Comparison of Causal Factors Influencing Behavioral Intention of Small–Scale Marathon Events Among Runners with Different Involvement

Paak Phantumabamrung[1] and Thee Trongjitpituk[2]

Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Thammasat University, Thailand

Corresponding Author, E–mail: [2]thee.t@allied.tu.ac.th

Received July 11, 2022; **Revised** August 15, 2022; **Accepted** August 25, 2022

Abstract

This article aimed to develop a causal relationship model of factors influencing behavioral intention of small–scale marathon event runners and to compare a difference of the causal relationship models among high and low involvement runners. This research was a quantitative research using the questionnaire with reliability value at 0.890. The Sample was 480 runners participated in small–scale marathon events recurring in Bangkok and Perimeter. The data were analyzed by using Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Model. The results found that the causal relationship model of factors influencing behavioral intention was fit. Service quality and destination image had direct effects on satisfaction which acted likewise as a significant mediator affecting behavioral intention indirectly. Furthermore, there were significant direct effects from destination image and satisfaction to behavioral intention. However, there was no significant difference of the models among high and low involved runners. Therefore, small–scale marathon event managers should pay attention to satisfaction because it can play an essential role in behavioral intention consisting of recommendation to others and retention. Service quality should be provided by concentrating on satisfying runners when organizing the events. In addition, the cities hosting the events need to serve destination image to runners for perceiving appreciation during the trips. Consequently, these were advantageous for developing small–scale marathon events sustainably.

Keywords: Service Quality; Destination Image; Satisfaction; Behavioral Intention; Small–Scale Marathon Events; Involvement

Introduction

Marathon events have been more popular recently because they can generate economic and social impacts positively to cities (Smith & Stevenson, 2009). Due to their benefits, many countries including Thailand have encouraged to organize marathon events. According to 12nd National Economic and Social Development Plan, Thailand has paid more attention to host sport events because it can support sport tourism and lead to earn monetary value from national and international sport tourists. Behavioral intention has been being concentrated on because experienced runners with positive behavioral intention will have possibilities to recommend the events to their friends or families and to participate in the events again in the future (Bigné et al., 2008). It is imperative for marathon event managers because attraction of new participants has a relationship with cost of organizing events.

Satisfaction is an important indicator influencing behavioral intention. Unless runners are satisfied in feeling during and post marathon events, they may search for other events or mention the events negatively (Oliver, 2010). Marathon events are required to provide high standard of service quality since importance of perceived service quality can result in satisfaction. An individual will assess all dimensions of service quality provided by marathon events with expectation. If, perception of service quality exceeds expectation, a person is likely to be satisfied and it will lead to have positive behavioral intention (Yoshida & James, 2010). However, owing to increasing population of runners, there are many types of runners having different participation purposes and criteria. Classification associated with runners' involvement is helpful for satisfying among various groups. Thus, understanding attitude and expectation of all runners plays a crucial role in sustainable development of marathon events.

Moreover, although size of sport events strongly correlates with size of their benefits, small–scale sport events have been likely to be promoted since they can avoid negative impacts by using existing infrastructure and utilizing small resources. Due to popularity of small–scale marathon events, runners have abundant alternatives to participate in. Accordingly, cities hosting the events need to attract runners to select by developing runners' perception of destination. Runners are considered as sport tourists, they may select to participate in the events by referring to hosting cities which they can experience appreciable occasions.

However, there has been limited research on the causal relationship models of factors influencing behavioral intention of small–scale marathon events among runners with different involvement.

Therefore, this article aimed to 1) study direct and indirect effects 2) develop the causal relationship model of small–scale marathon event runners and 3) compare a difference of the causal relationship models among high and low involvement runners.

Literature Review

Service Quality

Even though, it is widely acknowledged that the SERVQUAL model issued by Parasuraman et al. (1985) has been utilized in many research examining quality of service, it may not be able to measure service quality in term of sport research because sport participants have an unique evaluation by focusing on outcome after completion of sport events such as competition result or improving performance (Theodorakis et al., 2015). Hence, there have been various researchers attempt to develop the measurement of service quality to suit for the context of sports. In case of examining service quality in marathon events, Huang et al. (2018) applied the Scale of Service Quality in Recreational Sport to develop the model consisting of 1) facility quality 2) interaction quality 3) outcome quality and 4) information quality.

