

DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES THAT ATTRACT MARATHON RUNNERS: A CASE STUDY OF THE BANGSAEN21 HALF MARATHON

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ABSTRACT

Marathons are currently a popular trend in Thailand as more people have become interested in participating in them. Consequently, many marathon events have been organized and located in different cities, thus offering runners many options to choose from. The Bangsaen21 Half Marathon is one of the most popular choices among runners and has been voted Thailand's best marathon event by several parties. Not only does this event have an economic impact for the local people, but it also affects them socioculturally. More than 37,000 runners registered despite having only a 35 percent chance of participating. This study asked marathon participants to assess the appeal of Bangsaen as a preferred destination for a marathon event. Data used in this study was collected through questionnaires conducted in person. Over 510 surveys were collected and analyzed for factors that impact marathon runners' satisfaction and their intention to attend the next marathon. The results show that four factors, including activities, attractiveness, amenities and ancillary services, have an effect on the marathon runners' satisfaction, which consequently affects their decision to complete the next marathon. However, the research has not found direct and indirect impacts from available package and accessibility factors on runners' satisfaction and intention to revisit. This research study provides marathon organizers suggestions on how to market their respective events based on participants' perceptions, as well as provides support to the community and stakeholders interested in attracting and marketing similar events.

Keywords: Half Marathon, attractiveness, sport tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and sporting events attract travelers, tourists and sports enthusiasts. These industries, as well as academics, have taken an interest in conducting research related to sports tourism. Marathons which are either ultra (more than 42.195 kilometers), full (42.195 kilometers) or half (21.0975 kilometers) in length are a big part of sport tourism. These marathons can have financial, sociological and environmental impacts and can help contribute toward sustainable tourism (Halpenny, Kulczycki, & Moghimehfar, 2016).

Every year, more than one hundred thousand people from across the world participate in marathons. In the USA alone, the number of all marathon finishers was nearly 17 million in 2016, compared to only around 13 million in 2010. This represents a considerable increase of 23.5% (RunningUSA, 2017). More than 78,000 marathon events are held around the world annually, with around 30,400 in the USA alone (Ahotu, 2017). In 2017, 943 marathon races were held in different cities throughout Thailand (Forrunnersmag, 2017). With this high number of marathon races, runners are offered the choice between venues. Given the recent growth in the sport tourism market, an understanding of a destination's desired attributes,

which influence runners' satisfaction and decision to complete future marathons within said destination, allows organizers and authorities improve the quality of event management, deploy effective marketing strategies and build travel incentives to attract runners and their families.

A significant amount of literature related to sporting events has been published; however, its primary focus has been on major sporting events such as the Olympics (Ahmed & Pretorius, 2010), the FIFA world cup (Du Plessis & Maennig, 2011) and the Rugby World Cup (Frawley & Cush, 2011). Moreover, most of these studies have been conducted in Western countries. Generally, midsize events, such as city marathon races, which attract mass participation and spectatorship, are overlooked. Existing research studies have focused on the residential side; studying the perceived impacts of sporting events on the local hosting city (Liu, Chuang, Chang, & Chang, 2017; Piwowarczyk et al., 2016). In addition, some studies have concentrated on the runners' motivation to participate (Hammer & Podlog, 2016; Ogles & Masters, 2000), with little focus on the impact of these events on participants.

The aim of the present study is to fill the research gap and develop a theoretical model to help assess a destination's desired attributes which influence runners' satisfaction and decision to complete future marathons within said destination. Practical implications and further research are also discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Destination Attributes

