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Mediating Effects of Passive Involvement between Predictors of Sports Tourism and Support for Attending Malaysia Football Matches

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Abstract

Sports tourism requires tourists travelling to sports event venues as passively involved attendants to support the sports occasion. The increasing popularity of Football in Malaysia enhances tourists' eagerness to visit the stadium to watch Football as the pandemic end. The study on predictors of sport tourism, passive involvement and support for Football has witnessed less analysis in Malaysia. The study aims to identify the relationship between the predictors of sports tourism, passive involvement and support for attending Malaysian football matches and whether passive involvement mediates the relationship between the predictors and support variables. The research applies a quantitative method involving 237 respondents who are Malaysia Football fans, where data were gathered through online surveys. The analysis method used Regression and PROCESS Macro analyses. The findings indicate significant relationships among the predictors of sport tourism, passive involvement and support for attending Malaysian football matches. However, passive involvement partially mediates and enhances the relationship between the other two variables. The research can help tourism marketers search for the positive influence of passive involvement among tourists, leading to consistent growth of Malaysian sports tourism.

Keywords: Sports tourism, Malaysian Football Matches, Predictors of Sports Tourism, Passive Involvement, Support for Attending Malaysian Football Matches

Introduction

Sports events are part of tourism involving tourists and their movements and motives. More people participate in physical exercise and will also actively watch sports events, which greatly stimulates the continuous development of the sports wave in the world (Qi & Tang, 2022). Tourists would go to the sports event no matter the rationale, mainly to experience it themselves (Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020). However, many sports events were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacting today's world (Rejon-Guardia et al., 2020), such as the postponed of the Olympics and the FIFA world cup to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (Hodges et al., 2020; Kumudumali, 2020). The pandemic significantly impacted the tourism industry in many countries worldwide (Kumudumali, 2020). It resulted in many setbacks, as reported by the Organization for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OECD) (2020), which encountered a significant loss of nearly EUR 980,000 in April 2020 alone. The football scene faced multiple challenges in the Malaysian context due to the pandemic, where many stadiums had to be closed down ("Covid-19: M. League matches from Monday put on halt", 2019), leading to the postponement of the Malaysian Football League (MFL), much to the dismay of fellow Malaysians. However, Malaysian stadiums reopened as time passed, with permission from the Malaysian government ("Plans to allow spectators back into stadiums shelved", 2021). Although attendance is highly limited to the general public ("Fans can return to stadiums when Malaysia Cup resumes", 2021), its popularity is rising. It is the most active sports event to date ("Plans to allow spectators back into stadiums shelved", 2021).

The year 2022 witnessed that many people would love to travel for sports tourism. The SEA Games in Hanoi is proof of welcoming 700,000 domestic tourists and 31,447 international travellers (Indra, 2022). In Malaysia, Football leagues can attract domestic tourists (Mapjabil et al., 2015). It has also garnered the attention of non-Malaysians, especially aspiring football players looking for a different career experience ("Plans to allow spectators back into stadiums shelved", 2021). Therefore, sports tourists involve themselves in sports events due to several predictors. Their level of involvement becomes their mediating variable. These predictors help identify what piques their interest in their participation and hinders sports tourism. In contrast, involvement being the mediator helps to see what implicates their predictors and support toward Malaysian Football. The predictors include Economic, Social and Environmental predictors (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Vrondou (2018) has signified the significance of involvement as a mediator to the tourists' support towards sports. However, the typical level of involvement of a tourist used for studies in past research is on the passive prospective- tourists who are not participants in the event. Furthermore, studying the passive involvement level of tourists also prevents biases and a wholesome understanding of the predictors of participation of the tourists based on their level of involvement (Ito & Hikoji, 2021). Additionally, the passive involvement of tourists in the sporting event can also be a mediating agent, as the support for the event may be affected by this level of involvement (Hu & Cole, 2016). Moreover, the relationship between the predictors of sport tourism and passive involvement also rings true, as the level of involvement may affect the economic, social and environmental predictors. The effect is because different levels (Alexandris et al., 2017) of involvement may present different impacts on such predictors (Ahmad et al., 2019)

