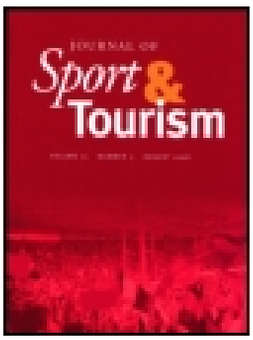

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Exploring sport participants' event and destination choices

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between destination and event elements and an individual's motivation to travel for sport events. Investigators surveyed participants who were planning to travel or had recently travelled to at least one running, cycling, or triathlon event in the current competitive race season. Data were analysed using exploratory factor analysis, regression, cross-tabulation, and ANOVA. The findings provide empirical evidence that travel behaviours vary by athlete type (runner, triathlete, and cyclist). The results of this study not only add to the push/pull theoretical framework but also provide strong practical implications for both event managers and destination marketers to better package destination attributes and event elements specific to athlete type.

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Destination sport events; active sport tourism; destination racing; motivation; event and destination attributes

Introduction

Over the past few decades, individuals travelling for passive and active sport involvement have dramatically increased in total numbers (Delpy, 1998; Gibson, 2003 ; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012). A factor in this growth is the increased interest in individual sports such as running, triathlon, and cycling. From 1990 to 2013, running events have experienced a 300% growth, with consistent progression over the last 25 years across all running distances until the most recent 9% decline in 2015 (Running USA, 2015). Research indicates that much of this decline affected the obstacle course events, but half marathon and marathon distances show continued development (Running USA, 2015). According to USA Triathlon (USAT, 2014), the sport has sustained consistent growth in participation (nearly 300%) over the last two decades and has experienced a record participation in 2013. Since 2007, the number of USAT-sanctioned triathlons has increased by 185% with the shorter sprint distances remaining the most popular. Finally, USA Cycling (2014) reported that as of 2013, participation memberships were up 16.4% from 2008 and sanctioned cycling events were up nearly 92% over the last 10 years. These smaller scale sport events provide researchers with a context to develop a stronger understanding of active sport tourism participants' behaviours (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010).

Hemmatinezhad, Nia, and Kalar (2010) suggested that to capitalise on sport tourism's growth and begin to offer better explanations as to why individuals select certain events, researchers should develop a stronger understanding of sport tourists' choices.

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Prior research outlines motivations associated with the choice to visit a destination (Dellaert, Borgers, & Timmermans, 1997; Lue, Crompton, & Stewart, 1996; Pavlovich, 2003) and motives to participate in events (Getz & McConnell, 2011; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005). However, few studies evaluate the two simultaneously. Largely missing from this research line is how motivation, sport event elements, and destination assets interact to inform active sport tourism decisions.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how the pull factors of the destination (e.g. location, attractions, optional destination bundles, etc.) and the event elements (e.g. distance, type, challenging course, expo, location, etc.) attract (push factors) active sport event participants. For this study, we evaluated both active sport tourists who are planning to attend or recently attended their 'A' (primary or most important) event rather than those who have attended a specific event, which is common in this line of research. The secondary purpose is to explore how athletes are motivated based on athlete type (i.e. cyclist, runner, and triathletes) to determine if these groups are motivated differently or possess common preferences for destination or event elements. In doing so, the results may provide destination marketers and event managers, among others, consumer behaviour information to improve their marketing practices and event designs to capitalise on the growth of these three sports. Additionally, this research study will broaden our general understanding of the factors influencing active sport tourists' selections.

Review of literature

Push/pull factors

Tourism researchers have long explored the motives that drive tourists to travel. The concept of push/pull factors in tourism has been widely examined within several tourism contexts (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Caber & Albayrak, 2016; Crompton, 1979; Crompton & McKay, 1997; Dann, 1977). Largely intrinsic, the push factors explain a desire for escape, rest, adventure, social interaction, and so on, in travel, while the extrinsic, or pull factors, drive tourists to choose destinations based on the attractiveness of the location (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996; Crompton, 1979; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). The two forces interact with one another as the pull factors of the destination respond to and reinforce the push factors of the individual (Dann, 1981). In the last 15 years, sport tourism research has begun to focus on what drives specific groups to travel, whether it is rural sport tourism (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Robertson, Newland, & Darby, 2014), adventure sport (Caber & Albayrak, 2016; Costa & Chalip, 2005; Fluker & Turner, 2000), or endurance sport tourism (Aicher & Newland, 2017), and specifically in cycling (Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010), running (Lough, Pharr, & Geurin, 2016), and triathlon (Kennelly, Moyle, & Lamont, 2013).

Crompton (1979) identified nine motivations that underpin tourists' decisions in the selection of a destination. The socio-psychological motives included escape, exploration, relaxation, prestige, enhanced relationships, and social interactions. The final two elements of education and novelty provided an influence by the destination (the 'pull' factor) and together were deemed the 'cultural' category (Baloglu & Uysal, 1996). Uysal and Jurowski (1994) suggested that push/pull factors interacted in a reciprocal nature and that by better understanding the interaction of these intrinsic/extrinsic forces,

destination marketers could create more successful bundling of these elements to attract varied tourists. Of interest is that the researchers found that sport motivations play an important role in the selection of cities and resort areas and when analysed as the dependent variable, there was a strong relationship with entertainment and environment (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Similarly, in this current study, we seek to better understand how sport influences the destination choices of the athletes.

