

SPORT TOURIST EXPECTATIONS OF A WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTING EVENT

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ABSTRACT

Sport tourist satisfaction is critical to the managerial success of any sporting event. Sport tourists have preconceived expectations of the type and quality of services to be offered at a particular event. The extent to which these expectations are met will determine sport tourism satisfaction. For the purpose of this study the definition of a sport tourist was taken as any individual that facilitates or organise a sport event, participates as an athlete or attend a sport event as spectator. This study aims to assess the expectations of international sport tourists by measuring the difference between sport tourist expectations and perceived performance of the event organisers. A questionnaire based on the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory of Qu and Ping (1999) was administered to a convenience sample (n=123) from the universum of 893 international sport tourists attending the 2002 Tug-of-War World Championships in South Africa. Data was analysed through the Cronbach Alpha Method, factor analysis and a paired sample t-test. Overall results indicate that the sport tourists perceived the particular sport event as a moderate success. Particular dissatisfaction was expressed with the administration of the event, standard of competition venue, standard of refereeing and the closing ceremony. Results suggest that the events organisers have not adequately capitalized on the economic and psychic income potential of the event. Sport event organisers should pursue multiple goals when designing the product and service parameters of a particular event.

Key words: Sport tourist; Expectations; Service experience; Satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is increasingly becoming a salient issue in most service industries. All sectors of service industries are heavily reliant upon the personal interaction between service provider and consumer (Corbin *et al.*, 2001). Sport tourism falls within the ambit of a service industry and as such sport tourists have preconceived expectations of the type and quality of services to be offered at a particular event (Turco *et al.*, 2002). The extent to which these expectations are met will determine what is perceived to be acceptable service levels (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Corbin *et al.*, 2001). Baker and Crompton (2000) unequivocally state that there should be a positive relationship between the constructs of quality of the tourism provider's performance, level of consumer satisfaction and the success of an event. Researchers have analysed the constructs individually but relatively little research has however been done on the

interface between constructs. According to Otto and Ritchie (1996) consumer emotions may intervene or act as a mediator between performance and satisfaction and elaborated on this by distinguishing between objective and subjective components of successful tourism events. Zeithaml *et al.* (1990) argued that service quality could only be defined by considering the customer's expectations, satisfactions and perceptions. It is therefore important for event managers to know their audience and consider their target markets before setting quality standards. En route to achieving success and to excel in service provision, a service-provider needs to ensure that all functions performed render appropriate contributions to overall success by embracing the customer (Knod & Schonberger, 2001). To excel in hosting international sport events requires from the event organiser to respond in appropriate ways to accommodate the needs of multiple-cultures within a single event strategy. This necessitates according to Day (1990), amongst others, the offering of a standardised core service offering that exploits or creates homogeneous tastes or performance requirements. Achieving this should enable the event organiser to largely meet the expectations of tourists arriving from anywhere around the globe regardless culture, race or gender. Meeting sport tourist expectations of service quality is a key element in effective sport events (Pope & Turco, 2001). Gilbert and Wong (2003) propose three popular models to measure service quality: the Weighted Importance Theory of Weiermaier and Fuchs (1999); the Expectancy Disconfirmation Model of Qu and Ping (1999) and the Actual Service Performance Theory. The Weighted Importance Theory aims to estimate theoretically defensible weighting schemes for each identified attribute of an event by allocating different weights to all factors influencing the service quality of the event. Respondents are typically asked to rate the relative importance of specific quality aspects as well as to assess experienced satisfaction of these aspects (Weiermaier & Fuchs, 1999). Qu and Ping's (1999) Expectancy Disconfirmation model differs from the aforementioned theory in so far as allocating equal weight (importance) to all factors influencing the service quality of the event. Respondents are merely asked to compare expectations to actual service performance. The gap between expectation and performance indicates either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Service satisfaction is thus expressed as a function of level of expectation and perceived performance. Three states of satisfaction emerge according to this model: highly satisfied (performance > expectation); satisfied (performance = expectation) or dissatisfied (performance < expectation). Berry and Parasuraman (1991) also focus on the gap between desired (hopes to receive) and adequate (finds it acceptable) levels of expectations. The difference between the desired and the adequate levels of expectations represents a zone of tolerance as depicted in Figure 1. This zone of tolerance thus represents a range of service performance that the sport tourist considers to be of a satisfactory level.

