

A Sport Affinity Segmentation: Understanding Thai Female Active Sport Tourists

การแบ่งกลุ่มตามความนิยมทางกีฬาเพื่อความเข้าใจนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงกีฬาสตรีชาวไทย

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Abstract

Female participation and popularity in sports have been increased dramatically in the 21st century, which generate substantial social and economic benefits to host cities of sport events and bring to sustainable tourism concept. The objectives of this study cover 3 objectives: the first objective will explore a profile of Thai female active sport tourists, their motivations, and event loyalty. The second objective will study the proportion of respondents with different sport affinity. The third objective will study the differences of affinity-segments on their profile, motivations, and event loyalty. This study classified 415 on-site participants in the Khon Kaen International Marathon 2018, into four affinity segments. Crosstabulations and Chi-square tests were used for the sport affinity segmentation. ANOVA and Chi-square tests were also used to determine the significant differences between the affinity segments among respondents' profiles, motivating reasons, and event loyalty, at 0.05 level of significant. The results found that a profile of Thai female active sport tourists was single with the average age 28 years, student, well-educated, relatively affluent, and resident who lived in the event province. Their top three motivations were being healthy, gaining new experience, and running location. The respondents were very likely to revisit and suggest or invite other people by making word-of-mouth. The main proportion of the respondents was the Beginner. The degree of affinity had significant differences on their profile, motivation, and event loyalty.

Keywords: Sport Tourism, Characteristic, Segmentation, Motivation

บทคัดย่อ

การมีส่วนร่วมและความนิยมในกีฬาของสตรีเพิ่มขึ้นอย่างมากในศตวรรษที่ 21 ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดประโยชน์ทางเศรษฐกิจและสังคมอย่างมากต่อเมืองเจ้าภาพที่จัดงานกีฬา ซึ่งนำไปสู่แนวทางการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษานี้มี 3 ข้อ ประกอบด้วย วัตถุประสงค์ข้อแรก สำรวจข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล แรงจูงใจ และความจงรักภักดีต่องานวิ่งของนักท่องเที่ยวกีฬาสตรีชาวไทย วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่สอง ศึกษาสัดส่วนของผู้เข้าร่วมงานที่มีความชื่นชอบทางกีฬาที่แตกต่างกัน วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่สาม ศึกษาความแตกต่างของกลุ่มผู้ชื่นชอบในกีฬาที่แตกต่างกันต่อ ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล แรงจูงใจ และความจงรักภักดีต่องานวิ่ง การศึกษานี้ได้จำแนกผู้เข้าร่วมงานขอนแก่นมาราธอนนานาชาติปี 2561 จำนวน 415 คน ออกเป็น 4 กลุ่ม วิธีการทดสอบแบบตารางไขว้ (Crosstabulations) และไคสแควร์ (Chi-square) ถูกนำมาจำแนกผู้เข้าร่วมงานตามความชื่นชอบด้านกีฬา นอกจากนี้ยังใช้วิธีการทดสอบ ANOVA และไคสแควร์ เพื่อทดสอบความแตกต่างระหว่างกลุ่มผู้เข้าร่วมงานที่มีระดับความชื่นชอบกีฬาที่แตกต่างกัน ข้อมูลส่วนตัว แรงจูงใจ และความจงรักภักดีต่องานวิ่งที่ระดับนัยสำคัญ 0.05 ผลการศึกษาพบว่า รูปแบบนักท่องเที่ยวกีฬาสตรีชาวไทยมีสถานะโสด อายุเฉลี่ย 28 ปี เป็นนักศึกษา มีการศึกษาดี มีฐานะค่อนข้างดี และมีถิ่นพำนักในจังหวัดที่จัดงานวิ่ง แรงจูงใจสามอันดับแรก คือ สุขภาพ การได้รับประสบการณ์ใหม่ และสถานที่ตั้งของการจัดงานวิ่ง ผู้เข้าร่วมงานมีแนวโน้มอย่างมากที่จะกลับมาเยือนอีกครั้งและสื่อสารแบบปากต่อปาก สัดส่วนหลักของผู้เข้าร่วมงานคือ กลุ่มนักวิ่งเริ่มต้น (the Beginner) ระดับความชื่นชอบทางกีฬามีความแตกต่างมีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อ ข้อมูลส่วนบุคคล แรงจูงใจ และความจงรักภักดีต่องานวิ่ง

