

# Investigating Sport Tourists' perceived Attributes of Muay Thai, Event Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions of Attending Future Events

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate which determinants of the theory of planned behaviour (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control), perceived attributes and event satisfaction are the best predictors of behavioural intentions in attending future Muay Thai events in Thailand. Data were collected from 209 subjects comprising of foreign sport tourists who attended Muay Thai events at Sanam Muay Rajadamnern stadium and Sanam Muay Lumpini stadiums in Thailand. The questionnaire consisted of instruments modified from Ferreira and Armstrong (2004), Shonk (2006) and Cunningham and Kwon (2003). The finding indicated that subjective norm ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .251$ ) or 25.1% of the total variance was the best predictor of tourists' behavioral intentions in attending future Muay Thai events, followed by game attractiveness ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .045$ ), perceived behavioral Control ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .037$ ), cost ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .025$ ), and event satisfaction ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .019$ ). The results of the study were discussed in light of earlier findings concerning of intending sports events.

Keywords: Sport Tourists, Sport Events, Event Satisfaction, Behavioural Intentions

## **1. Introduction**

The relationship between sport and tourism is a subject of increasing interest in tourism academic extent. Sport-related travel has emerged as a popular form of tourism where people travel to participate in sports or attending sports events. In Thailand, one event which has been popular among foreign tourist is the traditional sport of Muay Thai. A form of combat sports, Muay Thai has historically been practised by Thai soldiers as a form of self-defense. This sport is

recognised as one of Thai's traditional sports. In this martial art, all parts of the body are used as both offensive and defensive tools such as feet, knees, calves, and elbows. However, few research has been undertaken to understand perceptions and behaviour intentions of sport tourists attending Muay Thai events in Thailand. This lack of data makes it difficult for tourism authorities in Thailand to implement effective market planning, targeting, promotion and development of Muay Thai events as tourist attractions. Several questions remain unanswered what are sport tourists' perceived attributes of Muay Thai as a form of tourist attraction, what are their levels of satisfaction with the event and whether a tourist will revisit any Muay Thai events in Thailand again in the future. Information on sport tourists' perceptions, satisfactions and behavioural intentions are important to help Thai tourism authorities plan and develop market segmentation and tourist development strategies.

Regarding sport events, many researchers in sport event tourism have concentrated on mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. Some authors (Dansero & Puttilli, 2010; Zarei & Yusof, 2014; Yusof, Shah, Geok, 2012) have pointed out the benefits of hosting mega sporting events in terms of political, social, economical, physical, and cultural impacts on the host country. Specifically, mega sporting events like Olympic Games can promote economic activities both in local and urban setting such as creating jobs and constructing sports facilities, and from the vast number of tourists visiting that city before, during and after the events (Malfas, Theodoraki, & Houlihan, 2004). On the other hand, other researchers argued that mega sporting events have huge negative impacts. For example, mega sporting events frequently result in huge debts for host communities (Whitson & Macintosh, 1993), corrupt practices arise during the bidding process (Jennings, 1996) and there is often a displacement of local residents (Hiller, 1998). Malfas, Theodoraki, and Houlihan (2004) found that mega-events often resulted in the increase of land and property value during and after the event. This situation can lead to a problem for a poor people who live in this area because the cost of house and rental are increased.

The problems associated with mega sport events has led Higham (1999) to suggest there should be more emphasis on organising small-scale sport events as a form of tourist attraction. Small scale sport events include regular season sporting competitions in a community such as a soccer, rugby or ice-hockey or adventure/outdoor events such as cyclotron or skiing. It can also include traditional sport events such as the Muay Thai. According to Higham (1999), small-scale sport events require reduced investment of funds, usually operate within existing infrastructure and are more manageable in terms of crowding and congestion compared to mega sport events. The few studies on small-scale sport events showed some benefits to the hosting communities. For example, Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak (2003) studied college sports events as small-scale event sport tourism and their findings suggested that college sports events were able to attract a proportion of fans from outside of the local community. They suggested small-scale event sport tourism might hold more advantages for a community than hosting mega events. Furthermore, traditional sports events such as Muay Thai operated as a small sport event, can be beneficial in terms of the preservation of local traditional cultures (Ratanapaiwong, 2006)