Literature Review

Sports tourism has been defined as a leisure trip whereby individuals temporarily leave their residence to participate in physical sporting activities, view physical sporting activities, or visit attractions associated with physical sporting activities (Gibson, 2017). Sports tourism includes active participants (Park et al., 2019) and passive engagement types (Jiménez-Naranjo et al., 2016) in athletic events, whether informal or arranged for non-commercial or business/commercial purposes, including travel away from home and the workplace (Downward et al., 2020; Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020). The active form involved participating in a sport. At the same time, the passive version referred to travel connected with being a spectator at sporting events, whether these were important fixtures, regular seasonal programs, or one-off meetings (Pedauga et al., 2020). Typically, sports tourists fall into the

passive involvement (attendee) level compared to active involvement (Ahmad et al., 2019). Sports events play a critical role in the growth of sports tourism (Tichaawa, 2018). Historically, Greece hosts the first-ever sports event, the Olympics, in 776BC Yildiz & Cekic (2015), and for many reasons, the Olympics have become a worldwide spectacle, particularly sparking interest in sports.

Sports events have gained significant appeal among sports and non-sport tourists alike as they provide many opportunities and benefits (Gholipour et al., 2020; Peric et al., 2019). Malaysia is well known for sporting events that gain global appeal (Saari, 2018), such as Formula One Grand Prix, Le Tour De Langkawi, the Commonwealth Games, SEA Games, and others (Mapjabil et al., 2015; Zarei & Ramkissoo, 2020). The trend shows that there should be predictors that would influence tourists' involvement in Malaysian sports events, mainly Football (Nes, 2022). Malaysian football events have also gained the appeal of various stakeholders from different countries (Ramalingam, 2021), signifying the popularity of the sporting event (Pereira et al., 2020). Malaysian Football has reopened during the pandemic, like other football events worldwide, such as the English Premier League (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020; "Fans can return to stadiums when Malaysia Cup resumes", 2021). It is also deemed the most popular sport in Malaysia among its residents and non-residents (Nes, 2022). Despite the pandemic, another reason for its rise is its significant contribution to the economy (Mapjabil et al., 2015; Ya'akub et al., 2020) and great interest among Malaysians, especially in the youth market (Mohamed et al., 2016).

Predictors of sport tourism refer to factors that influence the involvement of tourists in sports tourism (Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). These factors may revolve around different antecedents that ultimately affect their decision to participate in sports tourism activities, particularly in sports events, either as passive or active tourists (D'Urso et al., 2020). Some of these predictors include the Economic (Buning et al., 2016), the Social (Aguilo et al., 2017; Peric, 2018) and the Environmental (Wicker, 2018). Previous research implies that these predictors either attract or hinder the tourist from attending sports tourism, reflecting their involvement in the particular field (Ahmad et al., 2019). Economic predictors are one of the predictors of Sport Tourism (Ahmad et al., 2019; Buning et al., 2016; Sato et al., 2018). Two variables fall into this category: cost and expenses, and facilities and infrastructure. The cost and facilities are the most prominent factors (Ahmad et al., 2019). Costs usually include travel costs, including transportation, accommodation and others (Gomez-Deniz et al., 2020; Burgan & Mules, 1992; Ahmad et al., 2019). Tourists must pay a significant amount, especially if they wish to participate in the event (McManus, 2020). Malaysians' eagerness to be involved in Football events is due to relatively affordable prices for admission tickets (Mapjabil et al., 2015). Furthermore, active sports participants (Sato et al., 2018) also signify fewer costs when involved in

Malaysian football events. Moreover, the participation of sports tourists at a destination hosting sports events can benefit the local community, which can initiate a multiplier effect. Infrastructure and facilities refer to things that help accommodate the event, provide an enhanced experience, or are just for general necessities, including public restrooms, football stadium seating, and other physical elements that make up the entire sports event destination (Uvinha et al., 2018). Additional facilities for the disabled and female attendees must be considered (Chang, 2017). Besides, in Malaysia, the facilities include special

arrangements for influential attendees who watch football matches (Ahmad et al., 2019). Recently, sports event venues can accommodate many tourists (Ritchie et al., 2020), requiring appropriate facilities (Ahmad et al., 2019) and required to meet specific standards. These standards are critical to mega sports events (Hu & Cole, 2016), such as the FIFA World Cup or the English Premier League, which must maintain their name and popularity (Toffano Pereira et al., 2020). Overall, spending activity for infrastructure and facilities shows commitment, dedication and support (Chen et al., 2020; McManus, 2020) towards Malaysian Football by the management authority. Tourists would also need the appropriate infrastructure to suit their travel needs and want, especially those in line with specific specifications by international organisations (Mapjabil et al., 2015).