H_1: service quality has a positive influence on satisfaction.

Destination Image

Destination image is considered as an important factor because it can differentiate a location to its rivals it can result in both satisfaction and behavioral intention. An individual will perceive cognitive image relating to external stimuli provided by destination attributes and affective image that assess a destination by internal belief (Koo et al., 2014). Ninomiya et al. (2019) developed the measurement of destination image consisting of 8 dimensions from Sport Event Image provided by Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) in order to evaluate overall consideration of cognitive and affective image.

H_2 and H_5: destination image has positive influences on satisfaction and behavioral intention.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction can act as a mediator of service quality influencing behavioral intention. According to Xiao et al. (2019), their study found that service quality has an indirect influence on behavioral intention by having satisfaction is the significant moderating role.

H_3 and H_4: satisfaction mediates influence of service quality and destination image on behavioral intention respectively.

Behavioral intention

Behavioral intention is created from developed an attitude from past experience and it leads an individual to express accurate behavior. It consists of recommendation to others and retention (Bigné et al., 2008).

H_6: satisfaction has a positive influence on behavioral intention.

Involvement

Getz and Andersson (2010) indicated that the level of involvement is dependent on allegiance and attachment of marathon. Runners with high involvement considered as a serious group are more influenced by internal factors such as self–fulfillment or self–actualization because they are familiar with the activity. As marathon loyalty, they seem to be primary customers because they tend to participate in marathon events frequently. On the other hand, despite influence of internal factors on low involved runners who are introductory participants, external factors have more result in this group, for example they have possibilities to join activities relating to socialization or entertainment. Therefore, segmentation is advantageous since there are different criteria to evaluate service quality of marathon events and destination image of event locations among runners with high and low involvement level.

H_7: there was a difference of the causal relationship models between high and low involved runners.