A theory that can be used to study behaviour intention of sport tourist attending small-scale sport event such as the Muay Thai is the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This theory was often used for prediction of attitude and behavioural intention. For example, Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) examined the behaviour intentions of active event sport tourists in the case of a small-scale recurring sport event. The authors added some determinants of the Theory of Planned Behavior into their analytical model to predict the influence upon the decision of active sport tourists to attend that event again. The results of the study showed that attitudes and satisfaction are significant predictors of a participant's intention to revisit an event again. In order to know more about the perception of those tourists attending Muay Thai events, their satisfaction with the event and behavioral intentions to revisit Muay Thai events, the aim of this study is to investigate which determinants of the theory of planned behavior (Attitudes, Subjective norms and Perceived behavioral control), perceived attributes and event satisfaction are the best predictor of behavioral intentions in attending future Muay Thai events in Thailand.

## **2. Literature Review**

The literature suggests understanding sport tourists and sport consumer behaviours as very important to aid in the development of marketing strategies in sport tourism. Understanding the behaviours of sport tourists or sport consumers has been shown to increase consumers demand for tourist products and services as well as consumers' satisfaction and motivation (Funk, 2008). Gibson (1998) suggested the key component of understanding the experiences and satisfactions of tourists was by studying their motivations, preferred destination attributes and type of vacation. One theory that can be used as a framework to understand how Muay Thai event may function as a tourist attraction is Leiper's (1990) Tourist Attraction System. A tourist attraction is defined as an empirical connection of a tourist or human element, a nucleus or central element, and a marker or information element (Leiper, 1990). Previous research has been conducted using Leiper's tourist attraction system. For example, Smith and Hinch (1996) studied Canadian Casinos as tourist attractions, identified the characteristic of typical tourist attractions and how each differed from each other. The study showed the utility of Leiper' tourist attraction theory in identifying the characteristic of typical tourist attractions, and was also able to show how a destination place attracts tourists. However, this theory has never been used to examine the tourists' intention to revisit the same destination in the future. Even though Leiper' tourist attraction has been used to study mega events and international sport event tourism (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003; Yusof, Shah, & Soh, 2012) such as football, rugby, and hockey, but it has never been examined within the context of small-scale traditional sport events such as Muay Thai events.

In order to know more the perception of those tourists attending Muay Thai events regarding their perceptions of event attributes, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions to revisit Muay Thai events, it is important to study Leiper's Tourist Attraction theory in combination with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This theory was often used for prediction of attitude and behavioural intention. A key proposition of this theory is that if a person intends to engage in a behaviour then it is likely that she or he will do it. It means that a

person's behavioural intention depends on the person's attitude about the behaviour and subjective norm (Behaviour Intention = Attitude + Subjective Norm). In this study, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is used to predict tourist's behavioural intention to attend Muay Thai events. This theory postulates three conceptually independent determinants of intention: Firstly, attitudes toward behaviour refers to a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of behaviour in question. Secondly, subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour, and the last is perceived behavioural control which refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, and assumed to reflect past experience.

Previous studies have used the Theory of Planned Behavior to predict behavioural intentions of sport tourists. For example, Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) investigated the behaviour intentions of active event sport tourists in case of a small-scale recurring sport event. They have added some determinants of the Theory of Planned Behavior into their analytical model to predict the influence upon the decision of active sport tourists to attend that event again. The study showed that attitudes toward event participation mediated the impact of satisfaction and destination image upon intention which clearly suggests that attitudes and satisfaction are significant predictors of a participant's intention to revisit an event again. In another study, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) examined the interrelationship between sport event and destination image and sports' behaviour by utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior. The findings showed that destination image and past experiences with a destination influenced the intention of a tourist to revisit the destination again in the future. However, no studies had examined how tourist attraction system interacts with prediction of tourist behaviour in understanding tourists' perceptions, experiences and satisfaction with an event. Hence, the current study combines Leiper's tourist attraction system and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) to know how the variables of each theory were related to each other in order to examine the perceptions of tourists to Muay Thai events as a form of tourist attraction, the perceptions of event attributes and satisfactions with event attendance, and how these perceptions and satisfactions were related to their behavioral intention to attend future events.