Social predictors in sports tourism can be divided into socialising, event popularity and entertainment, where social activities commence over time. Tourists can travel to the sporting event to witness the event and bask in experiencing the sports events offered (McManus, 2020). The social aspects also provide non-monetary benefits to tourists and the region (Burgan & Mules, 1992) implicate tourists' involvement in sports tourism through participation in many charity activities or social responsibility programs (Hua & Chiu, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2020; Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). Other activities included getting to know the local people of the venue and helping them in any way possible (Ahmad et al., 2019). Some underlying social implications influence tourism involvement, such as the ability to interact with other people outside their natural environment, meet new people at the destination, expense stressful environments, and meet people with similar interests (Nagy et al., 2021). Previous research has signified that the ability to socialise with other sports fans or athletes drives tourists' involvement in the event (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017). Additionally, many would agree that the experience of watching a live football event at the stadium is one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences, especially for football fans (McManus, 2020). Many football fans said they attend football events because they follow their respective fan clubs and gain opportunities to socialise with other sports fans (Chen et al., 2020; Hu & Cole, 2016; Katsoni & Vrontou, 2017; Rudkin & Sharma, 2020). Similar to the Malaysian context, true sports fans may come to sports events to socialise with other attendees outside their regular environment (Nagy et al., 2021). Ahmad et al (2019) imply that sports events' popularity and entertainment value have lured tourists into participating in sports tourism activities. Ahmad et al (2019); Kour (2019) also consider prizes, trophies and medal-awarding ceremonies as entertaining events to celebrate. Malaysian football events have seen their fair share of celebrations for winning football matches in various football events in the past (Seng, 2020). The social predictor stresses the need for tourists to belong to specific groups of people with similar interests (Hyun & Jordan, 2020; Sato et al., 2018), strengthens the excitement (Uvinha et al., 2018) and shows patriotic values (Ritchie et al., 2020).

The environment predictors have a significant role in the success of sports tourism, referring to the venue or destination itself (Wicker, 2018). Tourists are more educated and evolving and develop a sense of environmental awareness. The awareness guides them to employ sustainable practices to preserve the beauty and safety of the environment. Tourists demand that the destination's physical environment is safe and clean and will not harm them (Ahmad et al., 2019). Falk & Hagsten (2019) indicate that tourists' awareness of sustainable and green practices employs these beliefs and hinders them from attending events that harm the

environment. However, the authors stress that the concept may work differently in other places depending on the level of exposure to the environment and commitments. In Malaysia, the practice of sustainable and green concepts among passive tourists exists through acts of goodwill by picking up trash and litter at the stadium to maintain its cleanliness (Ahmad et al., 2019). Even organisations are working to ensure the environment is safe to travel in to reduce pollution due to the massive crowds of different behaviours that come to the event (Falk & Hagsten, 2019). The sentiment is added further by enacting laws and regulations involving acceptable cleanliness behaviour at the stadium taken seriously worldwide (Perbadanan Stadium Malaysia, 2021; FIFA, 2022).

Support for sports tourism depends on the function of the sports tourists, meaning it would require tourists to participate in sports events (Kumudumali, 2020). No sports event would live without the support of both participants and fans. Having tourists participate in the event helps maximise the event's name and multitude, symbolising the sports event's success (Mapjabil et al., 2015). With the help of other parties, such as governments and sports organisations, support for the sport becomes more robust than not having support. With constant support and loyalty (Hu & Cole, 2016), sports tourism has developed dramatically over the recent years, including in Malaysia, garnering the interest of many tourists nationwide (Mapjabil et al., 2015; Saari, 2018; Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020). However, several requirements must be met to support fans and participants, ensuring they are satisfied with the sports event (Hyun & Jordan, 2020). There are also underlying sentiments in which satisfaction can be achieved differently based on the sports tourists' preferences and levels of involvement (Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). Nonetheless, acquiring the attendee's satisfaction could lead to a positive mindset and improve Malaysian Football. Previous researchers claim that sports tourism will need improvements in terms of its facilities and infrastructure, the benefits it provides to its attendees and the local environment, as well as sustainable practices that can preserve the welfare of the domain (Ahmad et al., 2019). Moreover, satisfying audiences would also lead to loyalty (Hu & Cole, 2016). Dedication among the fans of Malaysian Football is especially in those loyal to the teams they support. They would travel to stadiums across their nations away from their homes for several hours (Mirehie & Gibson, 2020), all in the name of being there and experiencing a live football match at the stadium. Malaysians' effort and commitment truly signify support towards Malaysian Football, among other sports, and is the beauty that flourishes the sport and induces further development.

