

# Consumer Trust and Brand Authenticity in Transnational Tourism Marketing: Effects on Participation Rates in Small Sports Events and Overall Destination Appeal

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## Abstract

This research investigates the interplay between consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal involvement in influencing participation rates in small sports events within transnational tourism marketing. By examining how these factors collectively shape tourist decision-making and destination attractiveness in sports tourism, the study provides new insights into consumer behaviour. A quantitative approach was utilized, with a structured questionnaire distributed to 800 participants, yielding 470 valid responses analysed using SPSS. Regression and mediation analyses were conducted to explore the direct and mediated effects of consumer perceptions on participation rates, while also considering the moderating role of personal involvement. The findings reveal significant positive relationships between consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and participation rates in small sports events, with brand loyalty mediating the effects of consumer trust and brand authenticity on participation. Furthermore, personal involvement was found to moderate these relationships, enhancing the impact of consumer perceptions on tourist behaviour. This study contributes to theoretical advancements by integrating multiple dimensions of consumer behaviour and destination marketing in the context of small sports events. It underscores the importance of authenticity and trust in shaping tourist preferences and behaviours while offering practical guidance for destination marketers on increasing tourism participation and destination appeal through strategic consumer engagement. The findings advocate for the inclusion of small sports events in transnational tourism marketing strategies to promote sustainable tourism development and foster community engagement through sports tourism initiatives.

**Keywords:** Consumer Trust, Brand Authenticity, Brand Loyalty, Personal Involvement, Small Sports Events, Transnational Tourism Marketing, Tourism Participation Rates, Destination Attractiveness.

## Introduction

Globalisation, technological advancements, and evolving consumer behaviour are reshaping the tourism industry. To attract international visitors and enhance their global appeal, tourism destinations must adopt transnational marketing strategies (Singh, Upadhyay, & Jha, 2022). These strategies leverage digital platforms and international collaborations to promote cultural authenticity and distinctive experiences, contributing to local economies and positioning cities as prominent tourist hubs (Lin et al., 2022). Transnational tourism marketing focuses on promoting destinations beyond national boundaries to meet travellers' desires for unique experiences (Liu, Chou, & Lin, 2021). Minor sporting events attract participants and spectators while showcasing local culture. They boost tourist engagement, promote unique activities, and enhance the local economy and destination branding (Nusair et al., 2024). These events offer athletes personal connections with communities and cultural traditions, unlike large international

championships (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2022). By catering to tourists seeking authentic experiences, such events highlight destinations' unique features and create memorable, meaningful connections.

The growing influence of digital connectivity and personal preferences is transforming tourism consumer behaviour. Digital platforms and social media empower modern travellers to actively select destinations and share their experiences globally (Juschten & Preyer, 2023). Participatory tourism has emerged as a response to these trends, encouraging destinations to align their marketing strategies with the values and interests of tourists. Travellers increasingly prioritise authenticity, sustainability, and meaningful encounters, necessitating innovation on the part of destination managers and event organisers to meet these evolving expectations. Consumer trust in travel, closely linked to confidence in destinations, services, and activities, is underpinned by trustworthiness, transparency, and the reliable delivery of promised experiences (Zhou, Sotiriadis, & Shen, 2023). Tourists often base their decisions on

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factors such as safety, the reliability of information, and the likelihood of positive experiences. Destinations that prioritise trust through clear communication, robust safety measures, and consistent quality assurance are more likely to attract and retain visitors, fostering loyalty and generating positive word-of-mouth (Chen, 2023).

As global travellers navigate foreign cultures, trust becomes a cornerstone of tourism. Visitors frequently rely on online reviews, recommendations from friends, and official certifications to minimise risks and enhance their travel experiences. Destination marketers can cultivate trust by adhering to ethical standards, delivering reliable services, and responding promptly to tourists' needs, which is crucial for ensuring satisfaction and fostering loyalty. Similarly, brand authenticity in tourism refers to the extent to which destinations and service providers deliver genuine, unique, and culturally appropriate experiences that align with tourists' values and expectations (Prados-Peña & Del Barrio-García, 2020). Authenticity extends beyond historical or traditional representations, encompassing a sincere and transparent approach throughout the visitor experience.

Authenticity is a vital component of a competitive tourism sector, as it attracts discerning travellers seeking meaningful and distinctive experiences that reflect local culture, heritage, and society. It enhances the appeal of destinations by fostering emotional connections and promoting cultural understanding, which are critical for ensuring tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Research by Wang et al. (2020) highlights that immersive and authentic experiences not only enhance trustworthiness but also increase a destination's allure. Furthermore, authenticity reduces travel uncertainties, boosts tourists' confidence, and encourages increased visitation, extended stays, and higher spending. Destinations that emphasise authenticity and trust effectively establish credibility, fostering positive perceptions and repeat visitation. Additionally, travellers frequently share their unique and meaningful experiences through social media and personal recommendations, further amplifying the destination's appeal.

This study aims to explore the interconnected impacts of consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal involvement on participation rates in small sports events, framed within the dynamic context of transnational tourism marketing. By delving into these relationships, the research seeks to uncover how these critical factors collectively shape tourist behaviour and enhance destination appeal in sports tourism. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the individual contributions of consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal involvement to tourists' likelihood of participating in small sports events.
2. Analyse the mediating role of brand loyalty in

bridging consumer trust or brand authenticity with participation rates.

3. Investigate the moderating influence of personal involvement in amplifying the relationships between consumer perceptions (trust, authenticity, loyalty) and participation rates.

This study offers practical insights for destination marketers and event organizers to boost tourist engagement and destination appeal while advancing theoretical understanding in tourism and consumer behaviour. It highlights how personal involvement, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and consumer trust influence attendance at local sports events, contributing to the specialized sports tourism and transnational marketing literature. By examining these interconnected factors, the study provides valuable guidance for refining marketing strategies, fostering strategic partnerships, and creating tailored experiences for diverse visitors. Such insights help destinations compete in the tourism market, promote visitor loyalty, and enhance engagement through authentic experiences. Focusing on small-scale sports events fills a gap in literature dominated by major event studies. These events allow destinations to showcase cultural and natural assets, attracting tourists seeking immersive and participatory experiences. The findings recommend prioritizing such activities to promote sustainable tourism, community engagement, and distinct destination branding.