Motivations

A motive is an internal or external factor that directs a person's behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Murray, 1964) and, as discussed with push/pull factors, is critical to understanding why people travel. Dann (1981) defined tourism motivation as 'a meaningful state of mind, which adequately disposes an actor or a group of actors to travel' (p. 205). Tourism behaviour is best understood when considering two motivational forces: approach (seeking) and avoidance (escape). Meaning, travel provides intrinsic rewards *and* allows one to leave behind their regular routine (Iso-Ahola, 1982).

While Iso-Ahola (1982) considered the two interpersonal and personal dimensions (approach/avoidance), Beard and Ragheb (1983), adapting the leisure motivation research at that time (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Crandall, 1980; London, Crandall, & Fitzgibbons, 1977; and Tinsley, Barrett, & Kass, 1977), created a scale that captured a deeper understanding of leisure behaviour. In doing so, they created the Leisure Motivation Scale, which incorporated four motive categories that drive leisure and tourist behaviour: intellectual (i.e. learn, explore, discover), social (i.e. interpersonal interactions, friendship), competence-mastery (i.e. achieve, compete, challenge), and stimulus-avoidance (i.e. escape, Ryan & Glendon, 1998). This has been further developed by Pearce and Lee (2005) who suggested that a core of travel motivation extends this work to include novelty, self-actualisation, stimulation, and self-development. The motivation research has since developed further to consider the travel career trajectory of athletes as they become more involved with their sport participation (Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Getz, 2008; Getz & McConnell, 2011).

Further examination of leisure motivation is present where much of the research focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in sport tourism (Aicher, Karadakis, & Eddosary, 2015; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012), which align with the push/pull framework. For example, researchers have shown that extrinsic motivation occurs when individuals participate in externally driven activities or for reasons outside of their control – such as receiving a reward or gaining social capital (Amorose & Horn, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2007). This aligns very closely to Beard and Ragheb's (1983) competence-mastery category, which identifies competition and challenge motives of the leisure activity. Furthermore, these extrinsic forces act on an individual to create a 'pull' to the destination or event of choice (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Ritchie et al., 2010; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Alternatively, intrinsic motivation is considered an individual's personal desire to do things (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These internal forces are engendered by the motivation to experience stimulation, accomplish, and to learn (Vallerand, Blais, Briere, & Pelletier, 1989). Furthermore, it drives athletes to want to participate to have fun, for the thrill of competing (Getz & McConnell, 2014), or to challenge one's competence (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012). These intrinsic forces are present in the four categories of Beard and

Ragheb's (1983) motivations and create forces that 'push' the individual to a destination or event of choice (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977).

Athletes can be motivated to participate in a sport event for several reasons, including the unique qualities of the event that differentiate it from others in the marketplace, or the event's image and reputation (Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012; Lough et al., 2016). While others choose events for the challenge of the course or competitive field (Buning & Gibson, 2016b; Getz & McConnell, 2014; Lough et al., 2016), to improve skill or fitness (Lynch & Dibben, 2016), the prize money or gifts, and the cost of the event (|Buning & Gibson, 2016a, 2016b). Many could be pulled to the destination/environment because of the scenery, culture, entertainment, and the natural conditions associated with the location (Aicher & Newland, 2017; Bourdeau, Corneloup, & Mao, 2002; Crompton, 1979; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010), or the overall destination's attractiveness to the sport tourist (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

On the other hand, the value to an individuals' social identity or their membership within a group drives participation (Aicher & Brenner, 2015). These identities may form stronger, more valued social identities than other demographic characteristics (Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Green & Jones, 2005). In some, competition is the motive (Lamont & Kennelly, 2012; Lynch & Dibben, 2016). McDonald, Milne, and Hong (2002) defined the competition motive as the desire to enter a rivalry or event to determine one's ability compared to others. Emotion motives can include the excitement, enjoyment, and self-fulfilment individuals gain from participating in sport tourism (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010) and common factors involved with it such as escapism and nostalgia (Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Fairley, 2003). Finally, many are motivated to learn about or explore a new location (Getz & McConnell, 2014; Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2008), as well as learn more about the sporting activity (Aicher et al., 2015; Aicher & Brenner, 2015). How these factors interact with autonomous (i.e. intrinsic or push) and controlled (i.e. extrinsic or pull) motivation suggests that individuals' internal drive to further enhance their ability, challenge themselves with a difficult course or competitive field, and enhance their sport identity through participation may be considered 'push' factors (Aicher & Brenner, 2015). Alternatively, destination/environmental and event reputations can engender greater controlled motivation, as these factors create a 'pull' to the destination or event, which will be discussed below.

Destination and event elements

The destination's attributes may create a source of extrinsic motivation (Aicher & Brenner, 2015), serving as a pull factor (Ritchie et al., 2010). Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) defined destination elements as the scenery, places, culture, and location, while Bourdeau et al. (2002) suggested 'the diverse natural conditions, which do not readily lend themselves to satisfaction, demographic or economic needs' (p. 23). Much of the literature evaluating destination or race elements has largely centred on features associated with a specific event (e.g. Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014; Hallmann, Kaplanidou, & Breur, 2010; Robinson & Gammon, 2004; Trauer, Ryan, & Lockyer, 2003) or destination (e.g. Bourdeau et al., 2002; Hemmatinezhad et al., 2010; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Taks, Chalip, Green, Kesenne, & Martyn, 2009; Walker, Hinch, & Higham,

2010). While the following list of destination attributes is not exhaustive, it is important to highlight the research in this area.