Tourists have many options when it comes to travel. With regards to tourism and recreational activities, the destination is one of the crucial components in the decision-making process. Many scholars have defined the term "destination" in several ways. With regards to its geographical definition, a tourist destination is defined as a place of interest where tourists visit on a temporary basis, typically to experience the attractive characteristics of said destination (Leiper, 1995). In addition to the experiential dimension, Leiper (1995) perceives the destination's attractiveness as a key factor, and the perceptual aspect as essentially subjective. Concerning this aspect, a tourist destination is unlike other physical commodity products where the product is delivered to the customer; but rather, it is the inverse where the customer is "delivered" to the destination. Another definition states a tourist destination is a geographical region comprising the critical mass of development which meets the desires of the tourist (Gunn, 1997). Concurrently, the definition of a tourist destination can also go beyond the geographical limits and extend to a tourist's original motivations (Buhalis, 2000). As denoted by Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, and Wanhill (2008), a tourist destination is the focus on facilities and services designed to motivate or meet the needs of tourists. With these definitions in mind, an area, location, city or region can be invested in and developed to attract tourists. In other words, tourist destinations can include a mixture of complex entities aside from just locations, including products, services and experiences.

The choice in tourist destination has been of considerable interest for tourism scholars (King, Chen, & Funk, 2015). Many factors have been found which influence a tourist's decision-making process. Based on Dann's (1977) push-pull theory, these factors can be categorized into two groups: "push" and "pull". Push factors refer to the specific or internal forces that impact a person's decision to take a vacation, whereas pull factors refer to the forces that impact the person's decision as to which destination should be selected. In brief, push motives assist in justifying the need to travel, whilst pull

motives justify the destination choice (King et al., 2015).

From an internal perspective, many research studies have explored the behavior of travelers by investigating the push factors associated to tourism (Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2013; Templeton & Lee, 2016). The common push factors found in these studies included escape from a person's everyday environment, as well as novelty, social interaction, relaxation and prestige. Conversely, some studies have focused on sport tourism; specifically, marathons. For example, Ogles and Masters (2000) compared the motivation behind attending marathons between younger and older runners. The researchers found that younger runners were motivated by personal goal achievement, while older runners' motivation was based on general health and weight concerns, as well as the meaning of life. A later study conducted by Hammer and Podlog (2016) found that the motivation behind running marathons can depend on a person's family structure, including marital status, whether someone has children and the age of a person's children. For instance, those who were not married were motivated by a sense of accomplishment, health benefits, as well as the social aspect, whereas those who were married with young children reported being motivated by the social aspects, such as developing friendships.

To elicit a destination's desired attributes, some scholars have explored the determining factors for travelers, which affect their destination choice. For example, Buhalis (2000) proposes that successful destinations be organized into the 6As. The 6As include Activity, Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, Available packages, and Ancillary services. Activity refers to all activities which are available at the destination, and what activities travelers participate in during their visit; attractions refer to an event or place that draws visitors by offering something of interest or pleasure to tourists; accessibility refers to the ability to reach desired services, activities and destinations; amenities refer to all services which facilitate a convenient stay, such as accommodation, food and activities; available packages refer to the pre-arranged service bundles created by intermediaries to garner attention for the unique features of a destination; and ancillary services refer to the day-to-day services, including banks, telecommunications, post offices and hospitals (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2013). These attributes are related to location, products, services and ultimately, experiences. Buhalis (2000) claimed that it is important for destinations to properly maintain the 6As to stay competitive within the

industry. Nicolau and Mas (2006) claimed there are 17 attributes, which impact destination choices. Some of these attributes include infrastructure, programmed activities, entry prices and reputation. Another study conducted by Eusébio and Vieira (2013) proposed 9 destination attributes, some of which include quality of transportation, price of accommodation and traffic congestion. The mentioned attributes additional to the 6As are primarily elaborations upon the 6As and are not always applicable for all destinations. Therefore, the present study adopts Buhalis' (2000) 6As as they cover the core components of a tourist destination as defined in this study. Additionally, as many prior studies have explored push factors for sport tourism and only limited research studies on the pull side for marathon events, this study aims to examine a destination's key attributes which impact tourism.