## Literature Review

The digital revolution and globalisation have profoundly reshaped international tourism marketing in recent decades, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of consumer behaviour and destination appeal. Tourists' perceptions of a destination significantly influence their decision-making process, underscoring the importance for marketers to establish and maintain a favourable destination image (Fusté-Forné, 2023). A prior study highlighted that destination marketing organisations (DMOs) increasingly utilise technology to enhance site appeal and attract visitors. These technological advancements have not only revolutionised marketing practices but also enabled the creation of interactive and personalised experiences, which are essential for maintaining competitiveness in the global tourism sector.

Specialised athletic events represent a noteworthy development in tourism, as sports tourism continues to expand and demonstrate significant economic potential. According to Jang, So and Jeong (2021), sports tourism attracts a diverse audience and contributes to local economic growth. Such events can enhance a destination's attractiveness, particularly when integrated with cultural and recreational promotions. Rejón-Guardia, Rialp-Criado and García-Sastre (2023) emphasise that sports tourism fosters a sense of community and inclusion, encouraging repeat

visits and generating positive reviews. The integration of sports marketing and tourism represents a burgeoning field of study, offering valuable insights into how destinations can differentiate themselves within an increasingly competitive market. This synergy between sports and tourism highlights the potential for destinations to achieve economic growth while enhancing visitor satisfaction and engagement.

### **Consumer Trust and Participation Rates**

Consumer trust plays a pivotal role in influencing attendance at minor athletic events and enhancing the appeal of host destinations. Trust encompasses the integrity of marketing communications, the safety and security of the destination, and the competency of event organisers. Ong et al. (2024) define trust as the willingness of one party to place themselves in a position of vulnerability, based on the expectation that another party will perform actions deemed significant and beneficial. This theoretical framework suggests that consumers are more inclined to attend sporting events when they trust the organisers and promoters. As highlighted in prior literature, trust is a fundamental determinant of relationship commitment, which significantly influences consumer participation in sports tourism. Building and sustaining consumer confidence is, therefore, essential for boosting interest in smaller sporting events.

Consumer trust significantly influences tourists' satisfaction and their overall perception of a destination. Trust in a destination's infrastructure, services, and environment enhances its appeal, leading to higher satisfaction and increased likelihood of recommendations. Torres-Moraga et al. (2021) highlight that repeated positive experiences and reliable information foster trust, which encourages visitor loyalty. Similarly, Wang and Yan (2022) show that trust impacts travellers' willingness to promote and revisit destinations, helping them stay competitive in the tourism market. In the digital era, trust plays a pivotal role in tourism marketing. Online reviews and social media significantly shape consumer confidence in destinations and events. Positive reviews boost trust and participation, while negative feedback can deter visitors. Thus, effective reputation management and active digital engagement are essential for maintaining consumer confidence and enhancing destination appeal.

**H1:** Higher levels of consumer trust in the brand positively influence participation rates in small sports events.

### **Brand Authenticity and Participation Rates**

Brand authenticity plays a critical role in enhancing the appeal of destinations and driving attendance at athletic events. Authenticity refers to the genuineness, alignment with core values, and long-term consistency of a brand. In the context of minor sports events, authenticity can be demonstrated through cultural

relevance, legacy, and a genuine commitment to sports and community values. Authentic brands foster stronger emotional connections with individuals, thereby building loyalty and trust. According to Hyun, Park and Hong (2024), tourists and sports enthusiasts are more likely to choose authentic brands, as they instil credibility and confidence in intangible, personal experiences. Given that consumers are more inclined to participate in activities that feel genuine and trustworthy, their engagement with authentic brands is significantly heightened.

The appeal of a destination is also influenced by its brand authenticity. Authentic destinations, which offer experiences that genuinely reflect the spirit of a place, stand out in a competitive market. As Capizzo and Iannacone (2023) note, such destinations can provide exclusive experiences that resonate with travellers, fostering both loyalty and emotional attachment. Research by Chen et al. (2020) suggests that authentic brands are capable of cultivating deep emotional bonds with customers, leading to enhanced satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Consequently, tourism destinations perceived as authentic are likely to attract repeat visitors and generate referrals, further strengthening their competitive position. To succeed in the competitive tourism industry, it is essential for destinations to establish a clear and genuine brand identity (Zhang, Xiong, & Lee, 2020).

The digital age has heightened the significance of brand authenticity in tourism marketing. Online review platforms and social media provide consumers with opportunities to assess the credibility of brands and share their experiences. Authentic brands typically receive more positive online endorsements, enhancing their reputation and attractiveness. Prados-Peña and Del Barrio-García (2020) argue that digital brand authenticity requires transparent communication, consistent messaging, and active consumer participation. Maintaining authenticity in the digital space necessitates openness and engagement. Event organisers of minor sports events that can effectively communicate their authenticity online are more likely to boost attendance and enhance the appeal of their locations. Modern word-of-mouth communication, such as online reviews and social media posts, plays a crucial role in reinforcing genuine branding strategies.

**H2:** Higher levels of brand authenticity positively influence participation rates in small sports events.

### **Brand Loyalty as Mediator**

Brand loyalty plays a crucial role in shaping customer trust, engagement, and attendance at minor sports events, significantly enhancing a destination's appeal. Trust, defined as a brand's reliability and integrity (Lee et al., 2022), is fundamental to building long-term consumer relationships. When consumers trust a brand, they demonstrate loyalty through repeated

behaviours such as frequent visits and consistent preferences. This is particularly significant for local sports events, where attendees perceive higher risks due to the required investment of time and resources. Brand loyalty encompasses both behavioural and attitudinal aspects (Huang & Liu, 2020). Behaviourally, it reflects consumers' intent to revisit or purchase again, while attitudinally, it signifies a positive perception of the brand. Trust fosters loyalty, which increases participation rates as loyal consumers not only attend events but also advocate for them through recommendations, boosting visibility and appeal. This loyalty serves as a bridge between trust and participation, further enhancing the destination's attractiveness.