Accessibility to the location was an important attribute among rock climbers (Bourdeau et al., 2002; Mittelstaedt, 1997), Olympic spectators (Teigland, 1999), cyclists (|Buning & Gibson, 2016a, 2016b), skiers (Richards, 1996), and scuba divers (Tabata, 1992). In addition to access, the accommodation options available in the host community serve as a selection factor (Bernthal & Sawyer, 2004; Hallmann et al., 2010). In the study by Hallmann et al. (2010), they found participants listed accommodations as one of the key elements they look for when selecting a destination. The entertainment quality and variety may also enhance the destination's image and serve as another selection factor (Buning & Gibson, 2016b; Hemmatinezhad et al., 2010; Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Novelty also plays a major role in sport tourism choices as sport tourists consistently select places they have not visited before or may return when the destination provides a unique experience (Bello & Etzel, 1985; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Wahlers & Etzel, 1985).

Finally, some select destinations because they possess a special meaning among sport tourists (Fairley, 2003). For instance, marathon runners desire to tick off key races in specific cities through their participation, like those known as the 'big five' (Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London, and New York). And, races like the Bolder Boulder or Ironman become events participants must complete (Lough et al., 2016; Urry, 2002). Similarly, rock climbers will travel to specific destinations because of the reputation of the event or because it is a destination mecca (Kulczycki, 2011; Lough et al., 2016).

Summary and research questions

As a framework for understanding sport tourist destination and event choices, this study uses a combination of the push and pull theory of motivation (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977), and draws on both the sport participation motivation (Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Aicher et al., 2015; Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Buning & Gibson, 2016a, 2016b; Getz & McConnell, 2014; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012) literatures, as well as that from the destination (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and event element research (Aicher & Newland, 2017; Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014; Lough et al., 2016; Lynch & Dibben, 2016). In doing so, we explore two key areas. First, this work seeks to understand which motivation factors (push factors) influence decisions to travel to participate in events based on destination or event attributes (pull factors). Then, this study aims to examine the differences in motives based on sport type (running, triathlon, cycling) and athlete type (competitive level, hours trained, race length, number of annual events).

Rather than only sampling individuals post-hoc (after having completed a sport event), the sampling method for this study selected individuals based on their planned or recent travel to a destination for an 'A' race (their primary event for the season). This sampling strategy may allow for a broader understanding of the destination and event elements the sport tourists consider before, as well as after travel. Thus, the following research questions were developed based on the outline above:

RQ1: Which pull factors (relating to the destination/event) are more appealing to athletes who are motivated by push factors when deciding to travel for a sport event?

RQ2: What differences in push factors exist based on sport type (runners, cyclists, and triathletes)?

RQ3: What differences in pull factors exist based on sport type (runners, cyclists, and triathletes)?

RQ4: What differences in push factors exist based on athlete type (competitive level, length of race, hours trained, and number of events participated in per year)?

RQ5: What differences in pull factors exist based on athlete type (competitive level, length of race, hours trained, and number of events participated in per year)?

Method

Procedure

Upon receiving ethics approval, electronic surveys were administered to 5000 adult runners, cyclists, and triathletes with a Training Peaks membership. Training Peaks is an online coaching and performance-tracking tool that provides tailored training programmes for cyclists, runners, and triathletes. The email invited the athlete to participate if they had recently travelled (within the last month) or planned to travel to a destination race for their 'A' race (primary event for the season) in the next eight months. This period was selected, as it included events scheduled up to the end of the calendar year. 'Destination race' was defined as an event that required either a flight or extended drive from home and at least one night stay in a hotel. Participants were first asked if they had recently travelled or had planned to travel to such a race. Respondents who answered 'no' were thanked for their time and did not continue the survey. Those who answered 'yes' were advanced to the 15-minute survey in which they could complete at their leisure within a 2-week period. No incentives were offered to participate in the study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained four parts. First, respondents indicated what sport they identified *with most* (running, triathlon, cycling), and what distance they planned to race for their 'A' event at the destination (Short: <10 k, sprint distance triathlon, or <30-mile circuit or criterium; Moderate: half marathon, Olympic distance triathlon, 35–60-mi circuit/criterium; or Long: marathon, half/full distance Ironman, >65-mi circuit/criterium/stage). Then, athletes answered questions regarding destination and event attributes. Based on the literature discussed previously, athletes answered 10 items on event elements (e.g. Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Kulczycki, 2011; Lough et al., 2016; Urry, 2002), 7 items on destination elements (Bourdeau et al., 2002; Fairley, 2003; Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Snelgrove et al., 2008), and 20 items on motives (Aicher et al., 2015; Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010). All scales were based on a 6-point semantic scale 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Finally, athletes answered athletic attribute and demographic questions. Athletic attributes included number of hours trained per week, level of competitor (novice/beginner, intermediate, advanced/elite), and number of events completed in a racing year (<3, 4–6, 7–9, >10). Demographic information included sex, ethnicity, education, and annual household income.