Involvement refers to the degree to which people devote themselves to a specific activity or event (Downward et al., 2020; Ito & Hikoji, 2021). Passive involvement refers to tourists not being actively involved in sports events (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020). Passive involvement is typically the level of involvement that applies to tourists. Actively involved tourists may deviate from the original definition of tourism itself. However, what differentiates these levels of involvement is the privileges received by both parties. Tourists generally do not share athletes' same privileges (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020). The literature shows that tourists or passively involved attendees have less experience and enjoyment. However, tourists get several other opportunities to socialise and experience the event alongside their peers (Chen et al., 2020). With the popularity of Football nationwide and worldwide, tourists, either sports fans or non-sports fans, get the opportunity to show their support for the sports event by purchasing tickets and attending the stadium. Also, tourists would be more attracted to

the event if the stadium implemented safe and green practices that ensure the stadium attendants' safety and security (Uvinha et al., 2018). Although the tourists have to undergo many risks and costs, passion and dedication to the sport can overcome such obstacles and ensure these tourists' attendance at the stadium.

Hence, the research focuses on the relationship among predictors of sports tourism, passive involvement and support for attending Malaysia Football Matches. The hypotheses formulated are as follows:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the predictors of sports tourism, passive involvement and support to attend Malaysian football matches.

H2: Passive involvement significantly mediates the relationship between the predictors of sports tourism and support to attend Malaysian football matches.

Methodology

The study employs a quantitative method to generate knowledge and understanding of the phenomena. The measurement features are predictors of sports tourism, passive involvement and support for attending Malaysia football matches. Structured self-administered questionnaires were distributed to generalise the results to the entire population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Fischer et al., 2014). The researcher applies the post-positivism paradigm to indicate observations with logical reasoning, especially in spectators' views about support for attending Malaysian football matches suited for social science study (Jackson & Dolan, 2021). The data were collected through an online survey in line with other studies on tourism research (Hooker & DE Zuniga, 2017; Nayak & Narayan, 2019), distributed using online media such as Facebook and Whatsapp. The structured questionnaire enables the collection of relevant information from respondents considered representatives of the entire population (Creswell, 2013). The population was unknown; therefore, it utilised Roscoe's (1975) guidelines which indicate that a sample size of between 30 and 500 respondents would be sufficient for behavioural studies. The researchers determined that the sample size accounted for 250 (N) respondents from the Malaysia local football fans, but only 237 (N) respondents are usable for further analysis. The unit of analysis used in the research is the Malaysian population, as the data of a person's experience in attending football matches were collected from 25th October - 8th November 2021. A response rate of 100 per cent was achieved. The survey instrument consisted of five sections, including the screening questions (2 items), demographic information (7 items), sports predictors (30 items), passive involvement (5 items) and support for Malaysian Football (5 items). All the instruments were adapted from previous studies by (Nagy et al., 2021; Ito & Hikoji, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2019; Peric, 2018; Sato et al., 2018; Wicker, 2018). Respondents specified their score on a five-point as Lewis (1993) found that 5-point scales resulted in stronger correlations with regression results. Several scholars also indicated that adopting a 5-point Likert scale reduces common method biases (Kock et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2003). The questionnaire was designed in two languages: Bahasa Malaysia and English Language. The study used the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) Version 25. Demographic profiles and screening questions were first analysed descriptively. The relationship between independent and dependent factors was examined using Multiple Linear Regression. The Mediating factor of the study was explained using Process MACRO.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile indicates that most of the respondents were male, with 58 per cent (n=137) of the total respondents and 42 per cent (n=100) female respondents. Most of the respondents' age falls between 18-29 years old, with a percentage of 70.8 per cent (n=168). The rest, 29.2 (n=69) per cent, were from 30-59 years old. In terms of marital status, most of the respondents were single (n=145), with 61.18 per cent, followed by married respondents at 33.7 per cent (n=80) and divorced at 5.12 per cent (n=12). The level of education implies that the majority of the respondents possess a Bachelor's degree (n=115), with 48.52 per cent, followed by Diploma holders with 20.25 per cent (n=48), Master's Degree with 18.4 per cent (n=43), SPM with 9.7 per cent (n=23) and PhD with 3.37 per cent (n=8) of all total respondents. The employment statuses show that 51.47 per cent (n =122) are working in government or private sectors; the rest, 48.52 per cent (n=115), fall into the categories of students, entrepreneurs or unemployed. Most respondents earned an income between RM2500 to RM5499 with 52.6 per cent (n=125). Then, followed by respondents below RM2499 with 43.88 per cent (n=104), and the rest was more than RM5500 with 3.52 per cent (n=8). For the residential state of the respondents, the result shows that most of the respondents were from the Central region (48.5 per cent, n=115), followed by the East Coast region (16.87 per cent, n=42), Sabah and Sarawak region (15.61 per cent, n=37) and rest fall under Southern region (10.12 per cent, n=24) and Northern region (8.9per cent, n=19).

