

Research Paper

## **The Mediating Role of Destination Image on Sports Tourism Event Attributes and Behavioural Intention**

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**Abstract:** This research examines the relationship between sports tourism event attributes (access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality) and international participant revisit intention. Furthermore, this study attempts to explore the influence of destination image as a mediator between the relationship of sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention. Sports events is one way to add the attractiveness of a destination for new markets as well as first-time and repeat visitors. However, there is a relatively scarce amount of adequate research regarding sports events and destination image. A variety of standard statistical analyses was employed including reliability test, descriptive analysis using mean score and multiple regressions approach to explore the relationship between the dependent variables and independent variables. For this study, a questionnaire was distributed to international participants who joined running events at Putrajaya, Malaysia. The findings from this study demonstrate that destination image does mediate the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention to join similar future events. However, access quality and accommodation quality are not significant predictors of overall behavioural intention while only venue quality demonstrates a significant relationship with behavioural intention to revisit similar events.

**Keywords:** Sports tourism event, destination image, behavioural intention

**Suggested citation:** Abdul Razak, D. H. (2022). The mediating role of destination image on sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 11(1), 89–99.

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## **Introduction**

Referring to past studies, Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005) stated that in the service industry, the quality of services provided by any sports event is important. Sports events range from mega sporting events such as national championships to more diminutive-sized sports events which can be additionally characterised as leisure sports events (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010).

In line with this, past studies have found that communities are attracted to hosting sports events to draw marketing benefits that can contribute to the success of their areas in the long run by creating awareness, improving their image with visitors and attracting tourism business to generate future inbound travel (Candrea & Ispas, 2010). According to Chalip and McGuirty (2004), destinations can enhance their image by hosting sports events that attract first-time and repeat tourists as well as sports tourists using co-branding, brand leverage and product bundling techniques.

Malaysia Sport Tourism Council (MYSTA) reported that sports tourism has been contributing RM5 billion annually and is highly rated to emerge as one of the key sectors of the tourism industry (Chiu & Hua, 2013). Among the tourism components, sports tourism appears to be the most flourishing tourism component in Malaysia (Ong, Wee, Kee, & Musa, 2010). Meanwhile, Yusof, Fauzee, Shah and Geok (2009) stated that the growth of sports tourism in Malaysia is not new especially in participatory sports.

Some of the major sports events that have taken place in Malaysia include The Standard Chartered International Marathon, the Monsoon Cup, and the Formula One Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix and have become major international tourist attractions.

## **Problem Statement**

There have been limited research on motivations for sports tourism (Yusof et al., 2009; Yousefi & Marzuki, 2012) and even lesser on the satisfaction or revisit intentions of general tourists in the Malaysian context (Musa, 2002). For instance, Mat Som, Marzuki, Yousefi, and Abukhalifeh (2012) examined factors for visiting Sabah for sports activity. While past studies have focused more on sports events, in general and participant satisfaction, this particular study will focus on the event attributes. Consequently, knowledge on sports event attributes such as access quality, accommodation quality, and venue quality and participant satisfaction in Malaysia is lacking. In addition, Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil (2007) noted that there is no systematic structure that defines and operationalises the relationship between destination image and behavioural intention.

Therefore, understanding the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behaviour intention with the destination image as a mediator among the sports tourists to Malaysia is crucial.

## Hypothesis

*H1: There is a significant relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention.*

*H2: There is a significant relationship between sports tourism event attributes and destination image.*

*H3: There is a significant relationship between destination image and behavioural intention.*

*H4: Destination image has a mediating effect on sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention.*

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study is deemed exploratory as there is a very limited number of studies on this topic in Malaysia. It is exploratory in the sense there are very few or no prior studies to refer to. The focus of exploratory studies is to gain insights and familiarity for subsequent in-depth investigations or is undertaken when the issue of interest is in a preliminary stage of investigation. The research paradigm for this study is quantitative based using a structured questionnaire as the research instrument to gather primary data.

