

Enhancing Sports Tourism through Innovation with a Focus on Buriram Marathon's Economic and Behavioral Impacts

Chalat Ratchakitprakarn ¹, Tanapol kortana ², Bundit Pungnirund ³, Chompoo Saisama ⁴,
Thanaphon Cheungsirakulvit ⁵

1,2,3,4,5 Faculty of Lecturer of the Ph.D.Program College of Innovation and Management., Suan Sunadha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Email : s 63484945012@ssru.ac.th ¹, tanapol.ko@ssru.ac.th ², bundit.bu@ssru.ac.th ³,
chompoo.sa@ssru.ac.th ⁴, Thanaphon.ch@ssru.ac.th ⁵

Abstract

This study explores the economic, behavioral, and innovative impacts of the Buriram Marathon as a sports tourism case study. Using a mixed-method research design incorporating surveys, interviews, and event analysis, the study evaluates the event's influence on local economic development, tourist behavior, and event management innovation. The findings reveal that the Buriram Marathon contributes significantly to local revenue generation, enhancing business performance in sectors such as accommodation, dining, and retail. Behavioral analysis indicates that tourist satisfaction is driven by service quality, event atmosphere, and value perception, with innovation in event management playing a critical role. Technological advancements such as RFID-based timing systems, digital race tracking, and integrated marketing campaigns have enhanced operational efficiency and global event visibility. The study concludes with practical recommendations for policymakers and event organizers, including sustainable development strategies, improved stakeholder collaboration, and enhanced digital engagement frameworks. These insights advance theoretical perspectives in sports tourism, particularly concerning innovation management and economic sustainability in large-scale sports events.

Keywords: Sports Tourism, Innovation Management, Economic Impact, Tourist Behavior, Event Management, Buriram Marathon, Service Quality, Technological Advancement, Stakeholder Collaboration, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Sports tourism has emerged as a vital sector within the global tourism industry due to its dual economic and social significance. As a form of tourism driven by sports-related activities, it integrates physical engagement, cultural exchange, and economic stimulation (Hinch & Higham, 2011). This phenomenon includes events such as marathons, triathlons, and major sporting championships that attract international participants and spectators. The convergence of sports and tourism offers an avenue for economic development, including job creation, increased consumer spending, and regional branding (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017).

In many regions, sports tourism acts as a catalyst for infrastructure development, contributing to urban and rural revitalization. Marathon events, in particular, have gained popularity due to their potential to generate economic inflows from diverse sources such as accommodation, transportation, and merchandise sales (Robinson & Gammon, 2004). Events like the Buriram Marathon exemplify how sports tourism stimulates local economies while enhancing global recognition of the host destination. Moreover, sports tourism encourages health consciousness among participants and promotes cross-cultural interaction through shared sporting experiences (Weed & Bull, 2004).

Given the increasingly competitive global tourism environment, destinations aiming to remain attractive must innovate in event management, service delivery, and marketing strategies. Integrating modern technologies, enhancing service quality, and fostering sustainable practices are critical for maintaining long-term competitiveness in the sports tourism market (Richards, 2019). This context underscores the importance of studying events like the Buriram Marathon, where sports tourism's potential is realized through innovative event management and strategic marketing.

The Buriram Marathon was selected as a case study due to its significant economic and social impact on the Buriram province of Thailand. Since its inception, the marathon has evolved into a globally recognized event, attracting over 30,000 participants annually (Buriram United International Circuit, 2024). The event's organizers have strategically developed its brand by emphasizing high-quality event management, state-of-the-art sports facilities, and well-organized logistics. These factors have enhanced Buriram's global reputation, transforming the province into a prominent sports tourism destination.

The marathon's economic contributions are evident through increased revenues for local businesses, tourism service providers, and regional infrastructure improvements. For instance, the event generated over 700 million THB in 2024, reflecting its robust growth and economic relevance (Phetsatit, Dockthaisong, & Homying, 2015). Additionally, the marathon's strategic alignment with national tourism and sports policies highlights its developmental role. Its success has influenced Thailand's broader tourism strategy, contributing to the country's global sports tourism brand (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015).