The Actual Service Performance model claims that, in contrast to the abovementioned models, service performance and expectations independently influence customer satisfaction. Although tourist (including sport tourists) satisfaction is critical to the success of any sporting event, relatively little research has been published on this topic. Turco *et al.* (2002) state that it seems as if more advances have been made in producing higher quality and more marketable events (objective components) than on the manner in which the events affect (subjective component) the guests. It is emphasised that understanding how events affect customers will assist event organisers and sponsors to design more effective event marketing programmes to satisfy customer objectives.

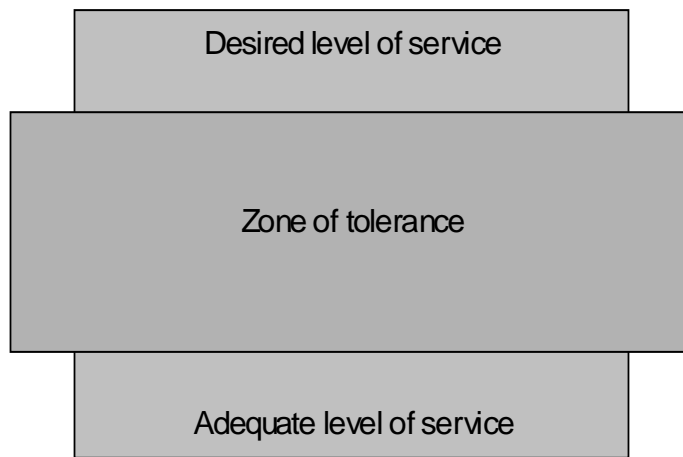


FIGURE 1. CUSTOMER'S EXPECTATIONS STRUCTURE

(Berry & Parasuraman, 1991: 58)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa has over the past decade increasingly bid for and staged international sporting events. Amongst others, South Africa has successfully bid for and staged the Rugby World Cup (1995); African Soccer Cup of Nations (1996); the U/21 (2002) and U/19 (2004) Rugby World Cup events; the Cricket World Cup (2003), the Tug-of-War World Championships (2002) and has just secured the FIFA 2010 World Soccer Cup™ Tournament. At the same time South Africa failed in its bid for the 2004 Olympic Games and the 2006 FIFA Soccer World Cup™. Analyses of selected bidding documents (FIFA, 2004) and reports on already staged events (South African Sports Commission, 2004) indicate that South African event organisers tend to evaluate and anticipate the success of these sport events primarily in objective (qualitative) terms such as environmental and economic impact, facility provision, programming and services. Adding subjective measurements like sport tourist expectations would undoubtedly enhance understanding of staging a world-class sporting event as advocated by Turco *et al.* (2002). The research questions that emerges are to which extent event organisers meet the expectations of the specific sport tourists and to which extent researchers are handling the paradox of reconciling rigid statistical expectation-performance gaps with the real dynamic abstract notion of sport tourist satisfaction.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the extent to which the organisers of the 2002 World Tug-of-War Championships, held in South Africa, were able to meet the expectations of international sport tourists relating to this specific event by measuring the difference between their expectations and perceived performance of event organisers.

HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses were formulated for this study:

Hypothesis 1

Ho: There exists no difference between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided.

Ha: There exists a significant difference between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided.

Hypothesis 2

Ho: There exists no difference between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided, taking into account tolerance zones.

Ha: There exists a significant difference between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided, taking into account tolerance zones.

The formulated hypotheses rest on the assumption that if a significant difference exists between measured expectations and perceived performance, the organisers of the Tug-of-War World Championship were either not able to meet the expectations or exceed the expectations of the sport tourist. However, this does not necessarily imply that the customers are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. For purposes of this research a gap of 5% between measured expectations and perceived performance will be considered as an acceptable zone of satisfaction tolerance as described by Berry and Parasuraman (1991). Thus, if 5% is subtracted from the measured expectations and the expectations still exceed the measured perceived performance significantly, it is assumed that the sample were dissatisfied with the service rendered as the performance expectation gap will fall outside the tolerance zone. The 5% deductions can be considered to be a more than moderate compensation in favour of satisfaction as Berry and Parasuraman (1991) indicated that, in general, the greater a dimension's importance, the smaller its zone of tolerance, reflecting less customer willingness to accept relaxed service standards. A further assumption is made that to host an international sport event the sport tourists' market should be treated as a homogeneous group obliging event organisers to organise the event in such a way as to meet global sport tourist demands. Thus accounting for national or localised cultural specific needs and expectations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Working definitions

For purposes of this study the definitions of Turco *et al.* (2002) on *sport tourism, sport tourist and consumer* will apply. Sport tourism is hence defined as any travel to and participation in or attendance at a pre-determined sport activity that can include competition and travel for recreation, entertainment, business, education and/or socializing. A sport tourist is defined as a person travelling outside their usual environment (domestically or internationally) for the primary purpose of active (participant, organiser, official) or passive (supporter, spectator) engagement in a competitive sport for no less than 24 hours and no more than one year. Turco

et al. (2002) describe a consumer as someone having the interest in and ability to travel to a sport tourism experience.