คำสำคัญ : การท่องเที่ยวเชิงกีฬา คุณลักษณะ การแบ่งกลุ่ม แรงจูงใจ

Introduction

Sport tourism has been continuously discussed in the academic field over the past three decades since it is a growing trend, and plays an important role in the economy and society. Sport tourism generated revenue of \$4.5 trillion (Tassiopoulou & Haydamb, 2007), resulting in job creation, development of people's quality of life (Swart & Bob, 2007), reduction of poverty and provision of social welfare for the community (Homafar et al., 2011). For these reasons, sport tourism has received a lot of attention from both developed and developing countries. It also plays a very important role in the national economy growth in the 21st century.

In the past, sports participation was restricted by the social class due to the high cost of sports equipment. Nowadays, there is a group of sports called "sports for all", which means that the sports is suitable for everyone; all genders and ages. For example, long-distance running which is often referred to "marathon" is one of the most popular sports in the world. From 2009 to 2014, the growth rate of marathon worldwide was 13.25% and the highest rate

was in Asia as of 92.43%. Interestingly, the rate of female runners around the world has grown three times faster than males at 26.90%. The growth rate of female runners in Asia is 97.80%, from 2009 to 2014 (Andersen, 2018).

Nowadays, women are obviously the main target group receiving special attention from all over the world as they continue to have higher rate of travel, high potential for spending and purchasing decision power; for example, certified female friendly hotels where offer women-only floors with enhanced security features in hotels, lady-specific seats in aircraft and lady-specific train carriages for aiding the independent woman traveler, and woman-specific rooms with further female amenities and facilities in 5-star-chain-hotels. Also, marathon is specially held for women in some countries.

The operation will be successful if the facilitators understand the features and the behaviors of the target audiences in order to properly prepare the events responding to the participants' expectations (Green & Chalip, 1998). However, local sport tourism events taking place in small communities such as bicycling and running have not been the focus of sport tourism studies (Chalip & Green 2001). Moreover, sport tourism in female participants has grown significantly, but there is little research focusing on characteristics and thoughts of female tourists, and data exist is outdated (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Greendorfer, 1979). Such research has also not been found in Thailand. As mentioned above, understanding the target audiences can support the events to be successful; therefore, this research focuses on studying and finding the characteristic of Thai female active sport tourists, their motivations, event loyalty and different sport affinity.

Objectives

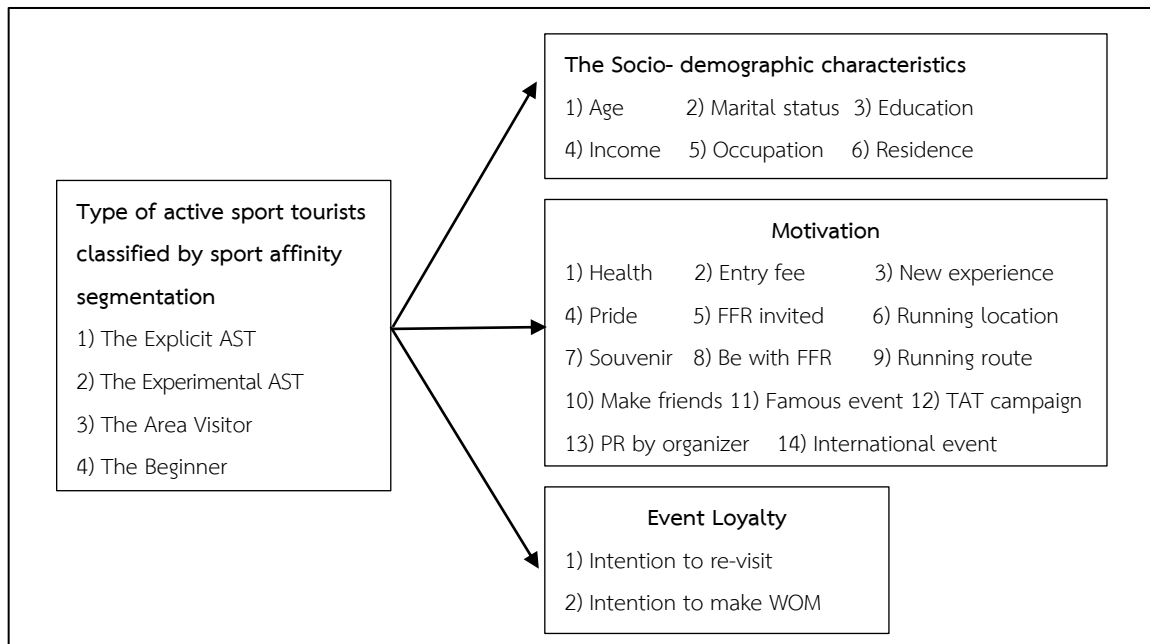
This research focuses on studying and finding the answers for the following questions.