2. Satisfaction

The word "satisfaction" has been theoretically defined as pleasure fulfillment through an overall evaluation of a service or product compared to a consumer's expectations (Oliver, 1999). In the context of tourism, satisfaction is predominantly referred to as a function of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences (Reisinger & Turner, 2012). Specifically, a tourist can construct an impression of their overall pleasure after a trip. A tourist might be satisfied when their experiences – within a given set of expectations – result in feelings of gratification. On the contrary, they might be disappointed when their experience results in feelings of displeasure. Consequently, satisfaction is an affective orientation toward the products or services customers are exposed to and experience.

To date, satisfaction has been empirically proven to be a necessary component within a competitive market-oriented industry. Extensive research studies have been conducted to investigate the causes of satisfaction, as well as examine satisfaction as a predictor in various post-processes (Koo, Byon, & Baker III, 2014). Pantouvakis and Lymperopoulos (2008) found that satisfaction is dependent on various factors, such as consumer moods, emotions, perceived service quality and social interactions. Kim and Lough (2007) also claim that the more experienced the consumer, the more likely they are to be satisfied with a service or product. With regards to the post-process, the evaluation of a traveler's experience has demonstrated that the satisfaction of the tourist has a significant impact on destination loyalty (Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013), positive word-of-mouth (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014) and a tourist's intention to revisit a

destination (Assaker, Vinzi, & O'Connor, 2011). Reisinger and Turner (2012) claim that the higher the satisfaction of the traveler, the higher the likelihood they will revisit a destination.

3. Behavioral intention

Behavioral intention is defined as a person's intention to behave based on his or her feelings, knowledge, or assessments of prior experiences (Spears & Singh, 2004). Behavioral intention can be classified into two categories: favorable and unfavorable (Ladhari, 2009). Some researchers have found that if a consumer has an unfavorable behavioral intention, they will leave a destination, spend less money, deliver negative word-of-mouth and will even take legal action against a product or service provider. On the contrary, if a consumer has a favorable behavioral intention, they are more likely to repurchase a product, spend more money, pay a premium price, deliver positive word-of-mouth and will become a loyal customer (Ladhari, 2009). A loyal customer might act as a channel in promoting a product or service through informal recommendation and word-of-mouth. Consequently, this helps the service provider gain more revenue and reduce marketing costs (Reid & Reid, 1994).

Lending to the benefits of favorable behavioral intention, scholars have used behavioral intention to investigate the direct and indirect relationships between a destination's attributes and satisfaction. Some researchers found that a destination's attributes have direct impact on behavioral intention (Park & Njite, 2010), whereas others revealed that a destination's attributes were indirectly linked to satisfaction (Wang & Hsu, 2010). Consequently, both a destination's attributes and satisfaction can act as predictors of behavioral intention.

4. Hypothesis Development

Based on the preceding literature review, this study proposed the model exploring the structural relationship between a destination's attributes, a runner's satisfaction and behavior intention. Specifically, the model examines the direct impact from the perspective of six destination attributes and behavioral intention. Furthermore, this model examines the mediating role of satisfaction between the six destination attributes and behavioral intention at a marathon event.

All six destination attributes were hypothesized to have direct effects on behavioral intention. The results from previous studies on

tourism are mixed and arguably inconsistent. Some attributes have been found to be significant in certain contexts (Chen & Funk, 2010; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010), whereas others were found less. Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) indicated that based on a population of active sport tourists whose primary purpose was to participate in a sporting event, the attributes from past experiences, including the natural environment, sightseeing opportunities, safety, novelty, climate and convenience of a destination, significantly influenced their intention to return to the destination for sport tourism activities. Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) also found that an important factor for a sport tourist is a destination's attributes. This finding is also supported by Chen and Funk (2010) whose study compared sport and non-sport tourists in Europe. The researchers found that three attributes – accommodation facilities, historic/cultural attractions and sporting facilities and activities – have different impacts on sport and non-sport tourists. They discovered a sport tourist's decision to return to the destination was influenced by the three attributes, whereas a non-sport tourist's decision was not. On the other hand, Eusébio and Vieira (2013) found that a destination's attributes have no direct impact on behavioral intention to return, but the destination has a direct impact on satisfaction. These authors explained that motivations, alternative destinations and low switching costs may contribute to tourist satisfaction, but nevertheless, could decide not to return to the destination. Therefore, the following first set of six hypotheses would be:

H1a: There is a positive direct relationship between activity and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

H2a: There is a positive direct relationship between attractive and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

H3a: There is a positive direct relationship between amenities and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

H4a: There is a positive direct relationship between available packages and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

H5a: There is a positive direct relationship between accessibility and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

H6a: There is a positive direct relationship between ancillary services and behavioral intention to attend a future event.

Literature on satisfaction with tourism and sporting events has indicated that travelers'

satisfaction with individual components of a destination leads to their satisfaction with the overall destination (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2015; Zabkar, Brencic, & Dmitrovic, 2010). In tourism, it is important to consider the individual attributes because the particular characteristics of tourism have a notable effect on a tourist's satisfaction (Seaton & Bennett, 1996). Zabkar et al. (2010) found that all six destination attributes, including accessibility, amenities, attractions, available packages, activities, and ancillary services influence the perceived quality of a destination's offerings and tourist satisfaction. Still, a study by Eusébio and Vieira (2013) found that attraction, accessibility and ancillary services have a direct effect on satisfaction. However, the researchers noted that the relative importance of these attributes is strongly influenced by and can vary with, the type of destination and the market under analysis. Therefore, the second set of six hypotheses would be:

H1b: Activity positively influences a runner's satisfaction.

H2b: Attractions positively influences a runner's satisfaction.

H3b: Amenities positively influences a runner's satisfaction.

H4b: Available packages positively influences a runner's satisfaction.

H5b: Accessibility positively influences a runner's satisfaction.

H6b: Ancillary services positively influence a runner's satisfaction.

The link between tourist satisfaction and behavior intention to return to an event in the future has been well-established by prior literature (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Zabkar et al., 2010). Previous research revealed that sport tourists travel for varied reasons –from watching sporting events, to actively participating in sporting events or visiting well-known sports locations (Shonk & Chelladurai, 2008). Baker and Crompton (2000) claimed that satisfied participants are more likely to return to the same event and share their positive experience with others. Additionally, Lehto, O'Leary, and Morrison (2004) stated that if a returning tourist visits different attractions or attends different activities within the same destination, they are likely to have different expectations. Scholars versed in sports have examined the indirect and direct effects of satisfaction on the intention to return to a destination. Concerning the indirect effect, Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) found that the relationship between the quality of sport tourism and the intention to return to the destination or event is

wholly influenced by the satisfaction a tourist experiences with the service. This finding is consistent with the previous study by Cronin Jr and Taylor (1992) who stated that consumers may not always purchase the best quality service, but may experience an enhanced level of satisfaction due to several aspects such as convenience, price or availability. With regards to the direct effect, Zabkar et al. (2010) found the direct impact of tourists' satisfaction on behavior intention. This finding is supported by Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) study wherein they indicate that satisfaction with a recurring sports event is a more stable predictor for repeated event participation. However, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) did not find any direct relationship between satisfaction and the intention to return in their non-recurring bicycle event study. Nevertheless, they found that previous experience with a destination significantly influenced their intention to return. Therefore, last hypotheses would be:

H7: Satisfaction positively influences a runner's behavioral intention.

RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Study sites and population

The target population of the present study consists of runners in the Bangsean21 Half Marathon event. This event was chosen as the research topic for three primary reasons. Firstly, the Bangsean21 Half Marathon was ranked as the best half marathon in Thailand by many agencies. Secondly, the appeal of the event's popularity – with applications from 37,000 runners, despite a random selection of only 13,000 runners. Thirdly, it was the first half marathon in Thailand and in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that conformed with the standards of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS), the Asian Athletics Association (AAA) and the Athletic Association of Thailand (AAT). Moreover, the IAAF agreed to send a committee to inspect the standards of the half marathon in accordance with the highest international running standards. Up to the first of January 2017, only 101 events worldwide – all international races – were certified (Destination Thailand News, 2016).