Conceptual Framework

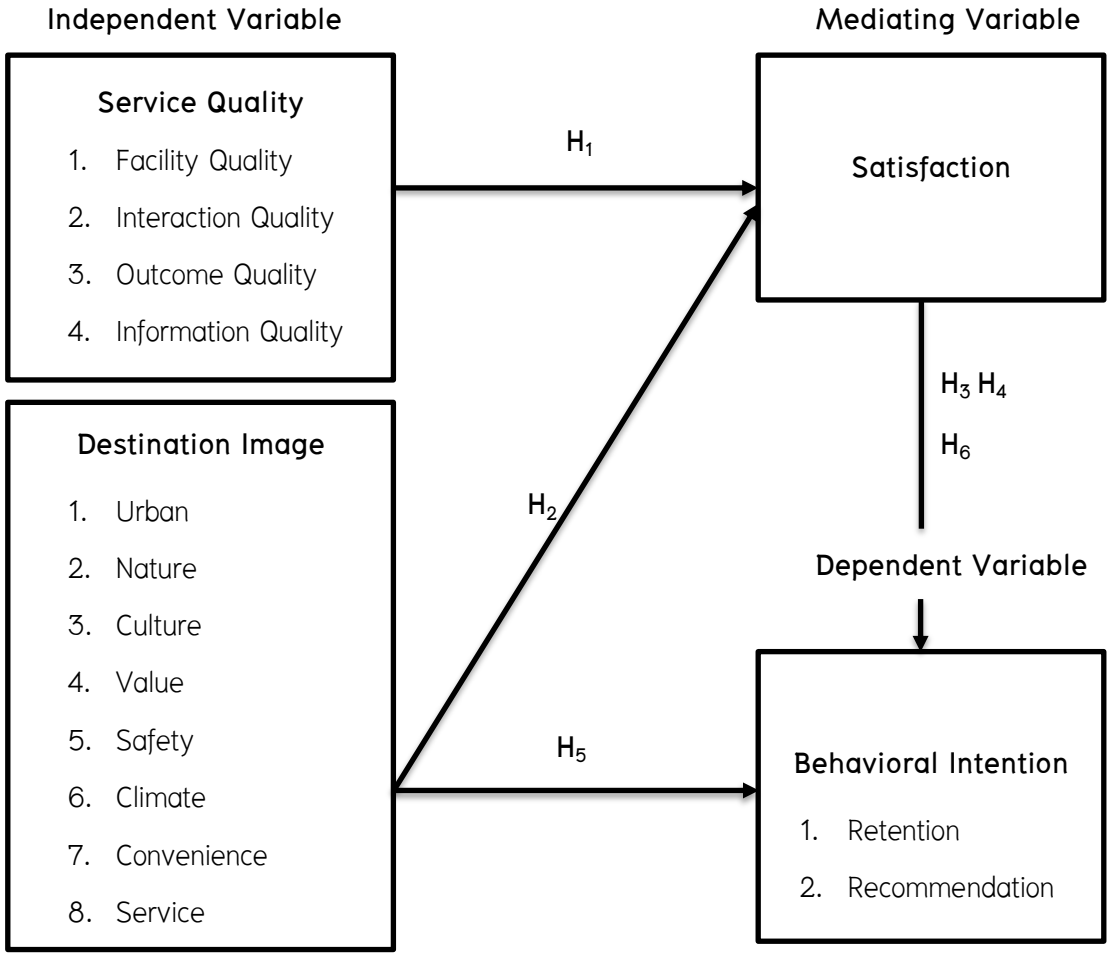

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Sample and Data collection

The sample of this study was runners who participated in small–scale marathon events recurring in Bangkok and Perimeter. The criteria of factor analysis were applied. Hair et al. (2014) indicated that an acceptable rule of factor analysis to identify the sample size was a ratio of 10 samples to 1 variable. Totally, 48 variables were calculated, hence the sample size of this study was 480 samples. According to the inclusion criteria, marathon events having participation of runners below 3,000 were considered as small–scale (Fotiadis et al., 2016). In addition, runners lived in the province that marathon events were held will be excluded in order to study perception of destination image. Multi–stage random sampling technique was applied. Firstly, 80 questionnaires were delivered to runners in Bangkok and

Perimeter consisting of 6 provinces. Next, the runners were divided into 2 groups including high and low involvement by examining median from the measurement of marathon involvement (Kyle et al., 2010). Consequently, there were 241 samples considered to be high involvement runners ($\overline{\boldsymbol{x}}$ = 4.45, SD = .606) and runners with low involvement had 239 samples ($\overline{\boldsymbol{x}}$ = 3.07, SD = .920).

Instrument

The questionnaire using 5–point Likert scales was adapted from existing literature. It consisted of 5 sections including 1) Marathon Involvement: the measurement developed by Kyle et al. (2010) was utilized to classify the level of marathon involvement among runners 2) Service Quality: Huang et al.'s (2018) scale of service quality was employed to measure perceived service quality of small–scale marathon events. 3) Destination Image: Ninomiya et al.'s (2019) scale was used to evaluate perception of destination image. 4) Satisfaction: Oliver's (2010) measurement of satisfaction was applied to assess the level of satisfaction in this study. And 5) Behavioral Intention: the scale of Bigné et al. (2008) was used to determine runners' behavioral intention including likeliness to revisit and willingness to recommend the marathon events to others. The questionnaire was examined content validity including content relevance, representativeness, and clarity by 3 experts in sport management. The questionnaire had Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) at .890. Likewise, the questionnaire was examined reliability and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was at .965.

Data Analysis

The LISREL 8.72 statistic program was used for the data analysis. Initially, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to test the suitability of data. In addition, correlation coefficient was also employed to ensure that the studied variables are not with multicollinearity. Before evaluating the proposed structural model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to evaluate the fitness of the measurement model. There were four measurement models including 1) Service Quality, 2) Destination Image, 3) Satisfaction and 4) Behavioral Intention were estimated separately. Then Structural Equation Model (SEM) was undertaken to analyze hypothesized linkages within the proposed theoretical model and evaluate the fitness of the structural model.