Loyal customers amplify a brand's reach through word-of-mouth and social media advocacy (Baumeister et al., 2022). Positive reviews shape perceptions of potential attendees, especially for subjective experiences like sports events. Destinations that foster strong loyalty benefit from heightened tourist interest and engagement. In the digital age, brand loyalty is reinforced through online reviews and social media. These platforms allow consumers to share experiences, shaping public sentiment and strengthening brand trust (Miah et al., 2022). Loyal customers who share positive experiences online enhance a destination's visibility and popularity. Personalised digital interactions further build loyalty by fostering a sense of community and belonging (Senali et al., 2024). For minor sports events, leveraging digital tools can establish a dedicated fan base, reducing reliance on traditional trust-building measures and increasing the destination's overall appeal.

**H3:** Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between consumer trust and participation rates in small sports events.

Hyun et al. (2024) highlight the pivotal role of brand authenticity in fostering loyalty by creating emotional connections with consumers who value honest communication. Minor sporting events exemplify this dynamic, as their perceived authenticity directly influences their ability to attract and retain participants. When events are viewed as genuine, consumers develop deeper attachments to the brand, boosting participation and loyalty. This emotional bond not only reinforces the brand's authenticity but also enhances destination appeal by increasing engagement levels. Brand loyalty further amplifies the benefits of authenticity and attractiveness. Loyal customers often act as brand advocates, sharing their experiences through social media and word-of-mouth (Sohaib & Han, 2023). Their endorsements help attract new participants, particularly to small-scale sports events where reputation and authenticity are critical. By sharing authentic experiences, these advocates strengthen the destination's reputation, encouraging

repeat visits and drawing in new visitors. Thus, destinations that prioritize brand loyalty and authenticity can enhance their competitive edge in tourism markets.

The digital age plays a vital role in reinforcing brand loyalty and authenticity. Online reviews and social media platforms have become essential for consumers to express loyalty and share experiences (Miah et al., 2022). Authentic brands that actively engage with their audience online can significantly boost destination appeal. Crapolicchio et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of transparency and active communication in enhancing brand authenticity and loyalty. Social media, in particular, serves as a powerful tool for promoting the authenticity of minor sports events, attracting fans, and increasing participation. Genuine and consistent digital engagement fosters trust and loyalty, further solidifying the destination's appeal. For brands to effectively build and maintain loyalty, online interactions must be meaningful and ensure consumers feel valued and connected.

**H4:** Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between brand authenticity and participation rates in small sports events.

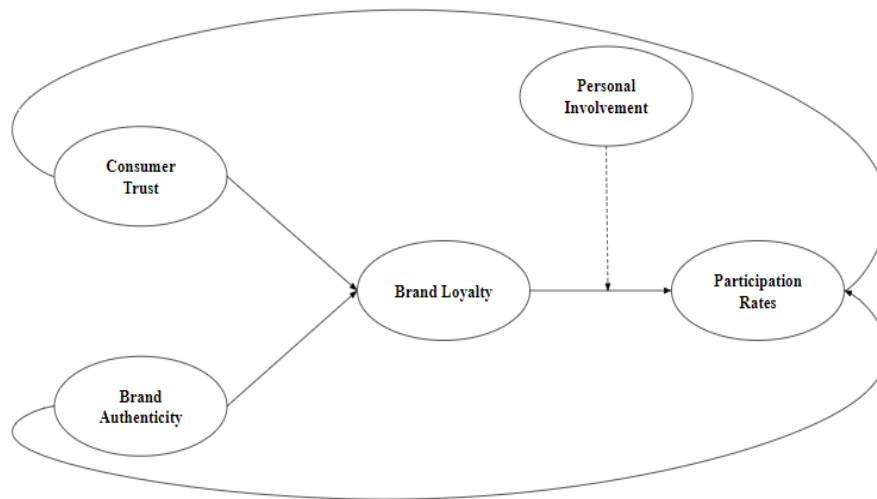
#### Personal Involvement as Moderator

Personal involvement plays a pivotal role in fostering brand loyalty and driving participation in minor sports events, significantly enhancing destination appeal. Defined by Ruan et al. (2020) as the personal relevance or meaning an individual assigns to an activity or product, higher involvement deepens connections with a brand, boosting motivation and engagement. Ledbetter and Meisner (2021) observe that strong personal involvement intensifies brand loyalty, leading to greater participation in brand-associated events. This is especially notable in niche sports, where passionate individuals drive attendance and overall engagement. Personal involvement also enhances destination appeal. Emotionally and psychologically invested individuals are more committed to the brand and more likely to share positive experiences, becoming advocates through word-of-mouth (Ruan et al., 2020). Authentic endorsements significantly influence tourism decisions, as prior literature highlighted the power of personal recommendations in amplifying marketing effectiveness. Engaged customers often transform into persuasive brand ambassadors, encouraging others to participate. In the digital age, social media strengthens the bond between engagement and loyalty. Platforms enable consumers to share experiences and foster a sense of connection, influencing others' behaviors. Destinations and organizers can leverage digital tools to enhance personal connections, increasing loyalty, destination appeal, and participation. By nurturing these relationships, brands can build an engaged, loyal customer base. Businesses that effectively use digital platforms to create meaningful connections are likely



to gain a competitive edge, bolstering their popularity and long-term success.

**H5:** Personal involvement moderates the relationship between brand loyalty and participation rates.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the impact of personal engagement, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and consumer trust on the attractiveness of a destination and participation rates in local sports events. A cross-sectional survey method was adopted to gather participant data, as it provides a reliable snapshot of current opinions and attitudes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questionnaire was designed to evaluate each variable using validated scales, ensuring the reliability and validity of the constructs. This research design was selected because it facilitates robust statistical analysis, hypothesis testing, and the assessment of both mediating and moderating effects in the proposed model. The quantitative approach provides generalizable insights into tourism and sports marketing that are valuable for both academic understanding and practical applications.