Participants

Respondents returned 732 usable surveys (response rate = 14.6%). Approximately 54% of the respondents were male, overwhelmingly White (90.7%), highly educated with high household incomes. By selecting athletes who were actively travelling to compete, the sample represented the target market for destination racing events (Running USA, 2015; USA Cycling, 2014; USA Triathlon, 2014). The sample included high-performance athletes, as well as many athletes who do not see themselves as elite and adequately represented the demographics of each of the three sports (Running USA, 2015; USA Cycling, 2014; USA Triathlon, 2014). Table 1 includes the remaining descriptive statistics.

Data analysis

The questionnaire was tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (DeVellis, 2003) and all items of the scale were found to be reliable with adequate levels of internal consistency (motives $\alpha = .79$; event elements $\alpha = .73$; destination elements $\alpha = .75$; DeVellis, 2003; Schmitt, 1996). Because the scale was adapted from the literature, underlying dimensions of push/pull motivations were identified through factor analysis with principal components extraction and Varimax rotations. The same process was followed for event elements. Due to a large sample size and because the variables were categorical in nature, a two-step cluster analysis was conducted to partition athletes into specific groups based on the type of athlete, which were identified by their competitive level (novice, intermediate, advanced/elite), number of hours trained, number events participated in per year, and length of race (short, moderate, long). To answer the first research question, the researchers computed separate regressions for the push factors on both the destination and event pull factors. Multiple analyses of variances were calculated to answer the remaining research questions.

Results

Exploratory factor analysis of the motivation items extracted five factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 50.98% of the total item variance. The rotated factor solution for the five dimensions of motivation (push factors) included: *sport specific exploration* (e.g. to learn more about the sport), *destination exploration*, *relaxation/escape*, *social interaction*, and *sport performance*. Likewise, exploratory factor analysis for the event elements extracted three factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 47.91% of the total item variance. The rotated factor solution for the three dimensions of event elements (pull factors) included *accessibility*, *auxiliary elements*, and *reputation*. Full results are presented in Table 2.

The results of the two-step cluster analysis revealed three distinct groups for *athlete type* based on key athletic attributes: competitive level, hours trained, distance raced, and number of events participated in per year. The analysis returned three clusters with a ratio of sizes equalling 1.98. Cluster 1 ($n = 158$) was named *Neophytes*, because the athletes in this cluster claimed mainly to be at a beginner/novice level (81.6%), trained less than 10 hours/week (96.2%), and competed in less than three events per year (60.8%).

Table 1. Participant and athlete demographics.

	Runners ($n = 271$)	Triathletes ($n = 314$)	Cyclists ($n = 147$)
Education			
High school graduate	11 (4.1%)	4 (1.3%)	7 (4.8%)
Some college	28 (10.3%)	33 (10.5%)	22 (15%)
College graduate	117 (43.2%)	106 (38.8%)	48 (32.7%)
Post graduate degree (ME/MS)	95 (35.1%)	133 (42.4%)	52 (35.4%)
Terminal degree (PhD/MD)	20 (7.4%)	38 (12.1%)	18 (12.2%)
Ethnicity			
White	243 (89.7%)	290 (92.4%)	131 (89.1%)
Black	5 (1.8%)	1 (0.3%)	6 (4.1%)
Hispanic	5 (1.8%)	8 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
Middle eastern	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.7%)
Asian	8 (3.0%)	7 (2.2%)	1 (0.1%)
Mixed ethnicity	9 (3.3%)	6 (2%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	8 (5.4%)
Household income			
<$59,000	69 (25.5%)	70 (22.4%)	27 (18.3%)
$60,000–99,999	79 (29.3%)	72 (23.0%)	47 (31.9%)
$100,000–149,999	73 (27.0%)	99 (31.7%)	21 (14.3%)
$<150,000	49 (18.1%)	71 (22.7%)	52 (49.7%)
Gender			
Male	123 (45.4%)	175 (55.7%)	98 (66.7%)
Female	148 (54.6%)	139 (44.3%)	49 (33.3%)
Age			
18–22	42 (15.5%)	45 (14.3%)	18 (12.2%)
23–34	84 (31%)	81 (25.8%)	35 (23.8%)
35–49	113 (41.7%)	134 (42.7%)	62 (42.2%)
>50	32 (11.8%)	54 (17.2%)	32 (21.8%)
Athlete descriptive statistics			
Hours trained per week			
<10	152 (56.1%)	135 (42.9%)	80 (54.4%)
10–15	77 (28.4%)	116 (36.9%)	44 (29.9%)
>15	42 (15.5%)	63 (20.1%)	23 (15.6%)
Competitive level			
Beginner/novice	61 (38.1%)	44 (14.0%)	36 (24.5%)
Intermediate	150 (55.3%)	169 (53.8%)	58 (39.4%)
Advanced/elite	60 (22.1%)	101 (32.2%)	53 (36.1%)
Annual competitive races			
<3	55 (20.2%)	39 (12.4%)	29 (19.7%)
4–6	90 (33.3%)	118 (37.6%)	63 (42.8%)
7–9	67 (24.7%)	86 (27.4%)	32 (21.7%)
>10	59 (22.5%)	71 (22.9%)	23 (15.6%)
Type of race travelled to			
Open	238 (87.8%)	178 (56.7%)	104 (70.7%)
Championship	1 (0.4%)	14 (4.5%)	14 (9.5%)
Both	32 (11.8%)	122 (38.9%)	29 (19.7%)
Distances raced			
Short	50 (18.5%)	39 (12.4%)	19 (12.9%)
Moderate	80 (29.5%)	82 (26.1%)	53 (36.1%)
Long	141 (52%)	193 (61.5%)	75 (51%)

Note: Percentages calculated from entire sample ($N = 732$).