### Population and Sample

The target population for this study was international participants who participated in running events such as Ironman 70.3, Putra 24 hours Endurance Run, Nexus International School Triathlon and Pemandan International Run held in Putrajaya throughout 2016.

The total number of respondents for this study was 200 international participants. According to Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010), to obtain the sample number, each item in questionnaire must be multiplied by 5. In this respect, as the total number of questions in this study was 37, therefore,  $37 \times 5 = 185$ . Thus, the sample complies with Hair et al.'s (2010) condition and suggestion.

### Data Collection Process

As this study intends to assess the experience of international participants towards sports event attributes and destination image as well as their intention to revisit the destination or to re-join the event in the future, the data was collected at the event venue itself two days before the event which was during the race kit collection day. Nevertheless, before carrying out the survey, the events' organisers, TwentyFirst Century Sport, Ultra Running and MTS Sports and Event Management were contacted to obtain permission for administering the questionnaire.

### Result and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed personally to 200 international participants who took part in sports events at Putrajaya such as Ironman 70.3 Putrajaya, Putra 24 Hours Endurance Run Nexus International School Triathlon Putrajaya, and Pemadam International Run. As a result, all 200 questionnaires were completed by the respondents.

### Demographics

This study found that most of the respondents were male (59.5%, n = 119) whilst 40.5% (n = 81) of them were female. Most of the respondents were in the 30 – 39 age group (37.5%, n = 75) followed by the 40 – 49 age group (28%, n = 56). The 20 – 29-year-old respondents made up 22% (n = 44) and the rest (12.5%, n = 25) 50 – 59 years old. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents travel twice a year to attend sports events (53.5%, n = 107) followed by those who travel 3 to 5 times per year for the same reason (38%, n = 76), 5.5% (n = 11) who travel once a year and only 3% (n = 6) who travel more than 5 times per year for sports events. Lastly, most of the respondents were from United Kingdom (51%, n = 102), while 38% (n = 76) were from Australia, followed by Indonesia (7.5%, n = 7.5%), China (2.5%, n = 5) and France (1%, n = 2).

### Access Quality

Based on the results, most of the international participants did not strongly agree with most of the items in this section, scoring a mean in the range of 2.96 to 3.71. This suggests that the international participants’ level of perception regarding access quality for sports events in Putrajaya is moderate.

**Table 1.** Mean score and standard deviation for access quality

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
B1_1	Accessibility has been excellent during my trip	3.6300	.66733
B1_2	Travel around the city was easy	2.9700	.81389
B1_3	I experienced no problems in getting to this place	2.9750	.98449
B1_4	Getting to event venue was easy	2.9550	.94203
B1_5	My hotel is in a convenient location	3.6350	.69584
B1_6	I experienced no problems in getting to where I needed to go from my hotel	3.7150	.22591
B1_7	Parking at my hotel is convenient	3.5100	.69449

### Accommodation Quality

The majority of the international tourists agreed with most of the items in this section, which implies that they are satisfied with the accommodation quality in Putrajaya.

**Table 2.** Mean score and standard deviation for accommodation quality

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
B2_1	My hotel is of high quality	3.9650	.68272
B2_2	I enjoyed staying in my hotel	3.9950	.63797
B2_3	I enjoyed interacting with front desk employees at my hotel	3.2350	.89092
B2_4	My interactions with housekeeping employees were pleasant	2.9550	.94203
B2_5	The design of my hotel is attractive	3.4800	.67220
B2_6	My hotel is very comfortable	4.1450	.50522
B2_7	My hotel is worth the money	4.1200	.62253

### Venue Quality

Most of the responses for items in this section obtained a mean score in the range of 3.39 to 3.93. This suggests that the majority of the international participants ranked the event venues in Putrajaya as very high for running events. This also demonstrates a positive international perception for Putrajaya as being well suited to host international running events.