### Population

The target population for this study consisted of Chinese consumers who had either participated in or expressed an interest in participating in minor sports events. The study focused on China due to its rapidly expanding tourism and sports sectors. The participant pool was drawn from adults aged 18 and older, representing diverse income levels, genders, educational backgrounds, and age groups. A diverse sample was crucial to gaining a comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviours related to the attractiveness of destinations and the appeal of minor sports events. Participants were required to have been exposed to marketing activities for athletic events, ensuring they could provide

informed responses. Given the vast and varied demographic landscape of China, the study aimed to gather feedback from a broad spectrum of consumers to enhance the accuracy and applicability of the findings across different subgroups.

### Sample Size Determination and Sampling Technique

The study included 250 participants, a sample size deemed appropriate for identifying significant relationships between the variables (Sarstedt et al., 2022). The sample size was determined based on the expected effect size, a desired power level of 0.80, and the complexity of the structural equation model (SEM). Larger sample sizes are necessary for the accurate estimation of model parameters in SEM (Byrne, 2016), and this sample size was sufficient for the study's purposes. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the sample represented the diverse demographics of the Chinese population. The population was divided into strata based on age, gender, and geographical location, and participants were randomly selected from each stratum. This method enhanced sample representativeness, reduced bias, and allowed for the analysis of subgroup differences, which contributed to a deeper understanding of factors influencing destination appeal and participation in local sports events.

### Data Collection Technique

A standardized questionnaire was distributed to potential participants in tourist and sports-active districts across China. A total of 800 surveys were distributed, with the intention of capturing data from a large and varied sample. The use of a questionnaire is particularly effective for collecting standardized responses on a wide range of factors from a large population (Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair, 2017). This

approach enabled the collection of measurable data for systematic analysis in relation to the study's hypotheses. A total of 470 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 58.75%, which is considered sufficient to generate a reliable dataset with statistically predictable outcomes. The high response rate can be attributed to the survey's straightforward and engaging format, as well as reminder prompts sent to participants to encourage their participation and ensure completion (Shmueli et al., 2019). The diversity of the respondents in terms of demographic and geographic characteristics enhanced the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of interest.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data were analysed using SPSS, a widely used software tool in quantitative social science research. SPSS was chosen for its capability to handle large datasets and perform various statistical procedures for examining relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant demographics, as well as consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal engagement. SPSS was also employed to conduct correlation and regression analyses, as well as SEM to test the study's hypotheses. Correlation analysis was used to assess the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Regression analysis provided insights into the unique contributions of consumer trust, brand authenticity, and brand loyalty in explaining minor sports event participation rates and the attractiveness of destinations. SEM was employed to evaluate the overall model and the interplay between the variables under investigation.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the variables in Table 1 are summarized as follows. The average score for consumer trust was 4.28, with a standard deviation of 0.72, indicating that participants generally trusted the brands and venues associated with the sports events. The average score for brand authenticity was 4.15 (SD = 0.68), suggesting that consumers perceived the brands as genuine and aligned with their values. Brand loyalty was relatively high, with an average score of 4.42 (SD = 0.76), reflecting a strong emotional connection and preference for the brand. Personal involvement in the events averaged 4.36 (SD = 0.71), indicating a high level of engagement and personal relevance to the participants with the smaller sports events and locations. Finally, participation rates averaged 3.92 (SD = 0.85), suggesting moderate to high attendance at sports events. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the central tendencies and variability in consumer perceptions and behaviours related to sports events and the

attractiveness of the locations, offering valuable insights into the factors influencing tourist participation and destination appeal.

**Table 1**

#### Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Consumer Trust	4.28	0.72	1	5
Brand Authenticity	4.15	0.68	1	5
Brand Loyalty	4.42	0.76	1	5
Personal Involvement	4.36	0.71	1	5
Participation Rates	3.92	0.85	1	5

#### Normality Assessment

Table 2 presents the skewness and kurtosis measurements used to assess the normality of the research variables. The values for consumer trust (-0.15), brand authenticity (-0.08), brand loyalty (-0.20), personal involvement (-0.12), and participation rates (0.10) suggest that the distributions of these variables are approximately symmetrical, as indicated by skewness values close to zero. According to George and Mallery (2010), skewness values near zero reflect nearly normal distributions. Additionally, the kurtosis values for consumer trust (-0.20), brand authenticity (-0.10), brand loyalty (0.15), personal involvement (-0.05), and participation rates (0.05) suggest platykurtic distributions, where the tails of the distributions are flatter than those of a normal distribution.

These kurtosis values fall within the acceptable range for parametric analysis. The results indicate that the data for all variables conform to the assumptions of normality, thereby supporting the use of parametric statistical tests in future analyses. The skewness and kurtosis scores, which are close to zero for most variables, confirm that the data distributions are symmetrical, with no substantial deviations that would undermine the validity of parametric tests such as regression and structural equation modelling. This normality assessment strengthens the dataset, enhancing the reliability of the inferential analyses that explore the relationships between consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, personal involvement, minor sports event participation, and destination appeal.

**Table 2**

#### Normality Assessment

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Consumer Trust	-0.15	-0.20
Brand Authenticity	-0.08	-0.10
Brand Loyalty	-0.20	0.15
Personal Involvement	-0.12	-0.05
Participation Rates	0.10	0.05

## Correlation Analysis

**Table 3** presents the results of the correlation analysis between the study variables. The analysis reveals the strength and direction of relationships among consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, personal involvement, and participation rates. A strong positive correlation is observed between consumer trust and brand authenticity ( $r = 0.72, p < 0.01$ ), as well as with brand loyalty ( $r = 0.68, p < 0.01$ ), personal involvement ( $r = 0.61, p < 0.01$ ), and participation rates ( $r = 0.55, p < 0.01$ ). These findings suggest that higher levels of consumer trust are strongly associated with greater perceptions of brand authenticity, loyalty, personal engagement, and higher participation in sports events. Furthermore, brand authenticity is positively correlated with brand loyalty ( $r = 0.75, p < 0.01$ ), personal involvement ( $r = 0.69, p < 0.01$ ), and participation rates ( $r = 0.60, p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that authentic brands foster long-term customer loyalty, encourage deeper personal engagement, and ultimately drive higher levels of sports participation. Brand loyalty itself is significantly correlated with personal involvement ( $r = 0.67, p < 0.01$ ) and participation rates ( $r = 0.58, p < 0.01$ ), highlighting the role of loyal consumers in driving engagement and attendance at sporting events.