Cluster 2 ($n = 313$), named the *Intermediaries*, claimed to be at the intermediate level (100%), trained less than 10 hours/week (68.7%), and competed in four to six events per year (53.7%). Finally, cluster three ($n = 261$), named the *Aficionados*, claimed to be at an advanced/elite level (70.9%), trained over 10–15 hours/week (100%), and competed in more than three events per year (46.7%). A chi-square test of independence was conducted between athlete type and sport type. All expected cell frequencies were

Table 2. Factor analysis results for motivation.

	Factor loading	Eigen value	Variance explained	Cronbach's *a*
Sources of motivation				
Sport exploration		4.37	21.83	.73
Learn more about sport	.776			
Curious about sport	.684			
Sense of belonging to sport	.607			
Discover more of sport	.578			
Expand sport knowledge	.442			
Destination exploration		1.80	8.98	.68
Expand knowledge of destination	.696			
Discover more of destination	.686			
Learn about destination	.682			
Curious about destination	.663			
Relaxation/escape		1.53	7.64	.64
Relieve stress	.811			
Escape hustle/bustle	.771			
Relax mentally	.581			
Relax physically	.432			
Social interaction		1.30	6.58	.66
To build friendships	.761			
To interact with others	.720			
To meet new people	.494			
Sport performance		1.21	6.06	.60
To use my physical skills	.714			
To challenge my abilities	.616			
To develop skill	.604			
To be physically active	.528			
Event elements				
Accessibility		1.71	19.04	.71
Ease of travel to event	.733			
Proximity of event to home	.646			
Event cost	.522			
Event location	.486			
Auxiliary elements		1.395	15.49	.69
Merchandise received	.790			
Quality of expo	.770			
Event cost	.419			
Reputation		1.203	13.37	.70
Type of event	.800			
Challenge of course	.578			
Longevity/history of event	.494			

Note: Items added from Beard and Ragheb (1983) and Crompton (1979), and Dann (1977).

Table 3. Results of cluster analysis of athletic attributes.

Athletic attributes	Neophyte ($n = 158$)	Intermediaries ($n = 313$)	Aficionado ($n = 261$)
Competitive level	Beginner/novice (81.6%)	Intermediate (100%)	Advanced/elite (70.9%)
Hours trained	<10 (96.2%)	<10 (68.7%)	10–15 (52%), >15 (48%)
Number of annual events	<3 (60.8%)	4–6 (53.7%)	>10 (46.7%)
Race distance	All distances (33%)	Long (53%)	Long (66.7%)
Triathletes	51 (32.3%)	133 (42.5%)	130 (49.8%)
Cyclists	44 (27.8%)	56 (17.9%)	47 (18%)
Runners	63 (39.9%)	124 (39.6%)	84 (32.2%)

greater than five. There was a statistically significant association between athlete and sport type, $\chi^2(4) = 15.690$, $p < .003$; although the association was small (Cohen, 1988), Cramer's $V = .104$. Table 3 illustrates the results.

RQ1: Which pull factors (relating to the destination/event) are more appealing to athletes who are motivated by push factors when deciding to travel for a sport event?

To test these relationships, we first regressed the push factors on the destination pull factors. A test of multicollinearity was conducted before all regression analyses and all tolerance values were found to be above 0.10 (Berry, 1993). Four of the five push factors (motives) were found to be significant: motivated by sport exploration ($F[6, 725] = 6.53$, $p < .0001$, adj. $R^2 = .043$); motivated by destination exploration ($F[6, 725] = 29.96$, $p < .0001$, adj. $R^2 = .192$); motivated by escape ($F[6, 725] = 12.69$, $p < .0001$, adj. $R^2 = .088$); motivated by social interaction ($F[6, 725] = 7.92$, $p < .001$, adj. $R^2 = .054$). Motivated by sport performance ($F[6, 725] = 1.50$, $p = .18$, adj. $R^2 = .004$) was not significant.

Next, we regressed the push factors on the event pull factors to understand the unique contribution of each of the independent variables. The test values for multicollinearity were above 0.10 (Berry, 1993). All five push factors were significant: motivated by sport exploration ($F[10, 721] = 8.67$, $p < .0001$, $R^2 = .095$); motivated by destination exploration ($F[10, 721] = 7.88$, $p < .0001$, adj. $R^2 = .086$); motivated by escape ($F[10, 721] = 5.99$, $p < .0001$, $R^2 = .064$); motivated by social interaction ($F[10, 721] = 4.90$, $p \leq .001$, $R^2 = .051$); and motivated by sport ($F[10, 721] = 3.34$, $p \leq .001$, $R^2 = .031$). A full analysis of the beta coefficients is provided in Table 4.

What differences in push factors (RQ2) and pull factors (RQ3) exist based on sport type (RQ4) and athlete type (RQ5)?

