

# Serious Recreation and Environmental Awareness in Sport Tourism: Differences Between Active and Passive Tourists

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Article History	Abstract
<b>Original Research Article</b>	<p><i>This study aims to assess the importance of environmental awareness among sports tourists on their engagement with and intention to recommend an event, focusing on the degree of difference between active and passive tourist groups. The study uses quantitative methods to collect, process, and analyze data through SPSS and AMOS software. The results are striking: environmental awareness is the strongest determinant of whether tourists intend to engage with and recommend a sporting event, followed by emotional experience and destination image, with significant differences between these two tourist groups. This suggests that the future tourism segment will focus on serious recreation, combining physical and mental health enhancement with environmental awareness, cultural heritage preservation, and immersive experiential activities. By integrating environmental awareness into the sports tourism experience, destinations can enhance visitor satisfaction while supporting sustainable development goals. The research strengthens the literature on sustainability and environmental behavior through empirical evidence in responsible sports tourism from the perspective of both active and passive visitor groups.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Sports Tourism, Active Tourists, Passive Tourists, environmental consciousness, engagement.</p>
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on sports tourism have existed for a long time, but its concept has not been universally accepted and has undergone significant changes over time, driven by technological advancements, customer psychology, and behavior.

Gibson (1998) defines sports tourism as an individual escaping their daily environment to participate in sports-related activities. This study divided sports tourism into three basic groups: active sports tourism, where participants are the ones engaging in sports activities; event sports tourism, where tourists are spectators; and finally, nostalgic sports tourism, where tourists visit sports-related destinations such as stadiums or museums.

Hinch et al. (2016) emphasized the multidimensional nature of sports tourism across space and time. In this concept, the authors introduce a new approach based on the nature of the sporting activity (active or passive), the time frequency (once/periodically), and the spatial scale (local, regional, or

international). Subsequently, this approach based on the nature of the sporting activity was further explored in the research of Gammon and Robinson (2003). This research clarifies the main motivation for tourists' trips. If the main motivation for the trip is participation in sports, it is called "sport tourism," and conversely, if sports is a secondary activity and tourism is the main motivation, it is called "tourism sport." Higham (2005) proposed that sports tourism is a distinct and attractive tourism product whose nature is unpredictable because it is resistant to "diminished authenticity" when commercialized. This author argues that uncertainty of outcomes, athletic display, kinesthetic nature, and visceral nature are characteristics of sports that make this type of tourism exciting, emotionally engaging, enhance authentic experiences, and create lasting memories.

Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) focused on analyzing the relationship between destination and sporting event image, and the intentions and behavior of sports tourists. The

results showed that sporting events are an important factor in improving destination image, thereby promoting the intention to return. In addition, positive prior experiences regarding destination image also build genuine intentions and behaviors of tourists. The study proposed a synchronized strategy between sporting events and destinations to enhance the experience and maintain tourist loyalty.

Hallmann and Breuer (2010) collected data from active sports tourists and passive sports tourists at four marathons in Germany. The results showed that active sports tourists tended to closely associate physical, emotional, and organizational concepts with sporting events. Meanwhile, passive sports tourists were more interested in historical and social factors. Furthermore, the urban or rural environment of the event also differently influences the perception of the event's image among these two groups of tourists. From this, the study provides profound implications regarding the opportunities and challenges in marketing strategies for sporting events, specifically investing in enhancing emotional experiences, organizing interactive activities, building content about cultural and traditional values throughout the customer journey, and strengthening community connections. Hallmann and Breuer (2010) surveyed how tourists perceive an event through their real-life experiences at a marathon. The results showed differences in perception and loyalty between passive spectators and active participants in this competition. Recent studies on factors influencing sports tourism show the strong impact of environmental and community sustainability in surfing tourism (Ruttenberg et al., 2025), esports tourism (Cerqueira et al., 2025), and half-marathon tourism (Chutipongdech et al., 2025). These studies explored and measured the extent of influence of several factors on emotions, environmental awareness, infrastructure, and destination image in general on tourist behavior. However, the studies have not measured the different levels of influence due to regional cultural factors and the role of tourists in participating in sports. Therefore, this study reviews relevant studies on sports tourism by authors worldwide to provide an overview, thereby proposing and testing a general model suitable for the context of Vietnam in particular and other countries. Against a backdrop of generally similar national conditions, this survey of sports tourists visiting Da Nang focuses on assessing the differences between two groups of tourists: active sports tourists and passive sports tourists. The results will provide insights into the impacts on the tourism business environment, economy, and society, and the considerations shaping this sector.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cheung et al. (2023) reinforced empirical results before asserting that a cognitive-emotional foundation of a favorable Destination Image will trigger Tourist Engagement. This is built from the interaction between tourists and marketers. Alashiq et al. (2025) argue that eco-destination images promote tourist engagement. Based on these foundations, the following hypothesis is proposed for testing in the context of golf tourism.

H1: Destination image influences sport tourist Engagement

Immersive experiential spaces are different experiences of a destination that will enhance tourist engagement, thereby promoting long-term behavior (Zhou & Wang, 2024).