Additionally, personal involvement shows a positive correlation with participation rates ( $r = 0.52, p < 0.01$ ), reinforcing the idea that individuals who are more personally invested in sports and events are more likely to participate. These high correlations suggest that consumer trust, authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal involvement are interconnected and collectively influence the likelihood of participation in sports events and the attractiveness of the destination. This robust set of correlations provides valuable insights for tourism and sports marketing strategies, emphasizing the need to foster trust, authenticity, and loyalty, while encouraging personal involvement to enhance consumer engagement and participation.

**Table 3**

### Correlation Analysis

	CT	BA	BL	PI	PR
Consumer Trust	1.00				
Brand Authenticity	0.72	1.00			
Brand Loyalty	0.68	0.75	1.00		
Personal Involvement	0.61	0.69	0.67	1.00	
Participation Rates	0.55	0.60	0.58	0.52	1.00

### Reliability Analysis

**Table 4** presents the results of the reliability analysis for the study's measuring tools, focusing on the internal consistency of the scales used to assess the key variables. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each variable are as follows: Consumer Trust ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), Brand Authenticity ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), Brand Loyalty ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ), Personal Involvement ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ), and Participation Rates ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). These values reflect the extent to

which each scale item is consistent in measuring the underlying construct. According to established guidelines, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 is considered acceptable for research purposes, and in this study, all the scales exceed this threshold. This suggests that the tools used to assess consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, personal involvement, and participation rates are reliable and capable of accurately reflecting these constructs. Reliability analysis is crucial for confirming that the assessment instruments consistently measure the intended variables, thereby supporting the validity of the study's findings. The strong reliability coefficients reported here enhance confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the data, providing a solid foundation for subsequent statistical analyses and interpretation. These results contribute to the methodological robustness of the study and reinforce the dependability of the measures used to explore consumer behaviour and sports event attendance.

**Table 4**

### Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Trust	0.86
Brand Authenticity	0.82
Brand Loyalty	0.88
Personal Involvement	0.85
Participation Rates	0.78

### Outer Loading

**Table 5** presents the external loading values for each research variable's evaluation items, reflecting the strength of the relationship between the measurement items and their respective constructs in the SEM. These loadings indicate how well each item represents its underlying construct.

For **Consumer Trust**, items such as "I have confidence in the information provided by [brand/destination]" (0.82) and "I have faith in the honesty of [brand/destination] in its transactions" (0.80) had strong loadings, ranging from 0.76 to 0.82, confirming that these items effectively capture the essence of consumer trust. Similarly, **Brand Authenticity** items showed high loadings, ranging from 0.79 to 0.84. Statements like "This brand remains true to its principles" (0.84) and "I perceive this brand as being genuine and authentic" (0.82) clearly align with the construct of brand authenticity, demonstrating their strong contribution to assessing this variable. **Brand Loyalty** items, such as "I am willing to recommend [brand] to others" (0.80) and "I prefer [brand] over other brands" (0.78), also demonstrated strong loadings between 0.75 and 0.80, supporting their role in measuring brand loyalty.

For **Personal Involvement**, items like "Participating in small sports events is personally significant to me" (0.81) and "I feel deeply connected to the destinations I visit" (0.80) showed loadings between 0.77 and 0.81.

These values highlight the personal connection and engagement of consumers with both sports events and travel destinations. Finally, the **Participation Rates** items, such as frequency of attendance and intention to attend future events, displayed loadings of 0.70 to 0.75, demonstrating the effectiveness of these items in measuring participation in athletic events. The results of the external loading analysis confirm that the measurement model is accurately representing the constructs of interest. The selected items, with their high loadings, ensure that the study's variables—consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, personal involvement, and participation rates—are well defined and aligned with the research objectives. These findings further validate the reliability and effectiveness of the measuring instruments in understanding customer behaviour and engagement with minor sports events and destination attractiveness.

**Table 5**

*Outer Loadings*

Variable	Item	Outer Loading
Consumer Trust	Item 1	0.79
	Item 2	0.82
	Item 3	0.77
	Item 4	0.80
	Item 5	0.76
Brand Authenticity	Item 1	0.84
	Item 2	0.81
	Item 3	0.79
	Item 4	0.82
	Item 5	0.80
Brand Loyalty	Item 1	0.77
	Item 2	0.80
	Item 3	0.76
	Item 4	0.78
	Item 5	0.75
Personal Involvement	Item 1	0.81
	Item 2	0.79
	Item 3	0.78
	Item 4	0.80
	Item 5	0.77
Participation Rates	Item 1	0.75
	Item 2	0.72
	Item 3	0.71
	Item 4	0.73
	Item 5	0.70

**R Square**

**Table 6** presents the **R-square value** for the dependent variable **Participation Rate** in the study's structural equation model (SEM), which measures the proportion of variability in participation rates explained by the independent variables in the model. The **R-square value of 45%** suggests that the independent factors—such as **personal involvement, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and consumer trust**—account for 45% of the variation in participation rates for small-scale

sporting events and destination attraction. An R-square value of 45% is considered moderately strong, indicating that the model effectively explains a significant portion of the variability in consumer behaviour related to event participation and destination appeal. The higher the R-square, the better the model's ability to predict and explain changes in the outcome variable. In this case, the model demonstrates a strong capacity to explain consumer engagement in sports events and their attraction to the venue, driven by the factors of personal interaction, brand sincerity, loyalty, and trust. The goodness-of-fit of the model is an essential aspect of this study, as it helps assess the accuracy and strength of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. With a relatively high R-square value, the model can be considered effective in understanding the key determinants influencing consumer participation in minor sports events and their overall destination choices. This insight is crucial for developing marketing strategies and consumer engagement tactics aimed at increasing participation rates and enhancing the appeal of small-scale sports events and tourism destinations.