A MANOVA was run to determine if differences in push factors (motives) existed based on sport type and athlete type. The interaction effect between sport type and athlete type for the dependent variables was not statistically significant, $F(5, 20) = 1.059$, $p = .388$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .971$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$. There was a significant finding for sport type, $F(5, 10) = 6.767$, $p < .0001$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .912$, partial $\eta^2 = .045$. A review of the univariate results indicated a statistically significant main effect for three of the motives for sport type: (1) to explore the destination, $F(2, 732) = 14.884$, $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .040$, (2) to escape, $F(2,$

Table 4. Results of regression analyses of push factors on pull factors.

Predictor (push)variables (β)		Motivated by sport exploration	Motivated by exploration	Motivated by escape	Motivated by social interaction	Motivated by sport performance
Destination pull factors	Group tours	0.14**	0.15**	–	0.10**	–
	Nightlife	–	0.13**	–	–	–
	Famous sites	–	0.17**	–	–	–
	Theme parks	–	0.81**	–	–	–
	Natural environments	–	0.23**	0.22**	–	–
	Shopping	–		0.08**	–	–
Event pull factors	Challenge of the course	0.08**	–	–	–	0.13**
	Quality of the expo	0.23**	0.10**	0.18**	0.20**	–
	Merchandise	0.09**	0.16**	0.08**	–	–
	Event type	0.09**			0.09*	–
	Destination location	–	0.13**	0.11**	–	–
	Proximity of event	–	−0.13**		–	0.10*

*Significance at the .05 level.
**Significance at the .001 level.

Table 5. Tukey post-hoc results for push and pull factors.

	Runners		Triathletes		Cyclists	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Push factors						
Motivated to explore destination	3.87*	0.89	3.54	0.94	3.37	1.06
Motivated to escape	4.23	0.77	4.49*	0.87	4.18	1.03
Motivated by sport performance	4.86*	0.66	4.95	0.56	5.05	0.50
Pull factors						
Auxiliary elements	4.01	0.826	4.05	0.812	3.74*	1.08
Reputation	3.62	0.836	3.81	0.871	4.05*	0.723
Destination elements	3.25*	0.812	3.15	0.752	2.622*	0.888
	Neophytes		Intermediaries		Aficionados	
Accessibility	4.75	0.731	4.71	0.665	4.59*	0.706
Reputation	3.76	0.785	3.72	0.833	3.88*	0.922

*A significant difference at the .001 level.

732) = 5.351, $p < .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$, and (3) sport performance, $F(2, 732) = 4.825$, $p < .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$. Tukey post-hoc results are illustrated in Table 5.

A second MANOVA was calculated to determine if differences in pull factors (event/destination elements) existed based on sport type and athlete type. The interaction effect between sport type and athlete type for the dependent variables was not statistically significant, $F(4, 16) = 1.074$, $p = .375$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .977$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$. There was a significant finding for sport type, $F(4, 8) = 11.739$, $p < .0001$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .881$, partial $\eta^2 = .061$ and athlete type, $F(4, 8) = 2.446$, $p < .013$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .973$, partial $\eta^2 = .013$. A review of the univariate results showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for three of the motives for sport type: (1) auxiliary elements, $F(2, 732) = 7.045$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .019$, (2) reputation, $F(2, 732) = 12.773$, $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .034$, and (3) destination elements, $F(2, 732) = 29.984$, $p < .0001$, partial $\eta^2 = .077$. For athlete type, two of the motives were significant: (1) accessibility, $F(2, 732) = 3.279$, $p < .038$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$, and (2) reputation, $F(2, 732) = 3.682$, $p < .026$, partial $\eta^2 = .010$. Tukey post-hoc results are illustrated in Table 5.

Discussion

Push/pull factors and event/destination interests

A focus of this study was to explore how the destination (e.g. location, attractions, optional bundles, etc.) and the event elements (e.g. distance, type) attract active sport event participants. The findings from the first research question – *which pull factors (relating to the destination/event) are more appealing to athletes who are motivated by push factors when deciding to travel for a sport event* – suggested that the main factors that influence the athletes differ by tourist motivations (sport exploration, destination exploration, escape, social interaction or sport performance). Knowledge about how push/pull factors amongst these different sports can aid destination marketers to couple push and pull factors in a more focused manner (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994).

For the destination pull factors, the group tours most interested those who were motivated by social interaction and sport exploration. Those only motivated by escape were interested in shopping and the environment. Unsurprisingly, those motivated to explore

the destination were interested in all destination attributes except shopping. The exploring motivation supports Aicher and Brenner's (2015) assertion that learning about a new culture may serve as a motivating factor for runners to participate in active sport tourism, and has been previously found among sport tourists (Snelgrove et al., 2008; Taks et al., 2009). Those motivated by sport performance had no interest in the destination pull factors. While it might seem obvious that athletes most driven by sport performance would be disinterested in the destination offerings, it is still a key finding that supports Taks et al. (2009), who found that athletes were less likely to participate in tourism activities. Furthermore, Getz and McConnell (2011) also found that highly fit mountain bikers and Aicher and Newland (2017) along with Bull (2006) found that high-level cyclists were less interested in destination offerings.

For the event pull factors, all athletes, except those motivated by sport performance, were interested in the quality of the pre-event expo. The merchandise received with registration process (e.g. give-aways, race t-shirt, or other merchandise) mattered to those motivated by sport exploration, destination exploration, and escape. The reputation in the sporting community about the giveaway items may affect future attendance, as organisational elements are important selection factors among sport participants (Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014). Buning and Gibson (2016b) found low entry fees, smaller and intimate events, website/social media quality, and event course safety were universal influencers for participation among cyclists; however, these results did not test for merchandise quality. Given that athletes spend a large sum to register for and travel to the event, what they receive beyond the event itself appears to be highly important.

