the tourism attractiveness at the venue to increase the number of participant. The results of this study also suggested that almost half of the triathlon spectator is a potential participant. Therefore, triathlon spectators are more likely to become participants, if some of three constraint factors (swim, cost and time) were removed. In this study, the possibility of spectator’s socialization into a triathlon was also suggested. `

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