

Exploring The Impact Of Social Worlds And Travel Conditions On Flow-On Tourism From Active Sport Events

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Aim of the research

The purpose of the study was to investigate flow on tourism and repeat visitation from an active sport event based on social world immersion and travel conditions. The research questions guiding this study were: (1) Does flow on tourism differ by social world group membership? (2) Does flow on tourism differ based on travel conditions? (3) Does social world immersion and event satisfaction influence intentions to return to the event? and (4) Does social world immersion and event satisfaction influence intentions to return to the host location for other tourist activities?

Literature review

Generally, sport tourism research is primarily concerned with understanding tourism stimulated from an event(s) as the associated visitor activity is essential to determining the value to the destination. The term flow-on tourism is used to describe additional visitor activity beyond the event itself, such as a visit to a museum and dining at restaurants (Taks, Chalip, Green, Kesenne & Martyn, 2009). As the endurance sport event sector experiences continued growth, researchers have explored what drives active sport event participation (Du, Jordan & Funk, 2015) and tourism (Buning & Gibson, 2016). Scholarly work on active sport tourism has explored motives, constraints, and travel behavior/patterns, as well as destination attributes. Buning and Gibson (2016) proposed that active sport event travelers progress through a career-like pattern of involvement and commitment over time termed the active-sport-event travel career, which can be determined with the concept of social worlds.

Social worlds is the idea that individuals develop and maintain a subculture related to an activity and become highly identified to a specific subgroup's unique set of norms, values, beliefs, and behavior that distinguishes them from others (Unruh, 1980). As an individual becomes more immersed into a social world, he/she progresses through four distinct social types: outsiders, occasionals, regulars, and insiders (see Unruh 1980).

Researchers have suggested that future studies explore social worlds at sport events that appeal to a variety of participants and the tourism intentions of active sport athletes. Researchers should also examine level of commitment and skill progression while evaluating the role of travel conditions in travel decisions. Travel conditions are circumstances related to a specific trip such as travel with non-event participants (e.g., spouse, children). Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by better understanding the influence of social worlds for runners at an event that provides a range of distance options for a variety of runner types and skill levels.

Method

Through a partnership with a major running festival in a large US city, surveys were distributed to participants following the event. The instrument included 11-items that measured travel-related behavior (adapted from Taks et al., 2009) and 4-items that measured social world immersion (Gawhiler & Havitz, 1998), and demographic items. A total of 3,924 usable responses were recorded which included 2,219 non-resident visitors.

Results

Analysis consisted of reliability testing, descriptives, analysis of variance, and regression. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed significant differences between flow-on tourism activities for both social world membership ($F(15, 6168) = 3.56, p < .001$) and travel conditions ($F(18, 6591) = 4.96, p < .001$). Two linear regressions explored the influence of social world and event satisfaction on intention to return to the event and to revisit the city. The first model statistically significantly predicted likelihood to return to the event, $F(2, 3481) = 464.443, p < .001$, accounting for 21% of the variation in behavior (adj. $R^2 = 21\%$). Event satisfaction predicted a return to the event, but a higher level of social world immersion predicted an unlikely return. The second model was statistically significant and predicted likelihood to return to the city, $F(1, 2032) = 56.177, p < .001$, accounting for 5.2% of the variation in behavior (adj. $R^2 = 5.2\%$). Similarly, event satisfaction predicted a return visit to the city, but those with higher immersion in social worlds are unlikely to return.

Discussion and conclusions

The results indicate individuals' social world membership and travel conditions effects flow on tourism as both the type of travel group and social world group differed based on tourism activity surrounding the event. Further, social world and event satisfaction predicted repeat intentions for both the destination and event, which suggests that as individuals become more immersed in a social world, the less likely they are to return to compete in an event. As a result, event planners are able to segment active event participants based on the respective value created by flow-on tourism and develop targeted strategies to improve repeat visitation and participation.

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