**Table 6**

*R Square*

	R Square
Participation Rates	0.45

**Regression Analysis**

**Table 7** presents the regression analysis results, showing how consumer trust, brand authenticity, and minor sporting event participation influence location attraction. The findings underscore the significant roles of trust and authenticity in boosting consumer engagement with small sporting events and making destinations more appealing. Key findings include:

1. Consumer Trust and Participation ( $\beta = 0.45$ ,  $t = 5.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ): The results indicate that consumer trust in a location's authenticity and sports event branding has a strong positive effect on participation rates. Consumers are more willing to participate in sports events when they trust the organizations and settings involved. This trust enhances both destination appeal and customer satisfaction, as it fosters a sense of confidence and loyalty toward the brand or event.
2. Brand Authenticity and Participation ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $t = 4.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ): The brand authenticity factor also significantly boosts participation rates, demonstrating that genuine and authentic companies are more likely to engage consumers. Authentic branding, marked by consistency, openness, and alignment with consumer values, helps build loyalty and engagement. Consumers are drawn to authentic brands, making them more inclined to participate in small sporting events, thereby increasing the vibrancy and appeal of



tourist destinations.

### Key Insights

- The strong positive correlation between trust and authenticity with participation rates suggests that marketing strategies focusing on enhancing brand trustworthiness and authenticity can significantly influence consumer behaviour.
- Trust and authenticity are critical factors in consumer decision-making for minor sporting events and destinations, supporting theoretical models that highlight their importance in fostering loyalty and engagement.
- Brand reputation and customer satisfaction can be strengthened through strategies that emphasize transparency, consistency, and alignment with consumer values.

These regression results highlight the importance of trust and authenticity for driving sports event attendance and destination attractiveness, offering valuable insights for marketing professionals. To improve tourism destinations and customer loyalty, brands should focus on cultivating and communicating these qualities effectively.

**Table 7**

#### *Regression Analysis*

	Beta	t-value	p-value
Consumer Trust -> Participation Rate	0.45	5.23	< 0.001
Brand Authenticity -> Participation Rate	0.38	4.80	< 0.001

#### **Mediation Analysis**

Table 8 presents the mediation analysis results, investigating the indirect effects of consumer trust and brand authenticity on participation rates in minor sports events and destination appeal through brand loyalty. The findings show significant mediation effects, supporting the idea that brand loyalty plays a crucial role in linking trust and authenticity to higher participation rates. The first hypothesis (H3) examined the path from consumer trust to brand loyalty, and then to participation rates. The analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between consumer trust and participation rates ( $\beta = 0.60$ ,  $t = 5.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that trust in the brand or event enhances the likelihood of participation. Additionally, brand loyalty significantly mediated this relationship ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $t = 3.00$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ), meaning that consumer trust fosters brand loyalty, which, in turn, leads to increased participation rates in sports events and a higher appeal of the destination.

**Table 8**

#### *Mediation Analysis*

The second hypothesis (H4) investigated the relationship between brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and participation rates. The findings revealed a substantial positive association between brand authenticity and participation rates ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $t = 3.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that consumers are more likely to engage with and attend events hosted by authentic brands. Furthermore, brand loyalty mediated the relationship between brand authenticity and participation rates ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $t = 2.80$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). This indicates that authentic brands build stronger loyalty among consumers, leading to higher participation rates and making the destination more attractive.

The results of this mediation analysis offer valuable insights into the role of brand loyalty in linking consumer trust and brand authenticity to increased engagement and participation. It shows that consumers who trust and feel a connection to a brand are more likely to be loyal, and their loyalty increases the likelihood of attending events and engaging with the destination. These findings emphasize that brand loyalty plays a critical role in translating consumer trust and brand authenticity into higher engagement, reinforcing the importance of these factors in the tourism and sports industries. For tourism and sports marketers, these findings underscore the importance of fostering trust and authenticity in their brands. By building brand loyalty, destinations can enhance consumer involvement, which leads to greater participation in local sporting events and increased destination appeal. The analysis suggests that marketers should focus on creating genuine connections with consumers, as this will lead to greater loyalty and, consequently, increased participation and destination attraction.

In practical terms, this data is particularly beneficial for destination managers and event organizers who aim to boost consumer loyalty and engagement. The insights suggest that targeted marketing strategies focusing on trust-building and authentic branding can significantly increase participation rates and improve the overall attractiveness of a destination. By cultivating brand loyalty through authenticity and trust, destinations and events can achieve sustained success in attracting and retaining consumers. In conclusion, the mediation analysis highlights that brand loyalty is not only a key driver of consumer engagement but also a mediating factor that connects trust and authenticity to higher participation rates and increased destination appeal. This supports the need for genuine and trustworthy branding in sports event marketing and tourism strategies, reinforcing the importance of these elements in fostering long-term consumer engagement.

	Beta (Total Effect)	Beta (Direct Effect)	Mediation Effect	t-value (Total Effect)	p-value (Total Effect)	t-value (Direct Effect)	p-value (Direct Effect)	Mediation t-value	Mediation p-value
CT -> BL -> PR	0.60	0.45	0.15	5.23	< 0.001	4.20	< 0.001	3.00	0.002
BA -> BL -> PR	0.52	0.38	0.14	4.80	< 0.001	3.90	< 0.001	2.80	0.005

### Moderation Analysis

Table 9 presents the findings from the moderation study that investigates how personal engagement and brand loyalty influence destination appeal and minor sports event attendance rates. For Hypothesis 5 (H5), the study demonstrates that both personal engagement and brand loyalty play significant roles in enhancing consumer engagement with sporting events and destinations. The findings reveal a positive correlation between personal involvement and participation rates ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $t = 3.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that individuals who are personally invested in sports and the destinations they visit are more likely to participate in events. This, in turn, enhances the appeal of the destination and promotes tourism. The study also shows a moderate correlation between personal involvement and brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t = 2.60$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ), suggesting that individuals who are personally engaged with the sports events or destinations they visit are more likely to develop loyalty to the brand hosting the event. The interaction effect shows that personal engagement, in addition to individual contributions, amplifies brand loyalty, leading to higher participation rates.