Regression Analysis

Table1

Regression coefficient of predictors of sports tourism, passive involvement and support to attend Malaysia football matches.

		β	t	p	F	R	R ²	Dependent Variables
Model								
1	(Constant)		7.426	0.000				
	Predictors of sports tourism	.786	25.069	0.000	628.431	.853	.728	Support for attending Malaysia football matches
2	(Constant)		8.718	0.000				
	Predictors of sports tourism	.871	39.817	0.000	1585.374	.933	.871	Passive involvement
3	(Constant)		18.420	0.001				
	Passive involvement	0.661	21.426	0.001	459.087	.813	.661	Support for attending Malaysia football matches

Based on Table 1, the result shows that the R^2 value was 0.728, which means 72.8 per cent of the variation in support for attending Malaysia football matches can be explained by predictors of sports tourism (Economic, Social, and Environment) where the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. The p-value was 0.000, less than 0.05, indicating that the overall regression was significant. The equation can interpret the result as $F = 628.431$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 728$. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant when those three (3) variables of predictors of sports tourism were together as a group; they significantly predicted the dependent variable, support for attending Malaysia football matches. Therefore, the assumption of the hypothesis testing, H1: There is a significant relationship between the predictors of sports tourism and support to attend Malaysian football matches, is accepted.

The result also shows that the R^2 value was 0.871, which means 87.1 per cent of the variation in passive involvement can be explained by predictors of sports tourism (Economic, Social, and Environment). The ANOVA output shows that the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. The overall regression was significant because the p-value was 0.000, less than 0.05. The equation can interpret the result as by the equation as $F = 1585.374.898$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.871$. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant, where passive involvement significantly predicted the dependent variable, predictors of sports tourism (Economic, Social, and Environment). Therefore, the hypothesis testing of H1: There is a significant relationship between the predictors of sports tourism and passive involvement is accepted.

The result shows that the R^2 value was 0.661, which means 66.1 per cent of the variation in support for attending Malaysia football matches can be explained by passive involvement. The ANOVA output shows that the R^2 value was significantly more than 0. The overall regression was significant because the p-value was 0.000, less than 0.05. The equation can interpret the result as $F = 459.087$, $p < 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.661$. Overall, the regression analysis was statistically significant, where support for attending Malaysia football matches predicted passive involvement, where the p-value for satisfaction (p-value=0.000) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the assumption of H1: That there is a significant relationship between passive involvement and support to attend Malaysian football matches is accepted.

Mediation Analysis

Table 2 : Results of PROCESS Macro analysis for mediation effect Passive Involvement between Predictors of Sport Tourism and Support for Attending Malaysian Football Matches

<i>PROCESS Model 4</i>					
Path	Coeff	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
a (Pred-Pasv)	1.2587	39.8168	.0000*	1.1964	1.3210
b (Pasy-Supp)	.0906	1.4030	.0000*	.0366	.2178
c (Pred-Supp)	.7860	25.0685	.0000*	.7242	.8477
c' (Pred-Supp)	.6719	1.4030	.0000*	.0366	.2178
Total Effect	.7860	25.0685	.0000*	.7242	.8477
Direct Effect	.6719	7.7162	.0000*	.5004	.8435
Indirect Effect	.1140			-.1449	.3352
R²	.7709				

Note: Coeff indicates coefficient. LLCI and ULCI indicate the lower-limit and upper-limit.

* Indicates $p < .001$.