2. Survey instrument

In the present study, a quantitative data collection method was applied to analyze the empirical data, which was collected from the marathon runners through a questionnaire survey.

The questionnaires were administered using a direct in-person survey methodology to achieve high response rates (Lee, 2013). A simple random sampling technique was used whereby all participants were given the same probability of being selected (Altinay, Paraskevas, & Jang, 2015). To facilitate the process of collecting survey data, twelve students majoring in tourism were hired to act as research assistants and trained in research data collection techniques, including in-person questionnaire administration, randomized sampling, and techniques for reducing refusal rates. The questionnaires were administered on November 16th and 17th, 2017. If an individual refused to participate, another runner was engaged and requested to partake. Some 571 fully completed questionnaires were collected from both local and non-local participants. 70 participants who were residents of Bangsaen, the host city, were deleted from the sampling frame. As a result, this study yielded a sample size of 501, which, based on studies conducted by Westland (2010) is adequate for performing the SEM analysis. The majority of respondents were male aged between 30-44, have average monthly income around 20,001-30,000 baht and hold bachelor degree.

Destination attributes. A combination of structured and unstructured techniques were used to capture various aspects of the Bangsaen21 Half Marathon as a sporting event, including a comprehensive review of previous destination literature, content analysis of tourism literature (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008; Zabkar et al., 2010), promotion brochures and websites, and the employment of qualitative research techniques, such as unstructured personal interviews and managerial judgment. An attribute list consisting of 32 items was established with "Activity" and "Accessibility" measured with five items, "Attraction" with seven, "Amenities" with nine, and "Available packages" and Ancillary services" with three. All items under the six destination attributes were anchored by a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied.

Satisfaction and Behavioral intention.

Satisfaction with the marathon event and behavioral intention were each measured with three items as suggested in tourism literature (Zabkar et al., 2010). The item requested respondents indicate on a 7-point scale, the satisfaction and the likelihood to participate in the following year's event, ranging from 1= extremely agree and 7 = extremely disagree.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation was administered to test the proposed model. Following Byrne's (2000) two-step approach, the measurement model was first examined to test whether the intended constructs were measured by the underlying latent variables, with no significant cross-loading on other factors. Subsequently, the structural model was examined to investigate the relationships between the theoretical constructs and proposed hypotheses. In this study, the AMOS version 21 software was used to assess the measurement and the structural model.

The testing of the measurement model. The measurement model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis to assess reliability and validity. According to the recommended level by Hair et al. (2010), the results indicate a satisfactory fit of eight proposed factors with $X^2/df = 1.798$ (recommended value below 3). The fit indices pass the minimum value of 0.9, where the goodness of fit index (GFI) = 0.918, the normed fit index (NFI) = 0.950, and the comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.977, respectively. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.040, which is lower than the suggested limit of 0.05. Accordingly, the researchers proceeded to evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement model in terms of convergent validity and discriminant validity.

The convergent validity was assessed using the attributes of factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE), and construct reliability (CR). In this study, all the scale items are highly loaded with respect to their constructs, with all factor loadings having an above the threshold value of 0.50 (Kline, 2010). The high loadings suggest that the indicators converge on a common point and the indicators are strongly related to their associated constructs. Moreover, the AVE values of each construct fall between 0.643 and 0.885, indicating good convergence (rule of thumb at 0.50 or higher) (Kline, 2010). Finally, CR of each indicator in this present study shows scores above 0.80, suggesting that the measures consistently represent the same latent construct.

To evaluate the discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE values was compared with the absolute value of the correlation estimates (Kline, 2010). As listed in Table 1, for each factor the square root of AVE values (shown as parentheses on the diagonal) are significantly larger than its absolute correlation estimates with other factors, indicating that a satisfactory level of discriminant validity has been achieved. In other words, all the constructs in the measurement model are statistically different from each other. Therefore, the measurement model of this study exhibits the sound reliability and validity necessary for further testing of the research hypotheses.