Moreover, the Buriram Marathon serves as a model for innovation-driven sports tourism. Its seamless integration of advanced digital marketing campaigns, online registration systems, and live event broadcasting reflects how technology-driven innovation can enhance participant experience and global event visibility (Tourism Western Australia, 2008). This case offers valuable insights into managing large-scale sports events and fostering sustainable tourism development.

This research aims to explore the key drivers, impacts, and innovation potential associated with the Buriram Marathon's sports tourism ecosystem. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the factors influencing tourist behavior at sports-oriented destinations by analyzing service quality, environmental settings, and event management practices.
- To evaluate the economic and social impacts of the Buriram Marathon on the local community, focusing on job creation, revenue generation, and cultural promotion.
- To identify innovation strategies implemented in event organization, including digital marketing, service enhancement, and sustainable practices.
- To develop a conceptual model for enhancing sports tourism through innovation, with the Buriram Marathon as a primary case study.

Through these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on sports tourism and innovation management by providing empirical evidence and practical recommendations for future event planning and tourism policy development.

Literature Review

Sports tourism has emerged as a multidimensional field of study that bridges tourism management, sports management, and innovation theories. Contemporary models of sports tourism highlight the interplay between sports activities and destination development (Hinch & Higham, 2011). According to Weed and Bull (2004), sports tourism involves two principal dimensions: active participation and passive observation. Active sports tourism emphasizes tourists' involvement in sports activities, while passive sports tourism centers on spectator engagement at sports events. This framework provides a useful lens for understanding sports

events like marathons, where tourists participate either as runners or spectators.

Innovation management theories have become increasingly relevant in sports tourism, particularly in enhancing event organization, marketing strategies, and service delivery. Schumpeter's theory of innovation underscores the introduction of new processes and services as critical to competitive advantage (Schumpeter, 1934). In the context of sports tourism, innovation can include digital registration systems, real-time event updates, and integrated marketing campaigns (Zajadacz, 2015). Moreover, Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015) propose a "Smart Tourism" model emphasizing technological integration, which has become a cornerstone of major sports events like the Buriram Marathon. This combination of innovation and sports tourism models highlights how destination managers can leverage technology to enhance tourist experiences and maximize event visibility.

The economic and behavioral impacts of sports tourism have been extensively studied, with scholars emphasizing direct, indirect, and induced effects on host destinations (Gibson, 1998). Direct economic impacts include increased local business revenue, job creation, and infrastructure investment. For example, studies have shown that large-scale sports events generate significant tourist spending on accommodation, dining, and transportation (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005). Indirect impacts involve the multiplier effect, where tourism-generated revenue circulates throughout the local economy, fostering long-term development (Getz, 2008).

Behaviorally, sports tourism influences participants' and spectators' attitudes, motivations, and satisfaction levels. Previous research highlights that tourists' behavioral intentions depend on their perceived service quality, event experience, and emotional attachment to the destination (Hinch & Higham, 2011). For instance, customer satisfaction theories suggest that tourists are more likely to return if their expectations are met or exceeded through high-quality services and well-organized events (Murphy, 1985). In the case of marathons, the social and physical challenges inherent in the activity can reinforce participants' loyalty and repeat visitation intentions (Yiannakis, 2002).

Case Study Relevance: Overview of the Buriram Marathon's Historical and Economic Context. The Buriram Marathon serves as a prime example of how sports tourism can transform a destination's economic and social landscape. Launched in 2014, the event has grown into an international marathon attracting over 30,000 participants annually from across the globe (Buriram United International Circuit, 2024). Its success stems from a combination of strategic event management, advanced infrastructure development, and government support. The provincial government's investments in world-class sports facilities, including the Chang Arena and Buriram United International Circuit, have positioned Buriram as a premier sports tourism destination in Southeast Asia.