Research instrument

Based on the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory of Qu and Ping (1999), a questionnaire was developed to assess sport tourists' expectations and perceived performance of the 2002 Tug-of-War World Championships. Twenty-five interrelated variables contributing to the effectiveness of the specific event were identified. The scope of the variables is indicated in Table 1. It was assumed that the valence or intensity of an expectation or evaluation, or the attributes comprising such an expectation evaluation, might vary on a continuum ranging from strongly negative to strongly positive. The intensity of each individual attribute was therefore assessed on a 5 point Likert continuum, ranging from strongly negative (1) to overtly strongly positive (5), assuming that the intensity distance between 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 was of equal distance and intensity. For purposes of the present study, expectations and evaluations marked as 3, 4 or 5 were interpreted as reflecting a positive inclination or valence; however, evaluations marked as 4 or 5 were weighed and evaluated as reflecting a strong positive inclination towards the specific expectation or evaluation target.

Sampling and data collection

A convenience sample was taken from the available sample frame of 893 international sport tourists attending the 2002 Tug-of-War World Championships held in Pretoria, South Africa. A convenience sample was used due to restrictions like sport tourists' mobility, differences in time of participation and the inability of some sport tourists to respond in the English language. Team managers of the various countries were approached, research objectives were explained in detail and managers were then requested to distribute the questionnaires amongst the team members. Completed questionnaires were deposited in a box over a period of one week.

Sample description

The survey comprised a total of 123 sport tourists (participants, spectators, coaches, team managers) attending the 2002 Tug-of-War World Championships, of which 31 (25.2%) were females and 92 (74.8%) males. Furthermore, 79 (64.2%) were participants at the World Tug-of-War championships; 35 (28.5%) were facilitators (officials, coaches, team managers) and nine (7.3%) were supporters and/or spectators. Participants included in the sample, represented India (n=27), Wales (n=14), Latvia (n=8), the Netherlands (n=7), Ireland (n=5), Belgium (n=4), England (n=4), Canada (n=3), the USA (n=2), Switzerland (n=2), Germany (n=2) and Italy (n=1). Ages of the respondents (n=123) ranged from 15 to 20 years (22%); 21 to 30 years (25%); 31 to 40 (18%); 41 to 50 (15%) and 51 to 76 (20%). Characteristically, and in contrast with the majority of other codes of sport, Tug-of-War as a sport lures their participants across the age span of 15 up to 76 years. Participants consisted mainly of students from educational institutions, such as schools, universities and colleges (50.9%) farmers (15.3%), entrepreneurs (11%), civil servants (7.6%), persons from the building industry (5.9%), craftsmen (5.1%) and managers (4.2%) – thus representing a vocationally diverse population involved in Tug-of-War as a sport.

Data analysis

The overall data analysis focused on the gap between expected service versus perceived service (gap 5) as developed by Parasumaran *et al.* (1985) and adapted by Thwaites (1999). The first step in the data analysis process was to determine the internal consistencies of both the expectancies and the perceived performance scales. In order to determine homogeneity of the questions, or the relative degree to which the responses to individual items correlate with the total test scores the Cronbach Alpha Method was used to perform this analysis (Black, 2002). A high Cronbach Alpha coefficient is indicative of high internal consistency and therefore low error variance. The second step in the data analysis process was to isolate those factors valued as important by the respondents by means of the factor analysis method. Through the factor analysis, underlying variables that best explained the personal expectations of the respondents regarding the 2002 Tug-of-War World Championships in South Africa were identified. Only factors with Eigen values exceeding 1.00 were retained. Through the Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation Rotation Method, the researchers were able to explain 78.20% of the variance constituted by 24 variables. Thirdly, a paired sample t-test was conducted to test the hypotheses that the expectations and the perceived performance means were equal. This enabled the researchers to identify the expectation-performance pairs on which expectations were met, those pairs that fell within the tolerance zones of tourists and those that caused dissatisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study provide a basis for discussion on the overall current status of organising sports events in South Africa. Results indicated that the World Tug-of-War Championships was perceived as a moderate quality sports tourism experience. Particularly high Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.9175 and 0.9785 for expectations and perceived performance were obtained, indicating very good internal consistency of the instrument and thus the existence of high homogeneity amongst the questions and also very low error variance.