H2: Emotional Experience influences sport tourist Engagement

Paul & Roy (2025) argue that ecological awareness shapes environmentally friendly behavior, in which tourists voluntarily associate their values and behaviors (such as lobbying) with a specific destination. Alashiq & Aljuhmani (2025) empirically demonstrated that environmental knowledge and sustainability awareness shape social cohesion.

H3: Environmental consciousness influences sport tourist Engagement

Many studies have also examined this mechanism, starting from perception through the quality of the tourist experience, to emotions (attachment) to promote behaviors such as recommending to others, strongly supporting the destination through community participation, sharing information, posting positive comments... about the destination (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020; Hossain et al., 2022; Zhou & Y., 2022). Based on this logic, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Sport tourist engagement influences their destination recommendation intention

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

### Research sample

Domestic tourists in Da Nang City participated in this survey. The survey was conducted in person from May to June 2025. 488 tourists participated in this survey, however, only 422 responses were valid. Therefore, the study will use the data collected from these 422 responses for further analysis. The survey sample is described in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	280	66.4
	Female	142	33.6
Group	Active	183	43.4
	Passive	239	64.5
Age	Under 30	187	44.4
	From 30 to 45	198	46.8
	Over 45	37	8.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Income	Under 15 million	84	19.9
	15 - 30 million	302	71.6
	Over 30 million	36	8.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From the results in Table 1, it can be seen that 33.6% of women and 66.40% of men stated that men constituted the majority in the survey sample, of which 44.4% were under 30 years old; 46.8% were between 30-45 years old; and 8.8% were 45 years old and above. On the other hand, income levels below 15 million VND were 19.9%, from 15 million VND to 30 million VND (71.6%); and above 30 million VND (8.5%), similar in age and income levels.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Reliability Analysis of Scales

The survey results show that the Cronbach's Alpha values of the scales are good, ensuring standards such as the

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale  $> 0.7$  (Hair et al., 2019). According to Nunnally (1978) and Hair et al. (2019), the Cronbach's Alpha reliability of a good scale must be  $> 0.7$ . In addition, Hair et al. (2019) also added that the scale needs to ensure internal consistency - unidimensionality. Besides, the Corrected Item – Total Correlation coefficient of each observed variable in the scale is  $> 0.3$ . The higher this coefficient, the higher the quality of that observed variable (Cristobal et al., 2007). The results are shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: Summary of Internal Consistency Test**

Constructs	Before screening			After screening		
	Number of items	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha
Brand Image	5	.649 - .715	.871	5	.649 - .715	.871
Emotional Experience	5	.727- .762	.897	5	.727- .762	.897
Environmental consciousness	5	.252 - .816	.834	4	.731-.847	.905
Tourist engagement	5	.678 - .750	.882	4	.678 - .750	.882
Destination Recommendation Intention	7	.432- .738	.852	6	.579 - .731	.856

The next task in the scale refinement phase is to perform factor analysis to test the multidimensionality of the observed variable scale and further assess the reliability of the scale.

### 4.2 Factor Analysis

There are two basic different methods of factor analysis: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

The results show that each observed variable has the highest loading coefficient on a dominant factor, indicating that no problematic observed variable was found through EFA analysis. Therefore, the next step is to calculate CFA using the observed variables maintained from the total variable correlation assessment and EFA.

### 4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA aims to assess the factor structure of the entire scale and test the reliability and validity of the measurement

model through convergent and discriminant validity to ensure the unidimensionality of the multivariate concepts (Bollen 1989). CFA is performed according to Amos 24.

*Model Fit*

For the initial model, each item is limited by a loading coefficient assigned to it. Previously, with five factors

allowed to correlate freely. Several fit indices were used to examine the structure of the instrument (Kelloway, 1998). The indices used for the current study included X<sup>2</sup>, RMSEA, NFI, TLI, CFI, IFI, RMR, and GFI. As shown in [Table 3], the CFA analysis of 24 items produced a reasonable fit of the data to the model.

**Table 3 Fit Indexes for the Model**

Index	Value	Fit Indexes
X <sup>2</sup>	597.341(d.f.=219; p=.000)	Acceptable
RMSEA	.064	Acceptable
NFI	.901	Acceptable
GFI	.892	Acceptable
IFI	.935	Acceptable
TLI	.925	Acceptable
CFI	.935	Acceptable

The fit indices listed above indicate that the model fits the data quite well, the GFI value also shows an acceptable value (>.80), and the model meets many criteria, indicating its fit.

**Table 4 CFA results of the measurement model**

Constructs	items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Parameter estimate	T-value
Brand Image	5	.871	.872	.576	.694-.792	14.054-16.202
Emotional Experience	5	.897	.897	.636	.779-.813	17.663-18.345
Environmental consciousness	4	.905	.907	.711	.768-.918	20.361-24.464
Tourist engagement	4	.882	.849	.586	.717-.798	14.153-15.771
Destination Recommendation Intention	6	.856	.856	.544	.684-.775	12.490-14.165

As shown in Table 4, the results indicate that the items of each concept have high loading factors (0.50 or higher). Furthermore, each structural concept shows a satisfactory AVE level, exceeding the general level of 0.50, suggesting that each concept is a reliable measurement tool.