Table 1 The AVE and squared correlation estimates

	ITV	ACT	ATT	APK	ACC	ANC	SAT	AMT
ITV	(0.941)							
ACT	0.582	(0.802)						
ATT	0.639	0.067	(0.804)					
APK	0.021	0.048	0.051	(0.926)				
ACC	0.101	0.085	0.119	0.010	(0.819)			
ANC	0.574	0.650	0.697	0.157	0.072	(0.807)		
SAT	0.753	0.677	0.764	0.047	0.083	0.670	(0.911)	
AMT	0.510	0.591	0.591	0.070	0.034	0.597	0.591	(0.899)

Direct effect. The results of the full structural model showed there was good fit of data ($X^2/df = 1.701$, GFI = 0.929, NFI = 0.957, CFI = 0.982, RMSEA = 0.037). This study tested each hypothesis by examining the path significance. Figure 1 illustrates the path diagram with the resulting standardized structural parameter estimates included on the paths.

With regards to the structural relations for runner satisfaction when attending a marathon event, the effect of activity (H1b), attractiveness (H2b), amenities (H3b), and ancillary services (H6b) are supported ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.427$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.129$, $p < 0.05$, and $\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). However, available packages (H4b) and accessibility (H5b) were

found to have no effect on runner satisfaction. These factors explained 65 percent of the total variance in runner satisfaction – the greatest being the attractiveness of the venue. Regarding the effect of behavioral intention to return to future marathon events, only satisfaction (H7) confirms this prediction ($\beta = 0.583$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, the hypotheses of activity (H1a), attractiveness (H2a),

amenities (H3a), available packages (H4a), accessibility (H5a) and ancillary services (H6a) are unsupported. The model explains 59 percent of

the total variance in behavior intention to return, with satisfaction contributing to the greatest effect.

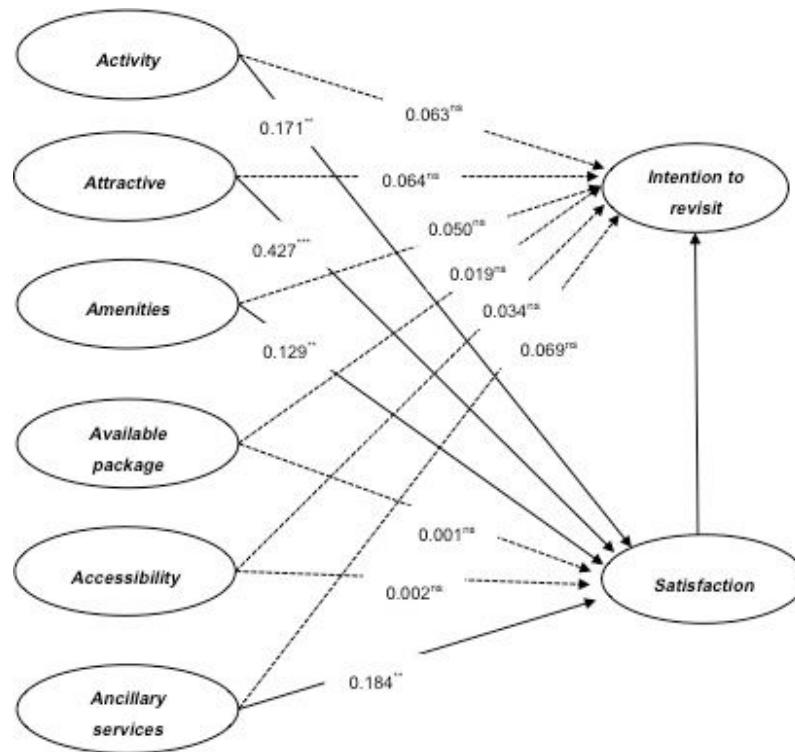


Figure 1 Results of structural path analysis for the research model and hypotheses testing.