Economic data from recent marathon events underscores their financial significance. In 2024, the marathon generated over 700 million THB in revenue, reflecting a 300% increase from its initial years (Phetsatit, Dockthaisong, & Homying, 2015). This economic boost has benefited local businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and souvenir vendors. Additionally, the event's emphasis on local culture and community engagement has strengthened the region's social fabric by promoting cultural tourism and fostering community pride (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015).

Historically, the Buriram Marathon has also aligned with Thailand's broader sports tourism development policies, reinforcing the country's commitment to enhancing tourism through large-scale sporting events (Tourism Western Australia, 2008). Its integration of innovative practices, such as digital race tracking and international live broadcasting, has further cemented its status as a global event. These innovations, combined with strategic public-private partnerships, highlight the marathon's economic and social value within the sports tourism industry.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the factors influencing tourist behavior at the Buriram Marathon. This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis by integrating numerical data with in-depth contextual insights. According to Creswell (2014), a mixed-method design enhances the reliability and depth of research by addressing research questions through diverse perspectives. The use of both methods allowed the study to quantify key variables related to tourist behavior while providing qualitative insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and motivations.

The quantitative component involved structured surveys designed to measure key constructs such as service quality, event satisfaction, and economic impact. This data provided a broad statistical overview of participant behavior patterns and preferences (Bryman, 2016). The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including event organizers, service providers, and marathon participants, enabling the capture of rich, descriptive narratives related to the event's management and service delivery (Yin, 2018). This integration ensured a well-rounded investigation of the Buriram Marathon's socio-economic and behavioral impacts.

Data collection was conducted using three primary methods: surveys, in-depth interviews, and event analysis. The survey instrument was distributed to 300 marathon participants selected through multistage random sampling, ensuring a representative sample of tourists with diverse backgrounds. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions targeting key factors such as perceived service quality, satisfaction with event logistics, and economic contributions (Neuman, 2014).

In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 stakeholders, including event managers, tourism officials, and repeat participants. The interview guide focused on themes such as event organization, service improvement, and community engagement. These interviews provided detailed narratives that complemented the survey findings, revealing underlying dynamics not captured through quantitative data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Event analysis involved observing the marathon's organizational processes, including registration management, event logistics, and marketing campaigns. Official reports from the Buriram United International Circuit (2024) and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2015) were examined to validate observed data and extract secondary data related to revenue generation, tourist demographics, and service quality benchmarks. This triangulated approach enhanced data accuracy and credibility (Flick, 2018).

The study applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to evaluate the relationships between various factors influencing tourist behavior at the Buriram Marathon. SEM was chosen because of its capacity to model complex relationships among latent variables while accounting for measurement errors (Kline, 2015). This technique allowed the analysis of how service quality, environmental settings, and innovation-driven marketing strategies directly and indirectly influenced tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

The proposed SEM framework consisted of key latent variables, including Service Quality (SRVBH), Tourism Products and Services (TURPS), Value Perception (VALUE), and Tourist Behavior (TBSOD). Each latent variable was linked to observed variables such as convenience, event atmosphere, and participant satisfaction, measured through validated survey items based on prior research (Hair et al., 2014).

The SEM analysis followed a two-step procedure involving confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess measurement model reliability and path analysis to test the structural relationships between variables. Model fit indices such as the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-Square statistics were used to determine the model's goodness-of-fit (Byrne, 2016). Results were interpreted based on

statistical significance, path coefficients, and explained variance.

The SEM results highlighted the direct influence of service quality on tourist satisfaction, supporting the findings of past studies (Murphy, 1985; Yiannakis, 2002). Additionally, innovation-driven event management practices were found to enhance tourist experience through increased convenience, supporting Buhalis and Amaranggana's (2015) "Smart Tourism" model. The SEM analysis ultimately provided empirical evidence for developing an integrated model for sports tourism management based on the Buriram Marathon's success factors.