1. To study the socion - demographic characteristics, motivations, and event loyalty of female active sport tourists
2. To study the proportion of respondents with different sport affinity
3. To study the differences of affinity-segments on their socio-demographics, motivations, and event loyalty

Scope of Research

This study focuses on the characteristics, motivations, and event loyalty of only Thai female active sport tourists in the Khon Kaen International Marathon (KKIM) 2018, Thailand.

Conceptual Framework



Literature Review

Sport Tourism Definition

Sport tourism is under the umbrella of Special Interest Tourism. This group of tourists is particularly interested in sports. The definitions of sport tourism are still under debate among academics. This is due to the relationship between the two disciplines; sport and tourism. Each academic has shared his/ her own viewpoints.

Based on the dimension of participation in sport tourism, sport tourism is the departure from the residence to participate in all forms of sport activities for recreation or competition (Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002), including active and passive sport activities (Delpy, 1998; De Knop, 1998; Hinch & Higham, 2004). There are three types of sport tourism; these are active sport tourism where participants travel to take part in sports, event sport tourism where participants travel to watch sport, and nostalgia sport tourism where participants visit sports related attractions (Gibson, 2003; Gibson & Yiannakis, 2002). In terms of the dimension of the purpose of travel, sport tourism refers to the travelers whose main purpose of travel is to attend or race in sports while traveling and recreation are the secondary purposes (De Knop, 1990). Based on the touristic endeavours, sport tourism refers to sport tourism attractions, sport tourism resorts, sport tourism cruises, sport tourism tours and sports tourism events (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2003; Kurtzman, 2005).

In this research, sport tourism means the departure from the residence with the main purpose of participation in competitive sporting activity involving the concepts of times, space, and rules of the sport event.

Sport Affinity Segmentation

Sport tourists are not a homogeneous market, by displaying a range of characteristics motivations, and behaviors. Market segmentation is the process whereby a market such as sport tourists is divided into distinctive market segments so that appropriate marketing and management strategies can be developed for each group. Standard criteria used in market segmentation are demographics, geographic, motivation, attitude, and behavior. Behavioral segmentation is a grouping of people based on behaviors, which the group of people with the same behavior can be better understood. The research that is quite remarkable about the affinity segmentation of people was national park affinity (Küpfer, 2000; Job, 2008; Mayer et al., 2010). Google has also launched affinity segments, which reflect a user's lifestyle and can be used for marketing planning. However, the studies about sport affinity segmentation have not been found.

Sport Tourism Motivation

Researchers try to understand the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of travelers by conducting psychological research to study the stimuli/motives affecting the behaviors (Chon & Sparrow, 1999; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Motivation can vary from the level of motivation and the orientation of motivation. Various theories of motivation were applied from Maslow's hierarchical theory, Murray's needs theory of personality, and Berlyne's concept of optimal level of stimulation to understand sport participants (Cassidy, 2005). The decision of sport tourists to participate in a sporting activity and event is intentionally attracted by both internal and external forces. Internal forces include sport involvement, the love of sport (Deery et al., 2004; Nogowa et al., 1996), willing to experience of being there (Delpy, 1998), feeling to escape, self-exploration, and relaxation (Crompton, 1979). The external forces consist of the social, economic, environmental and political factors. The study found that friends, family, relatives, (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005; Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2007; Mason, 1990), improvement in kinship relations, social interaction, prestige (Crompton, 1979), natural resources and tourism facilities of the city host (Homafar et al., 2011), destination image (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007;

Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Walmsley & Young, 1998), and media advertising (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005) were external choices to participate in sport tourism events and activities.