Mediating effects. A formal test of indirect effects using a bootstrap procedure was performed to examine the mediation effects in the part analysis model. As shown in Table 2, activity, attractiveness, amenities, and ancillary services were found to have no direct significant effect on behavioral intention; however, these factors indirectly influenced behavioral intention via satisfaction. In other words,

the relationship is fully mediated by satisfaction. For the indirect path, the effect of attractiveness on behavioral intention is strongest, followed by ancillary services, activity and amenities ($\beta = 0.249$, $\beta = 0.108$, $\beta = 0.100$, and $\beta = 0.075$, respectively). Moreover, the findings also suggest that there is no significant direct and indirect influence of available packages and accessibility on behavioral intention.

Table 2 Direct, indirect and total effects of the relationships

Independent variable	Satisfaction (R ² = 0.65)			Behavioral Intention to return (R ² = 0.59)			Mediation Analysis Results
	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	
Activity	0.171**	-	0.171**	0.063 ^{ns}	0.100**	0.163**	Full mediation
Attractiveness	0.427***	-	0.427**	0.064 ^{ns}	0.249***	0.312***	Full mediation
Amenities	0.129**	-	0.129**	0.050 ^{ns}	0.075**	0.125**	Full mediation
Available package	0.001 ^{ns}	-	0.001 ^{ns}	0.019 ^{ns}	0.001 ^{ns}	0.019 ^{ns}	No effect
Accessibility	0.002 ^{ns}	-	0.002 ^{ns}	0.034 ^{ns}	0.001 ^{ns}	0.035 ^{ns}	No effect
Ancillary services	0.184**	-	0.184**	0.069 ^{ns}	0.108**	0.177**	Full mediation
Satisfaction	-	-	-	0.583***	-	0.583***	Direct effect on BI

Note: Standardized coefficients are reported. ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.001, ns = not significant

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The objective of this research is to model the key destination attributes that impact runners' satisfaction and runners' intention to return. Based on current impact literature, the marathon destination model – with thirteen paths – was proposed. Using data obtained from the runners who participated in the Bangsaen21 Half Marathon, the hypothesized paths were tested with the structural equation modeling approach. The results of the analysis confirmed that only five hypothesized paths were significant. Four attribute factors from the 6As of tourism destinations, including activity (H1b), attractiveness (H2b), amenities (H3b), and ancillary services (H6b) were positively associated with runners' satisfaction, which consequently effected behavioral intention to return (H7). However, on their own, these factors have no direct effect on behavioral intention to return to future events. Available packages and accessibility were not found to directly and indirectly impact both runners' satisfaction and behavioral intention to return.

A positive significant relationship was found between activity and runners' satisfaction. Runners revealed signs of satisfaction when participating in activities such as warm up exercises, award ceremonies and meals during the marathon event. In other words, the runners not only considered the race, but also the supplementary activities that are provided during the event. This finding is in accordance with Theodorakis, Kaplanidou, and Karabaxoglou (2015) who studied event service quality and satisfaction in sporting events. These researchers found that environmental factors significantly contribute to sport attendees' perceptions of satisfaction and the quality on experiential happiness outcomes.

Tourist attractions are the soul of the tourism destination. In previous studies, Eusébio and Vieira (2013) highlighted the availability of tourist attractions as one of the most important factors which might pull or push tourists to visit a specific destination. This present study also found the positive effect of attractiveness of tourist attractions on runners' satisfaction and suggests that the involved entities pay attention to the aesthetic value of their venues. Previous studies involving other sporting events such as cycling, surfing and rock climbing, also found that beautiful scenery helps promote tourism for active tourists who travel to participate in their favorite sporting activity (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Papadimitriou & Gibson, 2008). However, this study found that not only does the environmental factor impact satisfaction among visitors, but so does the quality of

the route itself. Due to the high volume of marathon events in Thailand, runners consider the quality of the route, and choose the routes which have been accredited by trusted agencies.

