

**Sport Involvement, Event Prestige, and Intention to Attend Annual Spectator Events:
Moderating Effects of Gender and Past Experience**

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50-minute poster presentation

Increasing attendance is one of the most critical marketing objectives for sporting event organizers (Trail, Fink, & Anderson, 2003). Many studies have examined a range of factors influencing spectators' game attendance. These include spectators' motives (Kim & Chalip, 2004; Kim, Trail, & Magnusen, 2013; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James, & Gladden, 2002), satisfaction (Matsuoka, Chelladurai, & Harada, 2003; Yoshida & James, 2010), team identification (James & Trail, 2008; Kim et al., 2013; Theodorakis, Koustelios, Robinson, & Barlas, 2009), and service quality (Lambrecht, Kaefer, & Ramenofsky, 2009; Theodorakis et al., 2009; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996).

To a lesser extent, there were also studies examining the prestige of the sporting event as a source of influence in the decision to attend a sporting event. As such, it has been suggested that this source of influence has been underestimated in earlier studies and should be examined further (Kim, Liu, & Love, 2015). Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between sport involvement, event prestige, and attendance intention of annual sporting events. In addition, it examines the moderating effects of gender and past experience on the proposed model.

Sport event prestige refers to the status of an event which is consequent to its history, objectives, and pre-existing public image and prestige in the relevant sport (Kim et al., 2015). Event prestige mediates the relationship between sport involvement and sport participation intention (Bennett et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2015). Some scholars argued that event prestige can stimulate individuals' desire and intention to participate in a sporting event because they are likely to increase their sense of self-worth and self-esteem through their connection with a prestigious event (Bennett et al., 2007; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; Smidts et al., 2001). Accordingly, this study adopted the model of sport participation motivation proposed by Bennett et al. (2007) to examine the relationships between sport involvement, event prestige, and attendance intention for passive participation (i.e., spectators) of a sporting event.

In regard to event spectatorship, male spectators showed stronger connections with sports (James & Ridinger, 2002) while female spectators were less interested in the game, e.g. the performance of the athletes (Greenwell, Fink, & Pastore, 2002). Also, consumers without prior experience have fewer cues to evaluate quality when compared to experienced consumers (Ryu & Han, 2011). Specific to sporting events, prior experience of attending an event might lead to familiarity with the event, and this formed familiarity might enhance an individual's preference for future attendance (Taks, Chalip, Green, Kesenne, & Martyn, 2009). More recently, Chiappa, Tinaz, and Turco (2014) demonstrated that visitors' perceptions, experiences, and satisfaction of a motorsport event vary according to whether they have attended the event previously. Hence, the following hypotheses were proposed.

- H1: Sport involvement will positively influence event prestige.
- H2: Sport involvement will positively influence attendance intention.
- H3: Event prestige will positively influence attendance intention.
- H4: Gender will moderate the relationship between sport involvement, event prestige, and attendance intention.
- H5: Past experience will moderate the relationship between sport involvement, event prestige, and attendance intention.

Using an on-site survey, data were collected from spectators (N= 349) who attended the men's or women's basketball tournaments of the 2016 William Jones Cup held in Taiwan. Of the 349 respondents, the majority were male respondents (61.3%, n = 214) and aged between 21 to 30 years old (45.0%, n = 157). The survey instrument consists of four sections: perceived event prestige, sport involvement, attendance intention and demographic

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information, mainly adapted from Kim et al. (2015), Gwinner and Swanson (2003), and Kim, Trail and Ko (2011). Data were analyzed primarily using structural equation modeling techniques to investigate the relationship between studied variables and multi-group analyses to explore the moderating effects of gender and past experience.

The proposed research model fitted the data well: $\chi^2 (32) = 88.065$, $\chi^2/df = 2.752$, CFI = .980, NNFI = .972, RMSEA = .071 (Hair et al., 2010). It revealed that sport involvement has a significant influence on event prestige and attendance intention ($\beta \text{ INV} \rightarrow \text{PRE} = .314$, $t\text{-value} = .5.564$, $p < .01$; $\beta \text{ INV} \rightarrow \text{AI} = .191$, $t\text{-value} = 3.556$, $p < .01$), supporting H1, and H2. Moreover, event prestige has a significant impact on attendance intention ($\beta \text{ PRE} \rightarrow \text{AI} = .365$, $t\text{-value} = 6.443$, $p < .001$), supporting H3.

The results from multi-group analyses indicated that significant differences between male and female spectators were found on paths from sport involvement to event prestige ($\Delta\chi^2 (1) = -1.687$, $p < .10$) and from event prestige to attendance intention ($\Delta\chi^2 (1) = -1.767$, $p < .10$). Moreover, significant differences between first-time and experienced spectators were found on paths from sport involvement to attendance intention ($\Delta\chi^2 (1) = 1.982$, $p < .05$) and from event prestige to attendance intention ($\Delta\chi^2 (1) = -2.009$, $p < .05$). Accordingly, these results supported the difference between male and female spectators (H4) and between first-time and experienced spectators (H5).

The results show that event prestige partially mediated the relationship between sport involvement and attendance intention of sporting events. Moreover, moderating effects of gender and experience are found in the proposed model. Specifically, male spectators' involvement had a significantly stronger influence on event prestige, and in turn, their perception of event prestige played a more significant role in influencing attendance intention (Chen, 2010; Lagaert & Roose, 2016; Ridinger & Funk, 2006). Also, sport involvement was more important in predicting attendance intention for experienced spectators whereas the prestige of the event was more important for first-time spectators.

This study suggests that sport event organizers need to employ different strategies in developing the subsequent editions of the event and retaining fans' interest in the sport (McCartney, 2005). Specifically, event organizers need to enhance the prestige of the sporting event through effective marketing communication to attract first-time spectators to the event.