**Table 3.** Mean score and standard deviation for venue quality

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
B3_1	This event venue ranks very high as a running event venue	3.9350	.78348
B3_2	This event venue is well suited to host this sports event	3.6300	.75893
B3_3	The concession employees at the event venue are friendly	3.8450	.69526
B3_4	Ushers are very helpful at event venue	3.8900	.77518
B3_5	I enjoyed interacting with the vendors at the event venue	3.6500	.76841
B3_6	This event venue has an efficient layout	3.7750	.63750
B3_7	The parking at the event venue makes it easy to get in and out quickly	3.6200	.53576
B3_8	Food sold was priced reasonably at the event venue	3.3900	.69304

**Destination Image**

The results showed that a moderate number of international participants agreed that Putrajaya is an exciting destination. However, a number of them also strongly disagreed that Putrajaya is an arousing destination. Nevertheless, many agreed that Putrajaya is a relaxing vacation destination.

**Table 4.** Mean score and standard deviation for destination image

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
C1_1	Exciting	3.0850	.80686
C1_2	Pleasant	3.8400	.65309
C1_3	Arousing	2.0450	.90391
C1_4	Relaxing	4.4950	.42255
C1_5	Friendly	3.3400	.64535

**Behavioural Intention**

The mean ranged from a low score of 2.68 to a high score of 4.10. This result suggests that there is a moderate level of agreement that the international participants will come back to re-join the event again in the future. In fact, most of the respondents were not interested in returning to Putrajaya for future visits. Although the result demonstrated a low level of revisit intention to Putrajaya, most of the respondents were very satisfied with their trip to Putrajaya for the sports events.

**Table 5.** Mean score and standard deviation for behavioural intention

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
D1	I plan to attend this event again in the future	4.085	0.60797
D2	I plan to return to Putrajaya for another visit in the future	2.895	0.75951
D3	I plan to return to Putrajaya for another sporting event	4.1	0.75021
D4	There is no doubt that I will return for another visit to Putrajaya	2.68	0.77499
D5	Overall, I am very satisfied with my trip for this event at Putrajaya	3.985	0.62989

**Relationship between Access Quality, Accommodation Quality, Venue Quality and Behavioural Intention**

The derived R-square value was 0.237, which means 23.7% of the variation in behavioural intention can be explained by access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality.

**Table 6.** Regression analysis for sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	2.214	.308		7.189	.000
Access_quality	-.015	.049	-.020	-.299	.766
Accommodation_quality	-.133	.058	-.147	-2.304	.022
Venue_quality	.505	.067	.487	7.529	.000

a. Dependent variable: Behavioural intention

Multiple regression was conducted to examine whether sports event attributes (access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality) affect behavioural intention. An inspection of individual predictor revealed that access quality ( $\beta = -.02, p > .001$ ) and accommodation quality ( $\beta = -.15, p > .001$ ) were not significant predictors of overall behavioural intention. Whereas, venue quality ( $\beta = .487, p < .001$ ) proved to be a significant predictor of overall behavioural intention. Hence, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

**Relationship between Access Quality, Accommodation Quality, Venue Quality and Destination Image**

The value of 0.155 for R-square implies that 15.5% of the variation in destination image can be explained by access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality.

**Table 7.** Regression analysis between sports tourism event attributes and destination image

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	1.546	.422		3.666	.000
Access_quality	.190	.072	.186	2.638	.009
Accommodation_quality	.372	.075	.331	4.982	.000
Venue_quality	-.029	.097	-.021	-.299	.765

a. Dependent variable: destination\_image

Multiple regression was conducted to examine whether sports event attributes (access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality) affect destination image.

An inspection of individual predictor revealed that access quality ( $\beta = .19, p > .001$ ) and accommodation quality ( $\beta = .33, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of the overall destination image while, venue quality ( $\beta = -.02, p > .001$ ) was not. Hence, hypothesis 2 is supported.

**Relationship between Destination Image and Behavioural Intention**

The R-square value of 0.027 suggests that 2.7% of the variation in behavioural intention can be explained by destination image.