Sport Event Loyalty

Loyalty customers are very likely to repeat purchase and revisit the place; therefore this group has been focused by the marketers. Moreover, repeat customers definitely recommends positive word-of-mouth to the new comers which would influence their buying decision. The people with similar socio-demographic and lifestyle would share their life experiences to each other on a regular basis such as by telephone, email, social media due to the force of globalization (Booth & Loy, 1999). Therefore, the positive WOM is gold business due to non-marketing cost tool.

Research Methodology

Research Area

Khon Kaen province is one of the destinations for international events and the fifth MICE destination of Thailand. Khon Kaen International Marathon has been held as an annual event since 2004 and it became increasingly popular to 12,820 runners with 39.56% of female runners in the year 2017. The proportion of female was increasing to 10.6% from 2013 to 2017. The event is certified by Association of International Marathon and Distance Races (AIMS).

Data Collection

The survey was carried out 3 days: 26-27 January 2018, which were the registration days, and 28 January 2018, which was the event day. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents by convenience sampling. Face-to-face interview was administered; however, self-response was preferred by some runners. A sample size of 400 questionnaires was targeted to be within a sampling error of +10%. In total, 440 questionnaires were provided and around 94% were returned with completed forms. The samples of this study were Thai female on the completion 15 years of age.

Data Analysis

Crosstabulations and Chi-square-tests tested for the sport affinity segmentation. One-way ANOVA and Chi-square-tests tested for differences between the four affinity segments on respondents' characteristics, motivating reasons, intention to revisit the event, and WOM. Data were analyzed using the statistical program SPSS version 21.0. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was chosen.

Reliability of items showed Cronbach's alpha of 0.871. The 5-Likert-scale in motivation, revisit intention, WOM possibility had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.854 to 0.880, showing that the internal consistency of the scales was excellent.

Results

The characteristics of Thai female active sport tourists was single with the average age 28 years (Table 1). The main proportion of highest education was below Bachelor's. Most of respondents were university student with the pre-tax income between THB 15,000 -30,000 and were residents who lived in Khon Kaen province. Being healthy, gaining new experience, and running location were their main motivations to take part in KKIM (Table 2). The participants were very likely to re-visit and make a WOM recommendation.

Segmentation was used to identify possible segments among participants by sport affinity. This concept proposes four groups called; the "Explicit Active Sport Tourist" (Explicit AST), who has ever visited both KKIM and other marathon events, the "Experimental Active Sport Tourist" (Experimental AST), has ever visited other marathons but first visit for KKIM, the "Area Active Sport Tourist" (Area AST), who visited only KKIM, and the "Beginner", whom KKIM is his/her first marathon. The Explicit AST with the highest sport affinity was about one-third of the samples. The Experimental AST and the Area AST was included 10.8% and 15.4% of the samples respectively. The largest segment, the "Beginner" was accounted for 44.8% of all respondents and showed the lowest affinity. (Table 3)

The degree of affinity has significant differences on their socio-demographic profile (Table 1), motivations, and intention to revisit and making WOM (Table 2).

Discussion

The findings were congruent with the previous studies which have reported a common profile of active sport tourists that this group was single and young adult (Homafar et al., 2011; Bureau of the Census, 1995). Also, the profile of the Explicit and Experimental-AST segments were well educated and relatively affluent (Gibson et al., 1997; Schreiber, 1976; Kaae & Lee, 1996; Booth & Loy, 1999). In addition, financial resources were one of the important factors affecting the travel to participate in sports activities in other areas although long-distance running has been claimed as sport-for-all, based on the samples' information. This was consistent with the research results conducted by Kidd (1995).