Result

Data screening

Prior to data analysis, data screening was conducted to minimize any violation of Structural Equation Model analysis. Initially, it was found that skewness and kurtosis of all variables were a normal distribution and correlation coefficient did not exceed .90, thus all variables did not experience multicollinearity. Furthermore, the result of a test for independence was within acceptable range (Kaiser–Meyer–Okin = .889, Bartlett's test of Sphericity= 5410.762, df = 153, p = 0.000) (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, after data screening, it showed that data was suitable for Structural Equation Model analysis.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A total of 18 items was subjected to CFA with a separate four measurement model consisting of service quality, destination image, satisfaction and behavioral intention. The result of the CFA indicated that the overall fit of the all models was satisfactory that having χ^2=.05, χ^2/df < 3, p–value>.05, RMSEA $\leq$ .08, CFI $\geq$ .90, GFI $\geq$ .90, AGFI $\geq$ .90 (Hair et al., 2014). In addition, convergent validity was evaluated with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). Hair et al. (2014)[13] suggested that AVE must be higher than the .50 threshold and CR must be higher than .70 indicating that the both were confirmed. Therefore, all study variables could be analyzed effectively. The summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis was shown in table 1.

Table 1 The Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Study variables	χ^2	χ^2/df	p–value	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	AGFI	AVE	CR
Service Quality	.76	.76	0.38	.00	1.00	1.00	.99	.530	.818
Destination Image	20.08	1.05	.39	.01	1.00	.99	.98	.550	.907
Satisfaction	.00	1.00	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	.776	.911
Behavioral Intention	.00	1.00	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	.795	.921

Direct and indirect effects of causal factors influencing behavioral intention of small–scale marathon event runners.

Hypotheses 1–6 were tested. The path analysis result indicated that the direct effect from service quality (H1: β = .51, p < .01) and destination image (H2: β = .41, p < .01) to satisfaction were

positive and significant. In addition, the direct effect from destination image (H5: β = .25, p < .01) and satisfaction (H6: β = .61, p < .01) to behavioral intention. Moreover, the finding also revealed that satisfaction acted as a significant mediator of service quality (H3: β = .31, p < .01) and destination image (H4: β = .25, p < .01). Thus, all hypothesized relationships were supported. Our proposed model had a moderate ability to predict satisfaction approximately 40% and behavioral intention 55%. The path analysis result of the model was shown in table 2.

Table 2 The path analysis result.

Consequences	R^2	Influence	Antecedents		
			Satisfaction	Service Quality	Destination Image
Satisfaction	.40	DE		.51**(.08)	.41**(.08)
		IE			
		TE		.51**(.08)	.41**(.08)
Behavioral Intention	.55	DE	.61** (.06)		.25**(.06)
		IE		.31**(.06)	.25**(.06)
		TE	.61**(.06)	.31**(.06)	.50**(.09)

** p < .01, DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect

The causal relationship model of factors influencing behavioral intention of small–scale marathon event runners

The result revealed that the adjusted causal relationship model was fit (χ^2 = 111.90, χ^2/df = 1.01, p–value = .43, RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00, GFI = .97, AGFI = .96) and was shown in figure 2.

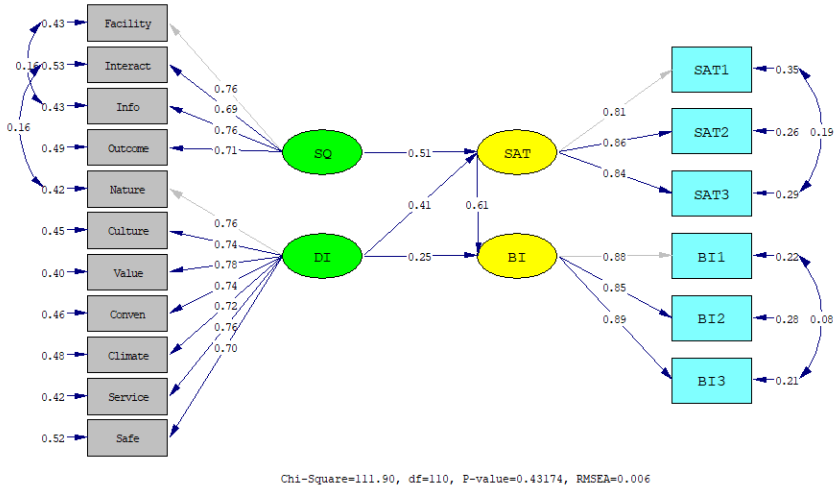

Figure 2 The causal relationship model of factors influencing behavioral intention of small–scale marathon event runners