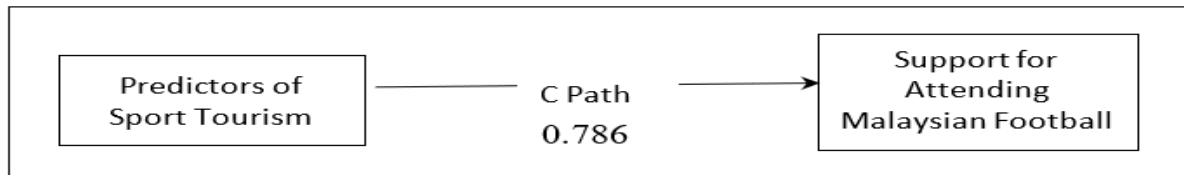


Figure 1: The coefficient result of total effect (Predictors of Sport Tourism and Support towards Attending Malaysian Football Matches)

The result in Figure 1 indicated that the coefficient means that for every 1 unit increase in Predictors of Sport Tourism (X), Support for Attending Malaysian Football Matches (Y) score increased by 0.7860, and the relationship was significant with a p-value <0.05.

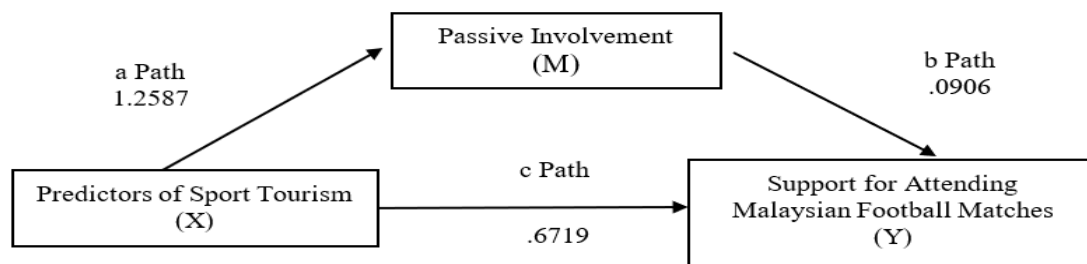


Figure 2: The coefficient result of the direct effect of Passive Involvement toward Predictors of Sport Tourism and Support for Attending Malaysian Football Matches

First, a path was statistically significant with a p-value less than 0.001. It showed that the coefficient value (a path slope) was 1.2587. This coefficient value means that, for every 1 unit increase in Predictors of Sport Tourism, the Passive Involvement score increased by 1.2587. Second, the b path is also statistically significant, with a p-value less than 0.001. It showed that the coefficient value (b path slope) was 0.906. This coefficient value means that, for every 1 unit increase in Passive Involvement, the support for attending Malaysian football matches score increased by 0.906. The result showed that the indirect effect (0.1140) was significant with a 95% confidence interval, which did not include zero; that was to say, the effect was significantly greater than zero at $\alpha < 0.01$.

As such, the first step in the mediation model, the regression of predictor of sport tourism with support for attending Malaysian football matches, ignoring the mediator, was significant, $\beta = 0.7860$, $t = 25.0685$, $p < 0.001$. The next step showed that the Predictor of Sport Tourism Image regression with the Passive Involvement as a mediator was also significant, $\beta = 1.2587$, $t = 39.8168$, $p < 0.001$. The mediation process stated that the Passive involvement (mediator), controlling for the predictor of sport tourism and support for attending Malaysian football matches, was significant, $\beta = 0.0906$, $t = 1.4030$, $p < 0.001$. Finally, the analysis revealed that controlling for Passive involvement (M), predictor of sport tourism, was a significant predictor of the support for attending Malaysian football matches, $\beta = 0.6719$, $t = 7.7162$, $p < 0.001$.

According to the results, it was shown that the direct effect was significant, and the indirect effect also remained noteworthy. Approximately 77.09% of the predictors' variance in Passive Involvement was accounted for ($R^2 = 0.7709$). The indirect effect and total effect

(VAF) are larger than 80%, signifying partial mediation. Partial mediation implies a significant relationship between the variables and shows a significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables should the mediator not be presented (Bommae, 2016). Thus, it was concluded that Passive Involvement mediates the relationship between Predictors of sport tourism and Support for attending Malaysian football matches. Therefore, to explain the hypothesis testing, it can be assumed that H2: Passive involvement mediates the relationship between Predictors of sport tourism and Support for attending Malaysian football matches was supported by the result (H2).

