

The Impact of Eco-Sustainability Practices on Consumer Demand: A Case of Sports Tourists

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ABSTRACT

Recent estimates imply the economic impact from sports travelers in the hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Numerous research studies indicate tourists frequently switch roles while traveling for pleasure, for example sports tourists may elect to visit a cultural heritage museum during their travels. While the sporting event still serves as the primary motivation for these tourists, they essentially have become cultural tourists as well. In today's society, there is increasing public interest in eco-sustainability issues. The hospitality industry has become aware of this growing area of importance, and many businesses in this field are adopting eco-sustainability initiatives to meet consumer demands. Sports arenas have realized the importance of environmental preservation as well. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent eco-sustainability measures of NBA arenas, such as recycling programs or waste reduction efforts, affect the motivation of fans to attend games.

Keywords: *Eco-Sustainability, environmental preservation, sports tourists, NBA, Resource Consumption,*

INTRODUCTION

A growing phenomenon in the tourism industry is the field of sports tourism (Gibson, 2004; Hinch & Higham, 2001; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2003). As the number of teams at both the professional and collegiate levels has grown, many host cities have begun to recognize substantial economic impacts through sports tourism. Sports tourism had an estimated \$51 billion earnings in 2003 (Biddiscombe, 2006). Further research found that sports tourism accounts for almost "32% of overall tourism industry receipts" (Kurtzman, 2005, p. 50). In 2008 "international tourism receipts grew to U.S. \$944 billion," (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2009, p. 3) which, based on Kurtzman's findings, equates to over \$300 billion dollars of sports tourism revenue. Events held at sports venues have the potential to generate significant revenue for both the venue and businesses in the host city. Popular sports teams and events which are of high interest to consumers draw large financial commitments from a variety of sponsors, thus further increasing the earning potential of a particular venue (Hall, O'Mahony, & Cieceli, 2010). Further research demonstrates sporting events have evolutionized, becoming

major tourism draws for a destination. Cities which utilize sporting events as tourist attractions, are realizing the significant economic impacts as a result (Bjelac & Radovanovic, 2003).

Sports tourists frequently participate in other tourism activities outside the main sporting event, such as dining out and shopping (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003). This is crucial for related businesses as additional income may be earned from activities or services which might attract the sports tourists (McCartney, 2005). Sports spectators who travel to attend a game or tournament will spend money in the local community on a variety of services, such as food and beverage, lodging, transportation, and entertainment (Bjelac & Radovanovic, 2003). Gibson (1998) further argues sport and tourism must not be examined separately, but collectively, recognizing that not all tourists partake in sports, and not all sports tourists participate in activities outside of the primary sporting event. Through extensive research, it has been determined sport and tourism are commonly intertwined, and often take place concurrently (Higham & Hinch, 2002).

Tourism is heavily influenced by trends, which must consistently be evaluated by hospitality industry businesses to meet changing demand from customers. In today's society, there is increasing public interest in environmental awareness, and travelers have begun to recognize the impact their activities place on the resources of destinations (Tixier, 2009). As environmental issues are brought to the forefront of the public's attention, many businesses have responded by adopting environmentally sustainable programs which will help them conserve depleting natural resources, and improve their public image (Chan, 2008). National Basketball Association (NBA) arenas have taken notice of the importance of eco-sustainability. NBA arenas such as the American Airlines Arena, Philips Arena, and the Toyota Center have all recently achieved LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (Brinkmann, 2009; Koch, 2010; Muret, 2009). The Washington Nationals, a Major League Baseball team located in Washington, D.C., have implemented initiatives which aim to reduce water consumption by over 3 million gallons per year (Major League Baseball, 2010).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent eco-sustainability measures of NBA arenas, such as recycling programs or waste reduction efforts, affect the motivation of fans to attend games. Based upon extant literature, it is postulated sports tourists switch roles while traveling and external motivators influence their decisions to attend sporting events. However, sports tourism encompasses many levels of motivation, from *casual fans* to those considered *die hard* (Hall, O'Mahony, & Vieceli, 2010, p. 329). This aspect of sports tourists creates the necessity for research, as it will be valuable knowledge for NBA arenas to ascertain whether fans are solely motivated to attend games based on a team's performance, or if eco-sustainability initiatives influence their decision to frequent these venues.

The sample for this study will be collected through a survey distributed via Qualtrics Labs. The survey contains 72 questions, of which 61 pertain to eco-sustainability practices. Questions concentrate on the aspects of environmental preservation, protection, and concern. Additionally, respondents will be presented with topics regarding current NBA eco-sustainability performance, their personal motivations for eco-sustainability, and motivations for travel. To

guarantee a sample of sports tourists, geographic sampling will be utilized. Filter questions are in place to sort respondents, as the research is concerned with those fans who have attended an NBA game in the past year. Residents of Texas, Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado, and Arizona are being targeted due to their relative proximity to one another.

Once collected, data analysis will incorporate a wide range of statistical methods including ANOVA, Importance Performance Analysis (IPA), mean variable calculation for demographic questions, and multiple regression. ANOVA analysis will allow for the segmentation of respondents based upon independent variables, such as geographic location while multiple regression will examine relationships between independent and dependent variables. The survey utilizes a series of questions pertaining to areas of significant *importance* regarding eco-sustainability practices and the subsequent *performance* of these aspects in NBA arenas. Results from these questions will allow for an Importance Performance Analysis (IPA). Results from the IPA will provide insight into customer's preferences and assist NBA arenas in making managerial decisions to better meet customer demands.

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