Comparison a difference of the causal relationship models of factors influencing behavioral intention of small-scale marathon event among high and low involvement runners

The result revealed that both of the causal relationship models of factors influencing behavioral intention of small-scale marathon events among high and low involvement runners were satisfactory fit models. Firstly, the model of runners with high involvement had χ^2 = 149.67, χ^2/df = 1.18, p-value = .07, RMSEA = .02, CFI = .99, GFI = .93, AGFI = .91. Secondly, the model of runners with low involvement had χ^2 = 140.45, χ^2/df = 1.09, p-value = .21, RMSEA = .02, CFI = 1.00, GFI = .94, AGFI = .91. Moreover, the models of runners with high and low involvement were compared by evaluating the difference of Chi-square. The finding showed that there was no significant difference of the model between the model of high and low involvement runners (χ^2 = 290.12, χ^2/df = 1.14, p-value = .06). However, there was the marginal difference of effects between both groups. Initially, there were the total effects from service quality (High: β = .47 and Low: β = .52) and destination image High: β = .37 and Low: β = .45) to satisfaction. Furthermore, there were the total effects destination image (High: β = .48 and Low: β = .48) and satisfaction (High: β = .65 and Low: β = .55) to behavioral intention.

Table 3 The path analysis result of the models among runners with high and low involvement.

Consequences	R^2	Influence	Antecedents		
			Satisfaction	Service Quality	Destination Image
Satisfaction	.40	DE		High .47**(.11) Low .52**(.09)	High .41**(.10) Low .41**(.12)
		IE			
		TE		High .47** (.11) Low .52** (.09)	High .41** (.10) Low .41** (.12)

Consequences	R^2	Influence	Antecedents		
			Satisfaction	Service Quality	Destination Image
Behavioral Intention	.55	DE	High .65** (.06) Low .55** (.08)		High .21** (.11) Low .25** (.11)
		IE		High .31** (.10) Low .29** (.07)	High .27**(.09) Low .22** (.08)
		TE	High .65** (.06) Low .55** (.08)	High .31** (.10) Low .29** (.07)	High .48** (.12) Low .48** (.13)

** p < .01, DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect, TE = Total Effect

Discussions

1) The result showed that service quality positively and significantly influenced satisfaction supporting hypothesis 1. Confirming this relationship is essential because it presents how an individual perceives the marathon events' performance whether the quality of service meets expectation. In accordance with Huang et al. (2018) who uncovered that all aspects of service quality were proved to have an effect on runner' satisfaction in marathon events, the similar findings were found in many studies (Xiao et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021). This study also proved that destination image positively and significantly influenced satisfaction supporting hypothesis 2. The result was consistent with the study in the tourism context since Song et al. (2013) and Allameh et al. (2015) found that destination image directly affects tourist satisfaction. Satisfaction might vary depending on various factors including consumer emotions, social interactions, and other experience–specific factors (i.e., destination image) (Chi & Qu, 2008). In order to respond to satisfaction, understanding the role of destination image for marathon events is required. Moreover, the result proved that destination image positively and significantly influenced behavioral intentions supporting hypothesis 5. This was consistent with previous

studies (Jin et al., 2013; Moon et al., 2013; Milovanovic et al., 2019), especially Ninomiya et al., (2019) who found the destination image of the Kyoto Marathon in Japan predicted participants' intention.

The result revealed that satisfaction importantly mediated the relationship between service quality and behavioral intention supporting hypothesis 3. The result complied with those of Xiao et al. (2020), where service quality factors of the 2016 Shanghai International Marathon indirectly related to foreign runners' behavior intention through the mediating effect of overall satisfaction. It is suggested that all these three factors including service quality, satisfaction and behavioral intention should be focused on when managing small–scale marathon events. Furthermore, satisfaction played a key role in mediating the relationship between destination image and behavioral intention supporting hypothesis 4. It implied that when runners of the small–scale marathon events perceived destination image positively and favorably, they were likely to have a positive behavioral intention for the future. Our findings were also supported by Koo et al. (2013) who indicated that satisfaction mediated the relationship between destination image and behavioral intention in a small–scale event aspect and by Wu and Liu's study (2017) which confirmed this relationship in the context of Taiwan road running events. Moreover, the result indicated that satisfaction positively and significantly influenced behavioral intention supporting hypothesis 6. This was consistent with previous studies concentrating on marathon events (Koo et al., 2014; Ninomiya et al., 2019; Xiao et al., 2019). Although runners might have various criteria measuring what they experienced while participating or after marathon events. The quality of marathon events and image of destination could satisfy them. Thus, they are more likely to spread recommendations to others and possibly participate in events again in the future.