Discussion

The results indicate strong relationships between predictors of sport tourism and support for attending Malaysian football matches, justified with reasons. The variables are interconnected as they apply to the tourists who go to live football matches in Malaysia. For instance, predictors (economic, social and environmental) (Ahmad et al., 2019) are, in other words, motivators that influence the travel decision (Falk & Hagsten, 2019) of tourists regarding attending the football match at the stadium in Malaysia. Many Malaysians have shown a willingness to attend football matches at stadiums once the stadiums reopen, providing the opportunity to go to the stadium to watch Football ("Fans can return to stadiums when Malaysia Cup resumes", 2021). The application of predictors proves that Malaysians travel to the stadium due to various motivators. The result indicated that the Economic predictor had the most significant relationship among all the predictors. Previous research has proven that tourists' financial state influences travel decisions and behaviours (Hu & Cole, 2016; Kwiatkowski et al., 2018; Park et al., 2019). However, in the name of support, tourists would spend as much as they can to experience sports such as takraw, badminton and Football (Wong et al., 2020; Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020).

Dedicated and passionate tourists who are genuine supporters (Hu & Cole, 2016; Hyun & Jordan, 2020) would go the distance and purchase items to showing their support as attendees, use the available facilities, join groups, and try to keep the environment clean (Peric, 2018; Wicker, 2018). These dedicated tourists are genuine supporters of Football (McManus, 2020). However, it is essential to note that money is not the only motivator influencing (Ng & Chan, 2020). Some tourists can go beyond in the name of attending sports events to support their preferred teams (Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020), regardless of the costs they have to bear. Sports fans' willingness and dedication (Klyukina, 2020) would be even more appealing when the sports event implements sustainable practices that keep the environment clean and ensure (Uvinha et al., 2018) the safety and security of the attendants of the stadium. Regardless, as seen in Malaysia, true football fans have gone to great lengths, including camping outside the stadiums, making necessary purchases, and even joining fan clubs to watch a football match (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Passive involvement is not being actively involved in the sports event by being an attendee (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020). Nonetheless, the literature provided by previous authors points out that tourists are mainly the ones who implement passive involvement at sports events. Tourists generally do not share the same privileges provided by athletes (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020) and would have to bear many costs (Ahmad et al., 2019). However, tourists get several other opportunities to socialise and experience the event alongside their peers (Chen et al., 2020). The popularity of Football, for example, brings tourists, either sports fans or non-

sports fans, together to experience the event and bring home fantastic memories. Also, tourists would be more attracted to the event if the stadium implemented safe and green practices that ensure the stadium attendants' safety and security (Uvinha et al., 2018). The study implies that respondents of Malaysian football fans agreed that the popularity of football events attracts them to the stadium throughout the nation. The popularity brings them together to experience the event as passive attendants as they deem it rewarding (Ramalingam, 2019; Rudkin & Sharma, 2020).

The analysis indicated significant relationships between passive involvement and support for attending Malaysian football matches. The involvement of sports tourists usually can be seen as their attendance at the stadium to support their respective teams (Buning et al., 2016) as passive participants or visitors of the sport (Kwiatkowski et al., 2018). These include those who attend the stadium mainly to witness the sports event and spend time with those of similar interests (Sato et al., 2018). Previous literature has stated that passive attendees can gain various benefits, such as possible business opportunities (Absalymov, 2015) and making connections. Passive involvement thus opens possibilities for the tourist in many aspects, which can be rewarding for them in various ways (Hua & Chiu, 2013). Many Malaysians have also agreed that they like being at live football matches as a spectator (Mapjabil et al., 2015). Other than that, being passively involved allows tourists to show their support by just attending the match at the stadium. Additionally, being part of football fan clubs or Ultras groups in Malaysia ensures that tourists show more support for attending football matches in Malaysia. With the popularity of Malaysian Football consistently on the rise (Ramalingam, 2019; Vincent, 2019) despite the pandemic, tourists see the potential of Football in Malaysia developing even further and would attend the stadium to watch the game. Malaysian stadiums today are also reopening for more seating (Perbadanan Stadium Malaysia, 2021), providing a bigger opportunity for Malaysians to show their support for the most relevant sport in Malaysia today by making the necessary purchases (Ahmad et al., 2019) and at the stadium.