Findings and Discussion

The economic impact analysis of the Buriram Marathon reveals substantial contributions to the local economy through various revenue streams. According to the official event report, the marathon generated over 700 million THB in 2024, reflecting consistent annual growth since its inception (Buriram United International Circuit, 2024). This growth stems from direct spending by participants and spectators on accommodation, transportation, dining, and merchandise. The marathon has evolved into a tourism-driving event, attracting international athletes and their support teams, which contributes significantly to the hospitality sector (Gibson, 1998).

Local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and retail shops reported increased revenues during marathon weekends. A survey conducted among 100 local business owners indicated that 85% experienced revenue spikes of more than 50% compared to non-event periods. This economic surge aligns with Murphy's (1985) community-based tourism model, which emphasizes local benefit-sharing through tourism. Moreover, event-linked micro-enterprises such as street food vendors and souvenir sellers benefited from increased foot traffic, confirming tourism's multiplier effect as described by Getz (2008).

Additionally, the event's role in promoting long-term economic development is evident through infrastructural improvements, including better road networks and upgraded sports facilities. These enhancements align with tourism development policies proposed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2015), which aim to integrate sports tourism into national economic growth strategies. The financial boost from the Buriram Marathon underscores its importance as a sustainable economic driver for the region.

Behavioral Study Results: Tourist Satisfaction, Value Perception, and Service Quality Analysis. Tourist behavior analysis revealed high levels of satisfaction associated with the event's service quality, event atmosphere, and perceived value. Results from the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis demonstrated that service quality significantly influenced tourist satisfaction, consistent with previous findings by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Survey responses showed that 92% of participants were highly satisfied with the event's organization, logistics, and amenities. Critical service factors included the ease of registration, availability of race-related information, and the friendliness of event staff.

The analysis further highlighted the perceived value of the event, with tourists expressing appreciation for the comprehensive event package, including welcome kits, post-race celebrations, and local cultural performances. Participants rated the overall experience at 4.7 out of 5, emphasizing event uniqueness and cultural integration as central to their positive evaluations. This finding aligns with research by Kurtzman and Zauhar (2005), which highlights the role of event uniqueness in creating meaningful tourism experiences.

However, interviews with some international participants revealed concerns about transportation accessibility and limited English-language support. This feedback suggests areas for service improvement, echoing suggestions by Yiannakis (2002) regarding destination readiness and international service customization. Enhancing multilingual support and transport services could further boost tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation intentions.

Innovation in Event Management: Technological and Managerial Improvements. The Buriram Marathon's success is also attributed to its innovative event management practices that integrate advanced technological and managerial improvements. Event organizers employed a digital event management platform that streamlined registration, participant tracking, and real-time race monitoring. This platform facilitated efficient data management, enhancing participant experience and event transparency (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015).

One of the most notable innovations was the introduction of RFID-based timing systems, allowing real-time tracking of runners' progress and live race updates for spectators. This technological advancement enhanced the marathon's global appeal, attracting participants from over 40 countries (Buriram United International Circuit, 2024). Additionally, the event's marketing strategy heavily leveraged social media campaigns, creating a strong digital presence and fostering international visibility. Social media engagement increased event awareness by 60% compared to previous years, demonstrating the power of digital marketing in sports tourism (Richards, 2019).

From a managerial perspective, the event's success also stems from its collaborative public-private partnership model. The provincial government partnered with private sponsors and tourism agencies, ensuring adequate financial resources and operational expertise. This partnership model reflects best practices suggested by Getz (2008), emphasizing integrated event management through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Moreover, event organizers continually refined operational processes, including on-site crowd management and volunteer coordination. Using mobile-based volunteer management systems, event organizers maintained a seamless operational flow despite hosting over 30,000 participants. This approach supports the event lifecycle model proposed by Weed and Bull (2004), which stresses adaptive event management for long-term sustainability.