There is a wider understanding of actual sport tourists that are relatively more active and much concerned about health related benefits that can be achieved through exercising and also sports event participation. Therefore, being healthy is the first inspiration of female active sport participants. Moreover, marathon is the competition determining the distance for participation. If the participants can conquer the goal, they will feel sense of proud to win over themselves and show the potential of a healthy body.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of samples

Items	Samples (n=415)	The Explicit Active Sport Tourist: 28.9% (n=120)	The Experimental Active Sport Tourist: 10.8% (n=45)	The Area Visitor: 15.4% (n=64)	The Beginner: 44.8% (n=186)	ANOVA, χ^2
Age in years (mean)	27.66	31.96	30.64	25.44	24.93	$\chi^2 = 195.119^{***}$
Status in %						F = 0.606
Single	85.0	82.2	84.4	90.6	84.9	
Married/ Stay together	13.3	16.1	15.6	7.8	13.0	
Divorce/ Separated	1.7	1.7	0	1.6	2.2	
Highest education level in %						F = 18.320 ^{***}
Below Bachelor's	41.4	25.0	17.8	50.0	54.8	
Bachelor's	31.6	41.7	44.4	40.6	32.3	
Higher Bachelor's	21.0	33.3	37.8	9.4	12.9	
Main profession in %						F = 9.329 ^{***}
Students	60.0	43.3	40.0	71.9	71.5	
Employees	11.1	13.3	22.2	3.1	9.7	
Business owners	5.5	6.7	20.0	3.1	2.2	
Retirement	.5	.8	0	1.6	0	
Government officers	21.4	34.2	17.8	18.8	15.1	
Unemployed, looking for jobs	1.4	1.7	0	1.6	1.6	
Pre-tax income in %						F = 15.054 ^{***}
THB 15,000 or less	19.8	12.6	11.6	28.6	23.2	
THB 15,001 and 30,000	42.0	31.1	23.3	49.2	50.8	
THB 30,001 and 45,000	26.3	37.0	44.2	15.9	18.9	
THB 45,001 or more	12.0	19.3	20.9	6.3	7.0	
Residence						F = 5.462 ^{**}
Non-residents	25.5	22.5	40.0	9.4	29.6	
Residents (Postcode 4000x)	74.5	77.5	60.0	90.6	70.4	

* p < 0.05. ** p < 0.01. *** p < 0.001.

Table 2: Motivation and event loyalty

Items	Samples (n=415)	The Explicit Active Sport Tourist: 28.9% (n=120)	The Experimental Active Sport Tourist: 10.8% (n=45)	The Area Visitor:: 15.4% (n=64)	The Beginner: 44.8% (n=186)	ANOVA
Motivation ^a						
Health	4.02	4.12	3.76	3.95	4.05	F = 2.304
Pride	3.93	4.04	4.02	3.78	3.90	F = 1.436
New experience	4.02	3.93	4.09	3.80	4.13	F = 2.968*
Running location	4.02	4.22	3.98	3.97	3.91	F = 2.641*
Entry fee	3.21	3.34	3.13	3.28	3.12	F = 0.801
Souvenir (Medal & Shirt)	3.00	2.97	3.00	2.92	3.04	F = 0.182
Running route	3.30	3.56	3.40	3.20	3.15	F = 3.719*
PR by organizer	3.52	3.73	3.53	3.48	3.38	F = 2.909*
TAT campaign	3.24	3.33	3.36	3.11	3.20	F = 0.808
Make friends	3.28	3.36	3.47	2.86	3.33	F = 4.092**
Be with FFR	3.08	3.25	3.36	2.69	3.05	F = 4.191**
FFR invited	3.44	3.41	3.60	3.33	3.46	F = 0.586
International event	3.25	3.44	3.56	3.16	3.09	F = 3.103*
Famous event	3.33	3.49	3.60	3.34	3.16	F = 2.531
Event loyalty ^b						
Intention to re-visit	1.53	1.26	1.60	1.61	1.66	F = 13.719***
Intention to make WOM	1.50	1.25	1.58	1.61	1.61	F = 12.726***

^a Answer Scale; 1=not important; 5=extremely important.^b Answer Scale; 1=yes, very likely; 4=never.