The identified factor structure clearly indicates that participants, spectators, coaches, team managers of foreign countries attending the 2002 Tug-of-War event, expected as core capabilities from the event organisers the ability to stage and manage the Tug-of-War event in a professional manner; to ensure a safe environment to all and to provide a quality service offering. These factors (components) clearly indicated that sports tourists as consumers judge the quality of an event in terms far broader than just the competition. The three factors emerging from Table 1 were subsequently analysed in terms of its constituting variables on an attribute-by-attribute basis in order to determine, firstly, the adequacy of service delivery to respondents and secondly, the level of satisfaction experienced by respondents from the services provided.

TABLE 1. FACTOR STRUCTURE OF PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

Factor	Constituting variables	% of Variance
1. Ability to stage/manage event professionally	Var. 61: The opening ceremony Var. 62: Administration of event Var. 63: Efficiency of officials Var. 64: Level of competition Var. 65: Standard of competition venue Var. 75: Official social programme/entertainment Var. 82: The South African hospitality Var. 83: Medical services Var. 84: Standard of refereeing Var. 85: The closing ceremony	36.42
2. Ability to ensure a safe environment	Var. 66: Quality of public transport Var. 67: Availability of public transport Var. 68: The central business district, CBD, of Pretoria Var. 77: My own safety during the event Var. 78: The safety of my team members	23.53
3. Quality of service offering	Var. 70: Shopping opportunities Var. 71: Accommodation and food Var. 72: Quality and prices of South African products Var. 74: Leisure facilities and opportunities Var. 79: Freedom of movement	18.25

TABLE 2. MEASURED EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE GAPS

Pair	N	Desired Expectation- Perceived Performance Means	Sig.	Adequate Expectation- Perceived Performance Means	Sig.
1 Opening ceremony	113	0.25*	0.075	0.03	0.827
2 Administration of event	114	0.44**	0.001	0.24*	0.072
3 Efficiency of officials	110	0.31**	0.035	0.11	0.453
4 Level of competition	115	0.40**	0.004	0.20	0.143
5 Standard of venue	114	0.47**	0.002	0.27*	0.073
6 Quality of public transport	101	0.07	0.607	-0.13	0.333
7 Availability of public transport	103	0.11	0.408	-0.09	0.470
8 CBD of Pretoria	71	0.20	0.150	-0.01	0.983
9 Excursions and tours	107	0.28**	0.025	-0.80	0.517
10 Shopping opportun	110	0.17	0.196	-0.27	0.838
11 Accom and food	113	0.39**	0.010	0.19	0.203
12 Quality/price of goods	114	0.35**	0.016	0.15	0.296
13 Available leisure time	106	0.25**	0.038	0.06	0.653
14 Leisure facilities/opportunities	16	0.28*	0.069	0.08	0.591
15 Social programme	110	0.40**	0.002	0.20	0.117
16 Technical support at event	109	0.18	0.213	-0.02	0.864
17 Own safety at event	112	0.13	0.340	-0.07	0.637
18 Safety of team	108	0.00	1.000	-0.20	0.168
19 Freedom of movement	111	0.12	0.395	-0.08	0.547
20 "African experience"	108	0.06	0.713	-0.14	0.339
21 Climate of Pretoria	110	0.36**	0.019	0.16	0.284
22 South African hospitality	109	0.34**	0.040	0.14	0.395
23 Medical services	99	0.11	0.476	-0.09	0.568
24 Standard of refereeing	106	0.42**	0.000	0.22*	0.063
25 Closing ceremony	90	0.50**	0.005	0.30*	0.084

* = 0.90 statistical significance level

** = 0.95 statistical significance level

From Table 2 it emerged that what respondents hoped to receive or believed “should be” did not materialise with regards to:

Pair 1:	The opening ceremony
Pair 2:	Administration of the event
Pair 3:	Efficiency of officials
Pair 4:	Level of competition
Pair 5:	Standard of competition venue
Pair 9:	Excursions and tours offered
Pair 11:	Accommodation and food
Pair 12:	Quality and prices of South African products
Pair 13:	Available leisure time
Pair 14:	Leisure facilities and opportunities
Pair 15:	Official social programme/entertainment
Pair 21:	Climate of Pretoria
Pair 22:	The South African hospitality
Pair 24:	Standard of refereeing
Pair 25:	The closing ceremony