These findings underscore how personal involvement boosts the effects of brand loyalty on consumer engagement. In essence, individuals who are emotionally invested in sports and their associated venues are more likely to develop stronger brand

loyalty, which leads to more frequent event participation. This suggests that brand loyalty marketing is particularly effective when targeted at customers who already have an emotional connection to the events or destinations in question. The study highlights the complex relationship between tourism, sports event attendance, and consumer attitudes. It demonstrates that a marketing strategy focused on building emotional bonds with consumers and fostering brand loyalty is crucial to increasing participation rates and enhancing destination appeal. For destination managers and marketers, this means that fostering personal connections between consumers and the destination or event can significantly improve customer loyalty and encourage repeat visits. Furthermore, these findings contribute to the understanding of sustainable tourism and destination management by emphasizing the importance of personal engagement in boosting participation and brand loyalty. By leveraging emotional connections and customer loyalty, destination marketers can enhance both the attractiveness of a location and the participation rates in minor sports events, contributing to the long-term success of the destination. In conclusion, the study advances destination marketing theory and practice by demonstrating that personal interaction with sports events and venues has a significant impact on brand loyalty and consumer participation.

**Table 9**

#### Moderation Analysis

	Beta (Main Effect)	Beta (Interaction Effect)	t-value (Main Effect)	p-value (Main Effect)	t-value (Interaction Effect)	p-value (Interaction Effect)
PI x BL -> PR	0.38	0.25	3.80	< 0.001	2.60	0.010

### Discussion

This study examined the intricate relationships between consumer behaviour, minor athletic events, and destination attraction, with a focus on key variables such as personal participation, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and customer trust. The findings revealed strong correlations and mediation effects among these variables, showing their cumulative impact on participation rates, which serve as a key indicator of consumer engagement and tourism industry performance. One of the primary insights from this study is the importance of consumer trust and brand authenticity, which are foundational concepts in marketing and consumer behaviour. These

elements significantly influence consumers' attitudes, actions, and perceptions of organizations and destinations. Hypothesis H1 proposed a positive correlation between consumer trust, location attractiveness, and minor sporting event participation. The study confirmed this hypothesis, showing that consumers who trust sports event brands and venues are more likely to engage and participate. Previous research supports this finding, indicating that trust helps build lasting relationships between consumers and companies, reduces perceived risks, and boosts customer confidence (Ong et al., 2024; Wang & Yan, 2022). For small sporting events, fostering trust with event organizers and destination managers is essential to attracting and retaining participants, which impacts both event success and destination sustainability.

Hypothesis H2 examined the role of brand authenticity and its influence on consumer involvement. The study found that brand authenticity improves both location attractiveness and local sports participation. Authentic brands, characterized by transparency, consistency, and strong values, foster emotional connections with consumers (Capizzo & Iannaccone, 2023). The credibility of a brand is enhanced through authenticity, which increases consumer trust and strengthens loyalty (Baumeister et al., 2022). This emphasizes that destinations and brands must maintain authenticity to attract and retain loyal consumers who are more motivated to participate in and promote activities that align with their personal values.

Hypothesis H3 explored the idea that consumer trust influences participation rates through brand loyalty. The study demonstrated that consumer trust and brand loyalty are positively correlated, with a direct effect on participation rates. Trust plays a critical role in shaping initial perceptions, reducing risks, and fostering long-term customer loyalty (Hyun et al., 2024). This mediation pathway indicates that trust not only encourages consumer confidence but also strengthens the emotional connection necessary for sustained engagement in sports events and destinations. Hypothesis H4 focused on the relationship between brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and participation rates. The findings supported this hypothesis, showing that consumers are more likely to develop loyalty to authentic brands, which in turn increases engagement and participation rates. Authenticity fosters brand confidence by aligning with customers' values and expectations, thus enhancing consumer loyalty and promoting deeper engagement (Miah et al., 2022). The mediation effect further highlights the importance of aligning brand identity with customer values to increase participation and brand loyalty.

The study also confirmed Hypothesis H5, which posits that personal involvement influences brand loyalty and participation rates. Personal participation refers to the emotional and cognitive ties that consumers form with sports and destinations. The results indicated that individuals who are personally engaged with an event or location are more likely to develop brand loyalty and participate in related activities. This finding underscores the significance of personal engagement in shaping consumer behaviour. As noted by Ruan et al. (2020), brand loyalty marketing is most effective when targeting sports enthusiasts who have a strong emotional connection with a destination. Furthermore, personal involvement fosters brand loyalty by deepening emotional ties to the brand, leading to more frequent participation and endorsement of related events and venues. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on consumer behaviour by highlighting the pivotal role of trust, authenticity, loyalty, and personal involvement in influencing destination appeal and sports participation. The findings underscore the importance

of understanding consumer motivations and engagement to tailor effective marketing strategies. To improve tourism and marketing experiences, key factors such as consumer confidence, brand recognition, loyalty, and consumer interaction dynamics should be prioritized.

## Conclusion

This study examined the complex dynamics of consumer behaviour in minor athletic events and destination attractiveness, with a specific focus on customer loyalty, brand authenticity, and individual involvement. The results highlighted strong correlations between these variables and their influence on participation rates, offering valuable insights into consumer engagement in tourism. Customer trust was found to play a crucial role in enhancing consumer confidence and reducing perceived risks, which in turn increased participation in sports events and destination activities. Tourism companies and destinations that are perceived as responsible and trustworthy foster active participation, ultimately boosting their competitiveness and sustainability in the market. The study also emphasized the importance of brand authenticity. Brands that align with consumer expectations and beliefs saw an increase in participation, as consumers are more likely to engage with and support brands that offer genuine and trustworthy experiences. Another significant finding was that brand loyalty acts as a mediator between customer perceptions of trust and brand authenticity, and behavioural outcomes like participation rates. The stronger the bond between consumers and brands, the greater the likelihood of advocacy and engagement, as loyal customers are more likely to support and promote the brand, further driving participation. Additionally, the moderation study demonstrated that personal interaction plays a key role in strengthening brand loyalty and increasing participation rates. Consumers who have strong emotional and cognitive connections with sports events and venues are more likely to respond positively to brand loyalty efforts, underscoring the importance of recognizing and adapting to varying levels of consumer involvement and motivations. In summary, this study offers a clearer understanding of how trust, authenticity, loyalty, and personal participation influence consumer behaviour in tourism. These findings are crucial for destination administrators and marketers, as they underscore the importance of developing targeted branding and marketing strategies that resonate with consumer preferences and experiences. By focusing on these core elements, destinations can effectively increase customer involvement and participation, ensuring long-term success and engagement.