**Table 8.** Regression analysis between destination image and behavioural intention

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	3.084	.199		15.478	.000
Destination_image	.137	.058	.166	2.366	.019

a. Dependent variable: Behavioural\_intention

Based on Table 8 above, the  $\beta$  value of .17 and  $p < .001$  demonstrates there is a significant relationship between destination image and thus, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

**Mediating Effect of Destination Image on Relationship between Sports Tourism Event Attributes and Behavioural Intention**

The R-square, after adding mediating factor which is destination image, was calculated as 0.047 which means only 4.7% of the variation in behavioural intention can be explained by access quality, accommodation quality and venue quality and destination image.

**Table 9.** Regression analysis for mediating factor

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	$\beta$	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	2.552	.331		7.709	.000
Direct	.192	.096	.150	2.002	.047
Indirect	.091	.062	.110	1.467	.144

a. Dependent variable: Behavioural intention

The direct effect is between the independent variables and mediating variable as well as between the mediating variable and dependent variable. Meanwhile, the mediational effect in which independent variable leads to dependent variable through the mediating variable is called an indirect effect. The study adopted Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step approach in which several regression analyses can be conducted and the significance of the coefficients can be examined at each step. The first step for this study was the simple regression analysis between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention. The result shows that there is no significant relationship (refer Table 6). The second step was the simple regression analysis between sports tourism event attributes and destination image. The result shows that there is a significant relationship (refer Table 7). The third step was the simple regression analysis between destination image and behavioural intention, which demonstrated a significant relationship (refer Table 8). In reference to Mackinnon, Fairchild, and Fritz (2007), we can assume that while an overall independent variable may not be significant to a dependent variable, mediation can still occur. The last step was the multiple regression analysis between sports tourism event attributes, destination image and behavioural intention. Based on Table 9, destination image mediated the relationship between event attributes and behavioural intention (indirect effect,  $\beta = 0.091$ , and  $p$ -value = 0.144). The direct effect of event attributes and behavioural intention was  $\beta = 0.192$  and  $p$ -value=0.047, after controlling for the mediation effect (refer Table 9). Hence, based on the results, we can conclude that destination image mediates the relationship between event attributes and behavioural intention. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), perfect mediation holds if the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention to join similar events is found to be negative. This corroborates with a past study which found that the overall perceived perception of sports tourism event attributes can influence tourist satisfaction which in turn, influences the tourist's intention to return to the place of the event and/or the event itself (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). However, according to Hussein (2016), there is no consensus among scholars about the relationship between event attributes or event image and revisit intention.

The findings also show that the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and destination image is positive. This finding is aligned with Chalip and McGuirly (2004), who contended that destinations can enhance their image by hosting sports event that attract first-time and repeat tourists as well as sports tourists using co-branding, brand leverage and product bundling.

The present study also found a significant relationship between destination image and behavioural intention to join similar events. This finding is supported by Rittichainuwat, Brown and Qu (2001) who advocated that the more positive the image the tourists have about a destination, the higher the rate of revisit. Furthermore, the significant but weak relationship suggests that the intention behaviour to join similar events in future depends on the destination image.

Additionally, the results demonstrate that destination image fully mediates the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention. Such finding is consistent with previous studies that found destination image to positively affect behavioural intention to revisit the event and recommend it to others (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini, & Manzari, 2012).

Based on these findings, the researcher can conclude that destination image does mediate the relationship between sports tourism event attributes and behavioural intention to join similar events.

Among four main hypotheses of this study, three were supported. As mentioned earlier, hypothesis 1 is not supported because access quality and accommodation quality were found not to be significant predictors of overall behavioural intention, while only venue quality was. This could be attributed to the fact that the respondents for this study were international participants who mostly travel twice or three to five times per year to participate in sports events. Therefore, the respondents can be considered as sports enthusiasts, specifically running, and thus, accessibility and accommodation do not factor in as their main reasons for travelling. This insight is supported by Turco, Riley, and Swart, (2002) who stated that for sports tourism, the main purpose for travel is for participating in or viewing a particular sports.

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