Amenities and ancillary services were both found to have significant effects on runners' satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of the interaction between venue staff and runners, and the importance of the availability of support services, such as security systems and medical services. Both amenities and ancillary services dimensions have been previously emphasized, as shown in the study by Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005). The consistency in the predictive role of satisfaction may lie in tourism, especially within the context of sports. When they participate in sporting events, tourists have a higher probability of getting injured (Miller, Pauline, & Donahue, 2017). Moreover, since all events have mandatory rules to follow, event staffs are required to provide support and information to participants. However, it should be noted that the relative importance of these factors varies among different sports and destinations.

A significant relationship was not found between available packages and accessibility and satisfaction and behavior intention. These results conflicted with other studies (Zabkar et al., 2010) and could be due to the location in which the study was conducted. Since Bangsaen is not a big city and Thai people have recognized it as a popular travel destination, most runners who attended the marathon event had organized their trip on their own. Therefore, the available packages factor was not applicable. Moreover, with regards to the accessibility factor, most runners came from neighboring provinces such as Bangkok, thus access to the marathon event was not a major concern for them. Additionally, the popularity of the event among runners is significant as it implies that runners have a strong desire to participate, hence, little impact on their intention.

In this study, satisfaction was found to have a significant impact on the intention to return to the marathon event in the future. Nonetheless, the relationship between satisfaction and intention to return is not in accordance with existing tourism literature. The studies by Zabkar et al. (2010) found that satisfaction impacts the intention to return to a previously visited destination. In contrast, Bigne, Sanchez, and Sanchez (2001) found that merely measuring tourists' satisfaction is not adequate in predicting behavioral responses. Similarly, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) found that satisfaction with a bicycling event did not predict tourists' intentions to return back to the destination. However,

this study illustrates the significant role of satisfaction and its role in the decision-making process with regards to taking part in future marathon events. The inconsistent results between this study and prior studies may be due to the nature and frequency of the sporting event, as well as the destination. For example, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) conducted a study in the context of a non-recurring bicycling event which found no relationship between cyclists' satisfaction and behavioral intention. However, the present study conducted research in a recurring marathon event in the same destination. It may be that satisfaction with a recurring sporting event is a more stable predictor for repeat participation. Therefore, the role of participants' satisfaction could be essential in predicting sporting event behavior within the context of certain event types and hosting frequency. Furthermore, the SEM analysis confirmed the mediation role satisfaction played between the four destination attributes (including activity, attractiveness, amenities, and ancillary services) and the intention to return to the event in the future. This result is in accordance with prior research studies on tourism which examined the relationship between destination image (which includes a destination's attributes) and the intention to return (Bigne et al., 2001; Chi & Qu, 2008). In the present study, marathon runners with positive experiences tend to demonstrate a higher level of satisfaction, and are more likely to return to the event in the future, as well as refer the event to others.

The results of the present study should be interpreted with caution. The research sample in the present study is limited to visitors of the Bangsaen21

Half Marathon. However, the results of this study suggest that involved parties, including the organizers of the sporting event, should pay attention to keeping a high level of satisfaction among their participants to encourage future participation. Specifically, sporting event organizers should develop effective strategies to enhance key attributes for both the destination and event. For example, volunteers and staff should be trained to increase participants' satisfaction and improve their overall experience. The ability to respond quickly, an enthusiastic attitude and knowledge about the competition are important in meeting this crucial outcome. Event organizers should also cooperate with other service providers, such as hospitals, security companies and banks to provide convenient and supportive services for participants. Therefore, entities involved in organizing events should aim to deliver positive experiences for their participants, for example, by providing a safe running track with excellent facilities. Furthermore, event organizers, local governments, as well as constituents within the communities should work together to improve their respective destination's attributes. In doing so, they can provide the best and most inviting environment for participants, with the aim to maximize tourists' satisfaction in hopes of their return, eventually leading to sustainable tourism.

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