This provides sufficient support for the hypotheses that a significant difference exists between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided. Furthermore, a total of nine of the 15 pairs mentioned can be attributed to factor 1 - ability to stage or manage an event professionally, while three of the pairs can be attributed to factor 3 relating to the quality of the service offering. It is interesting to realise that, with the exception of *medical services*, all the aspects with regard to what respondents hoped to receive relating to the ability of the organisers to stage or manage the event professionally, were not met. Most of the variables, however, were evaluated within the tolerance zones of respondents and it can thus be concluded that the organisers achieved adequate levels of performance. Thus, evidence was found supporting the hypotheses that no difference exists between expectations and perceived service performance levels provided, taking into account tolerance zones. On four variables the alternative hypotheses had to be accepted, namely that perceived performance was below acceptable tolerance zones of sport tourists. The variables causing dissatisfaction were:

Pair 2:	Administration of event
Pair 5:	Standard of competition venue
Pair 24:	Standard of refereeing
Pair 25:	Closing ceremony

All four above-mentioned variables relate to factor 1, namely the ability of the organisers to stage or manage the event professionally. These four variables should be considered key standardised core variables in the service offering that needs to be addressed by the organisers to stage an event in a professional manner. The details of the variables causing dissatisfaction are explained in Table 3. This finding is supported by the relatively low correlations existing between what the sport tourists expected and their actual experiences during the event.

TABLE 3. VARIABLES EVALUATED BELOW TOLERANCE ZONES

Pair	Content	Mean adequate expectation	Mean perceived performance	Mean difference	Correlation between adequate expectation and perceived performance
2	Administration of event	4.265	4.026	0.239	0.241 **
5	Standard of competition venue	4.291	4.018	0.274	0.160 *
24	Standard of refereeing	43.781	3.566	0.215	0.262 **
25	Closing ceremony	4.244	3.944	0.300	0.163 *

* = 0.90 statistical significance level

** = 0.95 statistical significance level

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the obtained results cannot be extrapolated to all sports events because of size of the event as well as the relative unique participant profile, it could nevertheless contribute to enhance the awareness of sport event organisers regarding the subjective components in organising world class sport events. Based on the obtained results, the following main conclusions are drawn:

- It is evident that intangible (subjective) components influence sport tourists' satisfaction as results indicated that they expected more of most of the aspects pertaining to the Tug-of-War World Championship.
- Overall, the sport tourists perceived the particular sport event as a moderate success.
- The events organisers have not adequately capitalized on the economic and psychic income potential of the event. Sport tourists to a world sport event expect experiences and opportunities additional to the actual competition area to add value to their sport tourism experience. Auxilliary activities like leisure time and opportunities, climate, social programme and the quality and prices of products and services influence the ultimate level of sport tourist satisfaction.
- Results further seem to suggest that the professional capacity to stage a major sport event was lacking in this particular case as the administration of the event, standard of refereeing, the standard of competition venue as well as the closing ceremony measured below acceptable tolerance zones area of the sport tourists as proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991).

Getz (1997) maintains that evaluation of event success is a way to constantly learn more about the intended outcomes of the event and ways to improve. Consequently the following recommendations are offered:

- Sport event organisers should receive adequate training in order to increase their understanding of service quality. The critical incident analysis technique of Turco *et al.* (2002) could be a useful tool to capacitate sport event organisers.
- To ensure that the sport tourism experience meet the expectations of the sport tourism, sport event organisers should formulate specifications and performance criteria for each event component and service encounter. Specific expertise (refereeing, opening and closing ceremonies) could be out-sourced to obtain and maintain the required specifications.
- Sport event organisers should pursue multiple goals when designing the product and service parameters of a particular event. Both an increased economic boost as well as an improved psychic income to the hosting community should be the ultimate benchmark of event planners. In this regard Gibson *et al.* (2003) accentuate community co-operation and involvement to develop community pride, integration and self-sufficiency. Supportive policies of local as well as national government are clearly of utmost importance to sustainable, quality hosting of events. Resultant economic benefits are not limited to mega-events but smaller, well-organised sport events may hold equal opportunity to significantly contribute to psychic and economic income. Involving local business in sport event planning synergise strategies, leverage benefits of the particular event and influence sport tourist satisfaction.

This study should be seen as a first attempt to assess the impact and interrelationship of expectations and perceived service performance levels of sport tourists attending major sport events in South Africa. As it included only a general measure of tolerance, future studies exploring this issue should also include more specific measures reflecting sport tourist satisfaction.

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