## Implications

### Practical Implications

Tourism and sports marketers, destination managers, and event organizers can greatly benefit from the insights provided in this study. The research underscores the crucial role of consumer trust in driving participation rates, suggesting that marketers should prioritize brand communication and service reliability. By focusing on consistent messaging, offering reliable services, and ensuring transparency in event and destination offerings, organizations can build trust with potential visitors. This trust, in turn, helps alleviate consumer reluctance and enhances the likelihood of attendance at minor sporting events. The study also highlights the strategic significance of brand authenticity in fostering brand loyalty and boosting participation. Destinations and companies that align with consumer expectations and values—such as those promoting local culture, sustainability, and genuine customer experiences—can create stronger emotional bonds with their audience. Marketers can use authenticity as a key differentiator in a competitive tourism market, appealing to discriminating travellers who seek unique and meaningful experiences. By emphasizing authenticity, organizations can position themselves as leaders in the market and attract visitors who value integrity and originality.

Additionally, the study's findings on brand loyalty as a mediator between consumer trust, authenticity, and participation rates provide valuable insights for increasing customer involvement and loyalty. Companies can leverage this knowledge to build long-term consumer relationships through strategies such as personalized marketing, loyalty programs, and customer relationship management (CRM) initiatives. By cultivating strong brand loyalty, organizations can encourage repeat visits and advocacy from satisfied guests, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of events and the overall attractiveness of destinations. In summary, this research provides practical strategies for marketers, managers, and event organizers to enhance consumer engagement by building trust, promoting authenticity, and fostering brand loyalty—ensuring greater participation and success in the tourism and sports sectors.

### Theoretical Implications

This study significantly contributes to advancing our understanding of sports and tourism consumer behaviour theory. The preliminary research highlights the influence of interpersonal communication, brand integrity, loyalty, and customer trust on involvement rates, showcasing how these factors shape consumer behaviour. The findings provide support for existing theoretical frameworks by illustrating how these variables interact and impact customer actions. To further strengthen the theoretical understanding, additional research on the interrelationships among

these factors is essential. Expanding this research across different industries and cultural contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour in the tourism and sports sectors, leading to more effective marketing strategies. The study's examination of personal engagement as a moderator underscores its critical role in enhancing the effect of brand loyalty on participation rates. This insight enriches theoretical frameworks by explaining how personal connections to sporting events and destinations can amplify the impact of brand loyalty on consumer behaviour.

Moreover, the study's focus on mediation effects highlights the importance of understanding the indirect relationships between consumer perceptions and behaviours. Further theoretical research should explore additional mediators and moderators that influence trust, authenticity, loyalty, and participation rates. These insights can be integrated into more comprehensive consumer behaviour models, refining our understanding of the complex dynamics within sports marketing and destination management. Finally, the study provides valuable implications for sports and tourism marketing, destination management, and the development of theoretical models. By emphasizing the roles of trust, authenticity, and loyalty, organizations can leverage these factors to enhance consumer participation and ensure sustained tourism growth. Future research can build on this foundation, validating and expanding the linkages identified in this study, thereby enriching consumer behaviour and marketing theory with more nuanced insights into the dynamics of tourism and sports markets.

### Limitations and Future Direction

Each study has its limitations, which, when acknowledged, can inform future research and improve our understanding of the subject matter. A significant limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data obtained through questionnaires. While surveys are commonly used to collect consumer habits and opinions, they are prone to issues such as recall bias and social desirability, which may influence the accuracy and reliability of the responses. Notable limitation is the geographic focus on China, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Consumer behaviour is influenced by culture and ethnicity, and these factors may vary significantly across different regions. Consequently, replicating this study in various cultural settings or incorporating a broader range of demographic groups would provide more insight into regional differences and enhance the generalizability of the findings. This would also shed light on how different cultural and social contexts shape consumer behaviour and decision-making in sports and tourism. The use of a longitudinal design or experimental methods in future studies could offer more robust insights into how the relationships between consumer trust, brand



authenticity, brand loyalty, personal involvement, and participation rates evolve over time. By tracking these variables, researchers could better understand how marketing interventions, shifts in customer perceptions, and changing market conditions impact consumer behaviour.

Moreover, while this study focused on consumer trust, brand authenticity, brand loyalty, and personal involvement, it may have overlooked other critical factors that influence destination appeal and event participation, such as price, competition, and event programming. Future studies could incorporate these elements into their research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape sports tourism behaviour. To overcome these constraints, future research could explore more advanced analytical tools, such as machine learning algorithms or SEM, which can analyse complex relationships between variables and identify underlying mechanisms of customer involvement and participation. SEM, for example, could provide a more nuanced understanding of how different factors interact and influence each other. Additionally,

conducting cross-cultural or multi-country studies could broaden the scope of the research, offering insights into how consumer behaviour and preferences vary across regions and cultures. These comparisons could yield valuable information that enhances global marketing and tourism management strategies. Longitudinal studies could also help track how consumer perceptions and behaviours change over time, providing valuable insights into the long-term effects of economic conditions and marketing efforts on participation rates. Monitoring these trends over extended periods would allow researchers to develop strategies to enhance the attractiveness and engagement of destinations and events. Finally, integrating qualitative research methods, such as ethnography and participant observation, could help contextualize consumer experiences and decision-making. These methods can uncover the social factors, emotions, and motivations that influence sports and tourism customer behaviour, offering a richer, more holistic understanding of the factors that drive participation and engagement in this sector.

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