### **3. Methodology**

Self-administrated questionnaire surveys were distributed to 209 foreign sport tourists at two Muay Thai stadiums in Bangkok, Thailand. Question items measuring tourist perceptions of Muay Thai event attributes were modified from Ferreira and Armstrong (2004), consisting of the following dimensions; the popularity of sport, game attractiveness, free offerings and promotions, pre game/in-game entertainment, the degree of physical contact, convenience and accessibility, facility, cost, and culture. Subjects were also asked about their satisfaction for attending Muay Thai event based on an instrument adapted from Shonk (2006) while behavioural intentions were measured using questions based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) modified from Cunningham and Kwon (2003).

#### 4. Results

In terms of demographic information, eighty three (83) of the subjects in the study were from Europe (47.3%), followed by North America (n = 58; 27.8%), Australia/New Zealand (n = 26; 12.5%), Asia (n = 14; 6.7%), South America (n = 11; 5.2%), and other countries (n = 1; 0.5%), respectively. Majority of the subjects were males (n = 155; 74.2%), single (n = 159; 76.0%), persons (52.6%), employed full-time, (n=50, 23.9%), and educated with a bachelor’s degree (n = 83; 39.7%), Table 1 shows sport tourists perception of Muay Thai event attributes. The findings show that the most important attributes were the degree of physical contact, while free offerings and promotions were the least important. Based on the results, it is suggested that Muay Thai event promotions should emphasise the physical aspects of the event rather than give free gifts and offerings.

Table 1 : Tourists perceptions of event attributes

Muay Thai event attributes	Mean	S.D.
Degree of Physical Contact	4.93	1.06
Culture	4.87	1.38
Game Attractiveness	4.66	1.31
Cost	4.65	1.68
Popularity of Sport	4.27	1.20
Convenience and Accessibility	4.04	1.32
Pregame/In-Game Entertainment	3.67	1.42
Facility	3.67	1.69
Free Offerings and Promotions	3.60	1.55

The testing of the best predictor of behavioural intentions attending Muay Thai events in future is presented in Table 2. Multiple Regressions using Stepwise Method was analysed to determine which variables are the best predictor of behavioural intention of attending future Muay Thai events. The predictors consisted of the determinants of the theory of planned behavior (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control), nine dimensions of Muay Thai attributes (popularity of sport, game attractiveness, free offerings and promotions, pre game/in-game entertainment, degree of physical contact, convenience and accessibility, facility, cost, culture) and event satisfaction. The finding indicated that subjective norm ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .251$ ) or 25.1% of the total variance was the best predictor of tourists’ behavioral intentions in attending future Muay Thai events, followed by game attractiveness ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .045$ ), perceived behavioral control ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .037$ ), cost ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .025$ ), and event satisfaction ( $R^2_{\text{change}} = .019$ ). The total variance explained was  $R^2 = .377$  or 37.7 %,  $F(5, 187) = 22.016$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Table 2 : Multiple Regressions Testing the Best Predictor of Behavioural Intentions Attending Future Muay Thai Event s

Predictor Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>change</sub>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>Adjust</sub>	SE <sub>Est</sub>
Subj Norm	.501	.251	62.418	.001	.251	.247	1.544
Subj Norm, GA	.544	.296	38.971	.001	.045	.296	1.501
Subj Norm, GA, PBC	.578	.333	30.711	.001	.037	.323	1.464
Subj Norm, GA, PBC, Cost	.599	.358	25.539	.001	.025	.344	1.441
Subj Norm, GA, PBC, Cost, Satisfaction	.614	.377	22.016	.001	.019	.360	1.424