The challenge of the course mattered to those motivated by sport performance and sport exploration, which bolsters previous research (e.g. Buning & Gibson, 2016b; Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012; Ryan & Lockyer, 2002; Trauer et al., 2003) that established the importance of a challenging and well-managed course in motivating a participant to select an event (Buning & Gibson, 2016b; Nogawa, Yamaguchi, & Hagi, 1996). Those motivated to explore the destination wanted events far from home, while those motivated by sport performance sought events with close proximity to home. The event's destination location mattered to those motivated by exploring the destination and escape. Finally, for those motivated by sport exploration and social interaction, the type of event mattered.

Differences in athlete and sport type

The second research question sought to determine the differences in motives for sport and athlete types. Within the sample, there were differences amongst runners, triathletes, and cyclists in terms of push factors (motivation), and the pull factors (event and destination elements) they prefer. Following is a detailed analysis of each.

Push factors

Despite the high motivation score among the entire sample, differences were present by sport type, specifically to explore the destination, escape, and sport performance. In this study, runners were more likely to be motivated to explore over cyclists and triathletes, who were more highly motivated by their sport performance (i.e. improving skill,

challenging themselves, and being physically active). Bull (2006) found that competitive cyclists were not interested in the destination. Likewise, Getz and McConnell (2011) observed that those categorised into 'athleticism' were more focused on performance than what the destination might offer. Additionally, research also supports sport performance as an important motivating factor for cyclists (Bull, 2006) and triathletes (Getz & McConnell, 2011); however, a comparison between the three groups had not yet occurred. Lastly, triathletes were more motivated to escape than the other two athlete types, which expands the work on triathletes that has tended to focus on their motivations to participate in events (Myburgh, Kruger, & Saayman, 2014) rather than what draws them to the destination. Furthermore, the results bolster Aicher and Newland's (2017) work that found the most popular push motivation among older triathletes was to escape in order to rest and relax.

The current investigation highlights the importance of not labelling endurance athletes into a specific sport tourist category, but rather to consider the importance of evaluating how motives differ by the type of sport. It should be cautioned that motives continue to evolve as individuals become more heavily involved in sport participation (Buning & Gibson, 2016a) and as the athlete moves through the travel career (Getz & McConnell, 2011, 2014; Pearce & Lee, 2005). Continued measurement of the travel and event experience for patterns of motivation is key.

Pull factors

Comparing both the athlete and sport types established differences among the groups. First, when evaluating sport types, runners and triathletes reported auxiliary elements as the most important items, while cyclist valued the reputation of the event (Bull, 2006). Runners also reported higher preference for destination elements compared to the other two sport types. As outlined above, previous research has discussed the importance of the event's reputation (|Buning & Gibson, 2016a, 2016b), auxiliary elements (e.g. expo; Aicher & Brenner, 2015; Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Kulczycki & Halpenny, 2014; Lamont & Kennelly, 2012; Lough et al., 2016), and destination's image and reputation (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Adding to this line of research, the current investigation established differences based on athlete type, which demonstrates that these groups consume their sport tourism differently. Furthermore, as Chalip and McGuirty (2004) noted, appropriate event elements include activities that support the sport, and triathletes and cyclists seem to confirm this notion.

The second finding established differences between the groups based on athlete type (i.e. skill and consumption levels). These findings established individuals who consider themselves more skilled and consume greater amounts of sport, either training or event participation (aka aficionados), are more concerned with the event's reputation compared to the other two groups. This aligns with Chen and Chen's (2013) finding that individuals with higher levels of recreational specialisation preferred more challenging routes. Often, reputation is based on the challenge of the course and its organisation (Buning & Gibson, 2016a). Past tourism research shows that word-of-mouth recommendations are powerful determinants of decision-making behaviour (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008). Therefore, as individuals become more experienced and entrenched in their respective sport, they

value word of mouth to learn more about the event before deciding to participate (Buning & Gibson, 2016b).

Secondly, neophytes and intermediaries reported greater levels of concern with accessibility to the event compared to aficionados. This may indicate that individuals who are breaking into the sport are more interested in events that are closer or more accessible to them. In either case, the financial or time commitment to compete in an event that is difficult to reach is less appealing for those who are not as involved with their sport. When planning an event, marketing destination attributes that matter to those in the sport is important.

Practical implications

Based on the findings, event managers may benefit from promoting the challenge of the course over destination elements when attempting to attract athletes focused on sport performance. To bolster this, event managers could provide merchandise or finisher gear that emphasises the difficulty of accomplishing the challenging course after the event. The ability to share race results with others could enhance the psychological connection with the event that could positively affect word of mouth and reputation of the event, albeit after the fact (Buning & Gibson, 2016b; Lough et al., 2016; Taks et al., 2009). Many events have begun to incorporate photos (sometimes with finish times) that can be shared easily to social media to enable self-promotion of accomplishments. With the advancements in technology, event managers could easily capitalise on attendees' use of social media to further enhance positive word of mouth and reputation by sharing participants' posts.