2) Based on the result, service quality, destination image, and satisfaction were variables that should not be overlooked by the host of small–scale marathon events. It can be clarified that when planning and managing the events in order to remain participants' behavioral intention. Satisfaction was a powerful driving force of recommendation to others and re–participation because its influence coefficient was at 61%. Furthermore, the service quality provided by marathon events that runners participated in was the core products. Runners' satisfaction will appear if marathon events can serve all dimensions with high standard. Participation in the events required runners to travel to hosting cities, thus all attributes of destination affect runners' decisions. The cities need to attract runners as sport tourists and provide infrastructure and attraction in order to satisfy runners during trips and express

accurate behavioral intention afterward. Therefore, understanding these relationships would be advantageous for marathon event managers and future study.

3) The result showed no statistically significant difference between high and low involved runners on factors influencing behavioral Intention. This was in contrast to previous studies as Chen et al. (2018) pointed out that residents with high involvement level participated in the marathon reported a significantly higher positive impact perception and significantly lower negative impact perceptions compared to low involved residents consisting of spectators and non–participants, and as Celuch and Longfellow (1992) indicated that high involvement customers hold more favorable perceptions of bank attributes than low involvement customers. Similarly, Alexandris et al. (2017) found that the service quality of the international marathon event was more critical for the development of event loyalty among low than high involved runners. Involvement is widely used to segment individuals into high and low categories. The level of involvement is an important determinant in deciding how important a product (refers to marathon events) is for consumers and how much information they need to have before making a decision (Getz & Andersson, 2010). Based on previous literature, the findings of this study were particularly surprising. In order to explain the result, some possible reasons could be explained. The marathon events are generally held in different environments and areas, hence the past experience of the high involved runners might not be applied. Possibly, the high involved runners do not suddenly make the decision when they perceive the product (i.e., event quality) (Alexandris et al. 2017), but they take time to evaluate how satisfied or loyal they are that event which is the same process as low involved runners.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As examination of this research, satisfaction played an essential role in recommendation to others and retention that they are beneficial for small–scale marathon event managers to organize effectively. The events should provide service quality concentrating on all four dimensions including facility quality, interaction quality, information quality, and outcome quality because these can affect satisfaction directly and behavioral intention indirectly. According to the sport tourism aspect, runners are considered as tourists and they should perceive appreciation during trips. Thus, the cities hosting the events need to serve all dimensions of destination image consisting of safety, nature, culture, value,

convenience, climate, service, and urban to result in positive behavioral intention and to satisfy runners because destination image had an indirect influence behavioral intention by having satisfaction is the significant moderating role. Therefore, these factors should be focused on by small–scale marathon event managers when organizing the event in order to satisfy the behavioral intention of runners. Additionally, understanding expectations among runners with different levels of involvement is significant in order to meet their needs. The present study is advantageous for developing small–scale marathon events sustainably.

Limitations and Suggestion for future research

According to the present research investigation, there were few limitations should be addressed. Initially, data were collected from Thai runners participated in small–scale marathon events recurring in Bangkok and Perimeter. The finding may not be generalized with the other events, hence future research should collect data from the events in various regions. Furthermore, collecting data from foreign runners would be interesting for comparing results between national and international groups. Besides, although the current research studied the influences of service quality, destination image and satisfaction on the runners' behavioral intention, there are further variables consisting of perceived value and event image that have been proved to influence satisfaction and behavioral intention (Jin et al., 2013; Koo et al., 2014). They should be included in future research to be beneficial for development of small–scale marathon events. Moreover, this research classified runners into merely high and low involved runners. The Psychological Continuum Model (Funk & James, 2001) should be applied in future research to strengthen segmenting runners specifically. It could be useful for the event managers to understand runners' attitudes and behavior in each stage.

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