### 5. Discussion

According to Leiper’s Tourist Attraction Theory (1990), a nucleus or central element of a tourist attraction is defined as any features or attributes of the tourist destination. In this study, it refers to any feature or attributes of Muay Thai that tourists experienced while on vacation. The attributes or nucleus elements which tourists liked the most about Muay Thai event were the degree of physical contact, followed by culture and game attractiveness, while free offerings and promotions were the least important attributes. Similar to other forms of martial art, Muay Thai performers use all parts of the body as offensive and defensive tools such as the feet, knees, calves, and elbows and has a high amount of physical contact, with nimble movement, quick action, and speed. However, Muay Thai in Thailand is also different from other martial arts. It is still maintaining traditional aspects of the sport with rituals such as paying homage to the teacher, wearing Mongkon, the performance of the pre fight ritual dance or Ram Muay Wai Kru as well as playing traditional music and song during fights. Thai traditional sporting events which maintain original and authentic forms help tourists to experience and identify with Thai cultures as presented in the lifestyle and identity of Thai people (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2006). Hence, foreign tourists may be attracted by these attributes which are different from other combat sports. The results are consistent with Ramshaw and Gammon (2006), who suggested that sport can be a form of heritage as described from several sources such as history, memory, tradition, nostalgia and mythology. They also recommended that sport is an important part of a destination’s heritage. Some tourists may choose to visit the places associated with the sporting culture, sporting myth, and attending a heritage sporting events may also be one of the significant reasons for their travel.

Results from the study showed the best predictors of behavioural intentions for attending future Muay Thai events were the subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, cost, event satisfaction, and game attractiveness, respectively. As suggested by TPB, the subjective norm had a strong correlation with behavioural intention which is based on social influence such as friends, family or relative. It is possible that tourists are more likely to revisit



Muay Thai events again in the future if their friends and family have recommended the positive things about Muay Thai events. Similarly, perceived behavioural control (time and money) was also associated with behavioural intention which is ease and difficulties to perform something. One of the most important factors for making the decision to visit a destination is customer satisfaction with the attributes of the destination, which can also influence on the customer' behavioural intention to revisit. Thus, tourists may be attracted by these factors to make the decision to return and attend Muay Thai events again with their friends, money and time provided, and Muay attributes satisfaction (game attractiveness). These findings were consistent with previous researches to support these as the powerful factors of predicting behavioral intentions to return the destination, specifically as subjective norm (Sparks, 2007; Lam & Hsu, 2006), perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Lam and Hsu, 2004), cost (Osti, Disegna, & Brida, 2012) and satisfaction (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010).

## **6. Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the results that Leiper's Tourist Attraction Theory (1990) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) were useful for investigating tourists' perceptions of event attributes, satisfaction and behavioural intention to attend the Muay Thai events in Thailand. Leiper's Tourist Attraction Theory examined tourists' perceived Muay Thai event attributes and how these perceptions are related to tourist satisfaction and intention to return again in the future. In terms of the TPB, the model was also a valuable theoretical approach for investigating behavioural intentions of tourists to attend Muay Thai events. The current findings reported that there were significant relationships between Muay Thai attributes, event satisfaction and behavioural intention to attend Muay Thai events.

Therefore, it is recommended that those who want to study sport events and sport tourism to apply these two theories to understand the perception of tourists toward other sporting events. Understanding the behaviours of sport tourists and consumers are very important to aid in the development of marketing strategies in sport tourism (Barkhordari, Yusof, Geok, 2014; Dolinting, Yusof, & Soon, 2015). Sport tourism involved high competition from other destinations in the region and an accurate understanding of tourist motivation and travel behaviour is beneficial in the promotion and development of tourist destination products and services. Thus the results of this study provide important information to the Tourism Department of Thailand and related sport marketing agencies on the factors which are related to behaviour intention to revisit Muay Thai event and this information can be used to develop effective marketing plans to attract more sport tourists to visit Thailand in the future.

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