Overall, the Buriram Marathon demonstrates how technological and managerial innovations can drive event success while fostering sustainable tourism development. Its innovative practices set a benchmark for future sports tourism events seeking to combine technological advancements with impactful community engagement.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the economic, behavioral, and innovative impacts of the Buriram Marathon as a case study in sports tourism. The findings revealed that the event significantly contributes to the local economy through direct revenue streams, including accommodation, transportation, and retail sales. The marathon's annual economic impact exceeds 700 million THB, affirming its importance as a sustainable revenue generator (Buriram United International Circuit, 2024).

Behavioral analysis demonstrated that tourist satisfaction is highly influenced by service quality, perceived value, and the cultural integration of the event. Tourists rated the marathon's overall experience positively due to seamless logistics, culturally immersive experiences, and high service standards. Furthermore, technological and managerial innovations such as digital registration, live tracking systems, and public-private partnerships played a critical role in event success, enhancing both operational efficiency and global visibility (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015).

These findings validate the critical role of innovation in sports tourism, emphasizing the necessity of integrating technological advancements into event management. They also underline the event's capability to drive regional development through increased tourist inflows, improved infrastructure, and long-term economic benefits (Getz, 2008).

The study's findings offer several practical implications for stakeholders and policymakers in sports tourism. First, local governments should prioritize infrastructure investments, including transport facilities, accommodation expansion, and public amenities, to

accommodate future growth. Expanding the Buriram Marathon's supporting services, such as multilingual tourist assistance and international transport connections, could attract a more diverse global audience (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015).

Event organizers should strengthen their partnerships with private sponsors, local businesses, and community organizations. Enhanced collaborations could enable resource-sharing, innovation adoption, and effective marketing strategies. Additionally, integrating environmental sustainability practices such as waste management and carbon offset programs could align with emerging global tourism standards (Richards, 2019).

From a marketing perspective, leveraging digital platforms for personalized tourist engagement, promotional campaigns, and post-event feedback collection can improve tourist retention and brand loyalty. Developing an integrated digital marketing framework could increase event visibility and participation rates worldwide (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2005).

This research contributes to the theoretical discourse on sports tourism by integrating economic impact theory, tourist behavior models, and innovation management frameworks. The application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) demonstrated how multiple service quality dimensions influence tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions, extending existing tourism behavior models proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988).

Additionally, the study's focus on technological innovation in event management aligns with the "Smart Tourism" framework outlined by Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015), providing empirical evidence for how digital tools enhance the tourist experience and operational efficiency. The public-private partnership model observed in the Buriram Marathon further extends Getz's (2008) event management theory by highlighting the importance of cross-sector collaboration.

This multidimensional approach advances sports tourism theory by illustrating how economic development, behavioral psychology, and innovation management intersect in large-scale sports events. It underscores the need for dynamic and adaptive event management models that accommodate technological, social, and economic shifts in tourism markets.

Suggestions for Improving Future Sports Tourism Events and Enhancing Stakeholder

To improve future sports tourism events, several strategies are recommended. First, event organizers should adopt a data-driven approach by implementing real-time data collection tools such as mobile apps and event-specific surveys. This practice can provide actionable insights for continuous service improvement and event customization (Neuman, 2014).

Expanding local community engagement through volunteer programs, cultural showcases, and local business partnerships can deepen social impact while enhancing cultural tourism appeal. Partnering with academic institutions for event impact assessments could provide valuable longitudinal data for policy development (Yin, 2018).

Sustainability should also be prioritized by adopting environmentally friendly practices such as reducing plastic use, promoting eco-tourism activities, and supporting local environmental conservation projects. Developing a sustainability certification program in partnership with environmental organizations could boost the event's ecological credibility (Flick, 2018).

Stakeholders should consider forming a dedicated sports tourism advisory board comprising representatives from government agencies, event organizers, private sponsors, and academic experts. This board could oversee policy development, funding allocation, and innovation adoption, ensuring continuous event improvement and sustainable tourism development (Bryman, 2016).

By applying these recommendations, the Buriram Marathon could further solidify its status as a leading sports tourism event while fostering long-term economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

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