Considering the motivation of athletes by sport may assist event managers if they design events and pursue collaborative relationships that support the event and meet the desires of the various athletes. For example, bundling destination assets would be a strong tactic for runners (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004), whereas providing relaxing spa packages and opportunities for triathletes to relax may be a better tactic for event managers attempting to tie in destination assets to enhance the value of the event (Aicher & Newland, 2017). Furthermore, highlighting the course challenge or the competitive field would be highly attractive to triathletes and cyclists, but may create a deterrent for runners (Kaplanidou, 2010).

Event managers can incorporate event elements into the promotional materials in several ways. First, videos that share highlights from past events that include athletes overcoming the adversity related to the challenge of the course, highlights from past years, top professional athletes, and special interest stories from the amateur field can all help shape the story of the event's history. Large-scale events have begun to incorporate this tactic with success. Small to mid-sized events should also consider using such videos to enhance event promotional materials to highlight event elements. Second, emails and race updates that include the new participant as part of the event's history to excite participants prior to the event as well as follow-up emails and social media prompts that allow the athletes to co-create and share their experience. Last, providing channels for athletes to share tourist activities through social media could provide a platform for additional word-of-mouth promotion of destination add-ons (Taks et al., 2009).

Limitations and future research

As with any research study, this work is not without limitations. First, this study included those individuals who had recently travelled or were planning to travel to a sport event in the upcoming year. If some did not have a specific destination or event in mind, the results might not represent their attitudes and or behaviours. While the uniqueness of the investigation provides strength, it may also prove beneficial to determine what factors are affecting specific events and/or destination or the factors of those who do not plan to travel, as well. We also recognise that the unequal group size for each sport can influence the results. Comparisons of motives, and destination/event elements may highlight differences between those who do participate in active sport tourism and those who only participate in their respective sport locally. Further research is warranted to determine the different types of motivation that could influence individuals' levels of participation. Additionally, the sampling method included a website, which may have skewed the data, as those who utilise this site may be more committed to their respective sports.

The researchers recognise that runners, triathletes, and cyclists often participate in other sports (i.e. runners do triathlons, triathletes do run only events, etc.). This can be a serious complication to the results. We attempted to reduce this effect by asking athletes to identify their 'primary' sport. Identifying heavily with a specific sport and the subculture of that sport does enhance traits specific to that sporting subculture (Buning & Gibson, 2016a; Green, 2001). So, while a cyclist can also participate in a triathlon or running event, that individual still demonstrates the characteristics of the cycling subculture (Green, 2001). Furthermore, the environmental make-up of running (urban), cycling (rural), and triathlon (mixed) events varies, which can shape the preferences of the athlete. These preferences can change based on the travel conditions of the trip (Buning & Gibson, 2016b). Therefore, future studies should try to unpack how preferences change based on the sport and the environment type, especially when the athlete competes across different endurance sports.

This work also did not ask athletes of their intention to return to the destination for other leisure reasons. One assumption often held is that the event can inspire repeat tourism (Kaplanidou, 2010). Future work should consider whether the event does lead to repeat tourism to the area for non-event purposes. Finally, the survey method provides us with a sound methodological approach to this investigation; however, a follow-up qualitative approach may provide a deeper understanding of the motives, and the event and destination elements sport tourist value.

Conclusion

Past research into active sport event tourism has focused primarily on event elements (e.g. Getz & McConnell, 2011) and while important, the results of this study suggest that athlete type and destination and event elements influence sport event and destination selections. Thus, destination marketers might consider strengthening the promotions of the events to appeal to highly involved active sport tourists, with special consideration given to the sport context. This study found that runners are far more interested in the destination than triathletes and cyclists. For host communities that are trying to attract new tourists to the area, identifying moderate-distance running events could be a critical strategic move. For event managers who host longer distance events, the results suggest that

sport performance drives triathletes and cyclists, and therefore, the event matters far more than the destination elements. That does not mean that links to destination tourism options should be ignored. Providing opportunities to relax – spa packages or other relaxing activities, like laying on a beach – could be essential to ensuring that they stay longer and interact with the destination.

As Buning and Gibson (2016a) and Taks et al. (2009) argued, events and destinations cannot only market to past and present participants if they want to remain sustainable and competitive. As sport events and government tourist agencies seek to attract more athletes, it is important to understand that the type of athlete, what length of course, the type of sporting event, and the distance the athlete must travel when considering what sport event would work best for the increasing active sport tourism to the area. As the active sport event space continues to grow and diversify, so does the travel and potential tourism associated with it. The challenge for both destinations and event managers is to be able to see the different opportunities available by sport and athlete to capitalise on the competitive advantage it offers.

This current study furthers our understanding of what drives active sport tourists to choose a destination and/or event. Firstly, the study evaluated the impact of the active sport tourists' motivations (i.e. push factors), and the event and destination elements (i.e. pull factors) on event selection. Secondly, three different sports were included in the evaluation, which deviates from previous research that has focused on a single sport or event, specifically. The current investigation considers how a broader range of endurance athletes is influenced by the event and/or destination elements that pull the active sport tourist to a specific location. Finally, active sport tourists' decisions to travel to destinations regionally, nationally, or internationally differentiated between endurance sport types, which is a key finding and contributes to the active sport tourism literature by extending our knowledge of travel behaviour.

Disclosure statement

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