* p < 0.05.

** p < 0.01.

*** p < 0.001.

Table 3: Active sport tourist segments and segment sizes (n=415)

Segments Questions	The Beginner: 44.8% (n=186)	The Area Visitor: 15.4% (n=64)	The Experimental Active Sport Tourist: 10.8% (n=45)	The Explicit Active Sport Tourist: 28.9% (n=120)
Have you ever participated in KKIM event before?; no in 55.7%	Never, this is my first time	Yes	No	Yes
Have you ever participated in other Marathon events?; no in 60.2%	No	No	Yes	Yes

Crosstabulation; p-value = .000

Motives of visiting of each group were quite clear and consistent with their behavior on sport affinity. One of the highlight reasons was sport tourists especially younger ones always keep doing new things to challenge their ability, to learn what is different from their routine, that means life experience was expected to benefit female sport participants. These two groups, the Beginner and the Experimental AST-segment rated the highest score on new experience due to lack of the event experiences. Interestingly, those females experienced this event like the Explicit AST-segment and the Area Visitors still have a desire to revisit in order to get more experiences. Obviously, this is a clear indication that even the event is held annually with the same old running location and route, the participants belief that every time they take part in the sport events, they will get different feelings, new inspirations, new perspectives, excitement, challenges and fun.

The event location was also firstly considered by interested participants in terms of convenience of travelling, attractive running location were absolute important to the Beginner and Experimental AST-segment make an easier decision to take part in the event. However, even if the Explicit AST and the Area Visitor had participated in KKIM and had been to this area, location was also prioritized. The reasons might be due to the familiarity of the area, commitment, ease of travel and satisfaction with the past event. This is consistent with the study by Gibson's (1998) which found that active sport tourists tend to engage in repeat activity.

The important findings of the study were the least appealing factor was the souvenirs from the running event. Obviously, mostly running events in Thailand, what event organizers have been always trying to offer and promote are running shirts and medals but these had little effect on the decision of female active sport tourists.

Interestingly, when comparing the behavior of each group, the distinguish characteristic of the Beginner would be to try something that they have never done just to find new experiences. The Experimental-AST segments focused on social interaction, including participating in the event with FFR and creating new relationships with those who having a passion for running and the same lifestyle. The Explicit AST and the Area Visitor-segment showed higher levels of the place attachment. Although they had participated in this running event or come to this province, they still were excited and desired to be involved and be part of the event.

Lastly, in competitive market of sport tourism destination, the Explicit AST-segment might be highlighted as loyal visitors who generate important advantages and long-term benefits to

the sport event and the local area. The Explicit AST preferred to repeat visit and most wanted to promote positive word of mouth to their relatives about this event.

Recommendation

Implementation

The findings can assist the event professionals, event organizers, promoters, tourism planners, tourism marketers, and researchers to illustrate their characteristics, motivations, and event loyalty of the on-site situation of Thai running event. Segmentation can not only be grouped according to the sport affinity level, but it is also linked to the place attachment. The Explicit AST-segment with the highest level of sport affinity and place attachment indicated the most positive in both returning and making word-of-mouth possibility. It means that this segment plays an important role in regional economy and development, and the benefits will further increase in the long-term if the running event's performance satisfies the tourists. These participants will revisit the event, and express their experience and positive word-of-mouth to their acquaintances to become the new sport participants. Therefore, in marketing strategies of running event and tourism destination, the Explicit AST-segment might be highlighted as loyal visitors who generate important advantages and long-time benefit to the destination. However, in terms of the proportion of residence, it was found that most of the participants were local residents, not actual tourists. It indicated that this sport tourism event received a lot of positive feedback and participation from the community. Although less economic stimulus is provided compared to tourist arrivals and expenditures, it will be supported by the community and the long-term sustainability of tourism.

Further Study

A profile of male active sport tourists is recommended for further study for comparison. Also, tourists' expenses issue to investigate which group of active sport tourists plays the most positive role in stimulating the local economy and what the proportion of spending is.

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