Passive involvement was not a significant mediator, although having significantly high relationships with the predictors of sport tourism and support for attending Malaysian football matches. The results indicate that the indirect effect was equal to .1140 with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of -.1449 (lower limit/ LLCI) to .3352 (upper limit/ ULCI). The values show that the movement between the LLCI and ULCI involves "zero". Since "zero" falls within the 95% confidence interval, we can conclude that Passive Involvement does not mediate the relationship between the Predictors of Sport Tourism and Support for Attending Malaysian Football Matches. The act of involvement is required in order to show support for a sports event. In this study, the act of passive involvement by the tourists exclusively means attending a live Malaysian football match. Passive involvement does not occur without the attendance of sports fans as tourists to the event venue. However, this does not mean that no direct support is shown to the sporting event just because they are the tourists are not physically present at the event venue (Chen, 2014). When passive involvement does not occur, the requirements for predictors and support are not nullified (Jimenez-Naranjo et al., 2016). Several arguments can be made regarding supporting a sports event or anything in particular. Most importantly, support can be shown by ensuring monetary purchases from the event (Ahmad et al., 2019; Sato et al., 2018) and proof of purchase, indicating direct support (McManus, 2020). Making purchases alone shows how committed and dedicated

the tourist is toward the sporting event and their willingness to show their support for the sports event. Sports event also requires the commitment and dedication of the tourist (Klyukina, 2020; Rejon-Guardia et al., 2020), which tourists can implement by making purchases, using facilities, socialising with the event attendees and even keeping the stadium environment clean (Falk & Hagsten, 2019; Toffano Pereira et al., 2020). There is a common belief in the Malaysian context that they can only attend live football matches with more disposable income (Rudkin & Sharma, 2020). Although the respondents have agreed that the ticket prices of live football matches are relatively affordable, they also realise that there are other costs that they have to bear, including accommodations, transportation and food and beverage (Gomez-Deniz et al., 2020). The tourist's decision to travel to the destination is affected as some Malaysians may not have the financial capacity to satisfy these costs. Therefore, making them choose choices, including watching the live game at home or at local restaurants that air the game at the time (Kumudumali, 2020; Gomez-Deniz et al., 2020). For sports fans, watching Football at home does not indicate a lack of commitment, dedication, and loyalty to direct expenditures (Alexandris et al., 2017; McManus, 2020). Sports fans who watch the live games at home or other locations will make direct expenditures as they purchase merchandise that counts as direct income to the sports industry.

Conclusion and Implications of Research

The study aimed to gain more profound knowledge about the mediating effect of Passive Involvement on the predictors of sport tourism and support for attending Malaysian football matches among the Malaysian population, focusing on the respondent's view on live Football in Malaysia post-pandemic. Three predictors of sport tourism (Economic, Social and Environment) are utilised to assess respondents' views. Despite the restrictions of Covid 19 pandemic, respondents showed a willingness to return to stadiums out of passion which is evident in the reopening of stadiums in Malaysia. All the predictors showed a positive relationship with passive involvement, which led to a positive relationship with support for attending Malaysian football matches. The result is consistent with findings from past research (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ito & Hikoji, 2021; Nagy et al., 2021; Peric et al., 2019; Saari, 2018; Wicker, 2018; Zarei & Ramkissoon, 2020). The study focused on Malaysian public opinion via an online questionnaire. Several reasons support the willingness of Malaysians to watch football matches when stadiums reopen for public seating, such as experiences, the affordable and value-for-money, and the safety and security of the environment. Furthermore, besides being confined to their homes for such a long time due to COVID-19, the desire to travel increased, especially when Malaysian cannot truly experience a football match unless they attend the stadium. Nunis (2021) stated that football fans are excited to attend live matches with the opening of stadiums regardless of strict regulations and limited seats.

Through the analysis, the study also provided practical implications for tourism marketers in searching for the positive influence of passive involvement on predictors of sport tourism, which leads to their loyalty, positive word-of-mouth/recommendations, and, consequently, consistent growth of sports tourism in Malaysia. Implementations of Strict Operating Procedures (SOP) are required to oppose the deadly virus whilst maintaining Football's growth in Malaysia. According to research findings regarding health and safety, the SOPs that need to be strictly practised mainly concern wearing masks and encouraging the practice of social distancing. The stadiums should also be regularly sanitised to appease attendants'

minds from the potential dangers of Covid-19 being spread in the stadium. As a result, authorities should pay more attention to solutions for monitoring the attendants of the stadium to ensure they follow the SOPs provided.

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