**Table 5: Model Validity Measures**

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	EE	BI	EC	INT	ENG
EE	.897	.636	.355	.898	.798				
BI	.872	.576	.330	.874	.574***	.759			
EC	.907	.711	.496	.921	.563***	.424***	.843		
INT	.856	.544	.317	.860	.461***	.456***	.512***	.738	
ENG	.849	.586	.496	.853	.596***	.466***	.704***	.563***	.765

Looking at Table 6, we see that all CRs are >.7, meaning the scales are all reliable. All AVEs are >.5, so they qualify for convergent validity, meaning > 50% of the variance of the observed variable is explained by the factor. A scale is

discriminant if the square root of its AVE (the values on the bold diagonal) is greater than any correlation with other scales (Fornell-Larker, 1981).

**4.4 Results of Model Fit and Hypothesis Testing**

**Path Analysis**

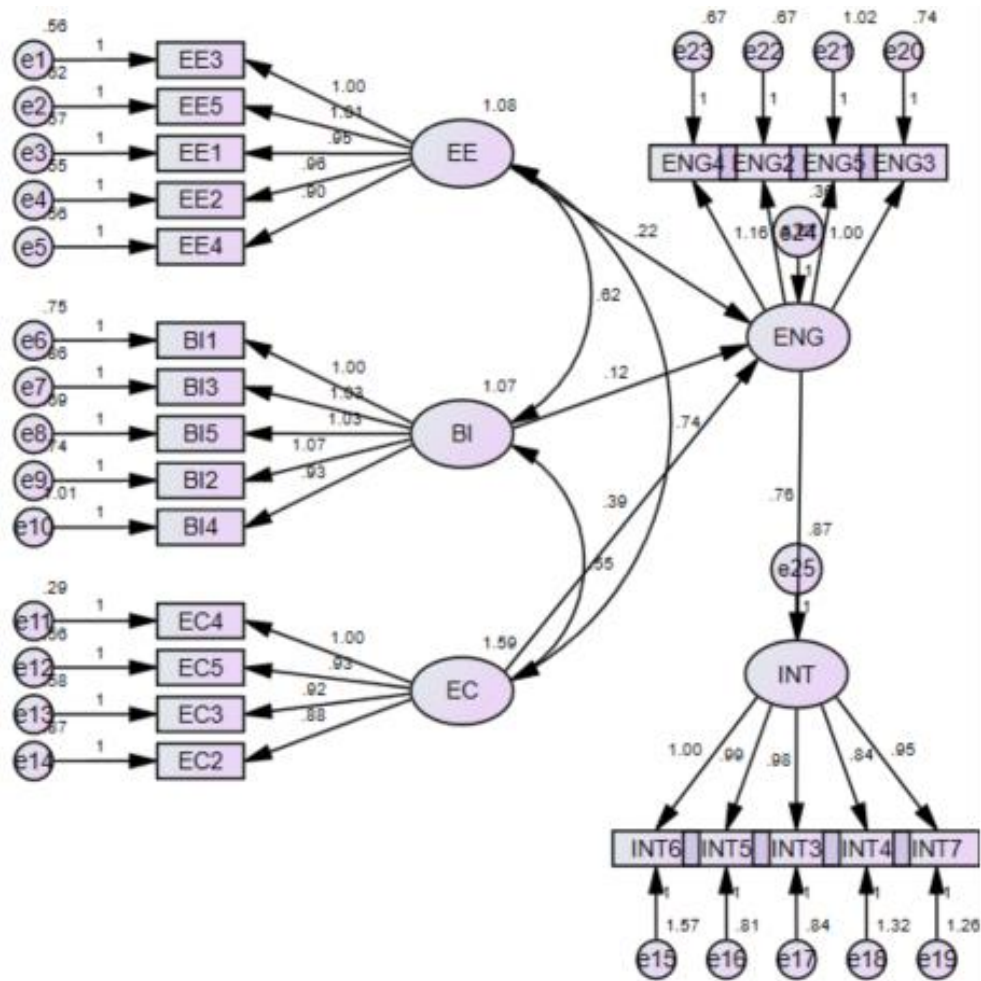
To test the hypotheses, a second analysis proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was performed, and the results are as follows:  $\chi^2 = 671.537$  ( $p = .0$ ,  $df = 223$ ),  $NFI =$

.889,  $CFI = .923$ ,  $IFI = .923$ ,  $TLI = .912$ ,  $RMSEA = .069$ , showing that the model is of good fit.

The results of the proposed model and our research hypotheses are presented in [Table 6]. The discussion of the hypotheses is presented in the following paragraph.

**Table 6: Path Analysis**

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	T-value	p	Results
H1	BI → ENG	.132	2.491	.013	Accepted
H2	EE → ENG	.243	4.083	***	Accepted
H3	EC → ENG	.527	9.370	***	Accepted
H4	ENG → INT	.608	9.482	***	Accepted



**Figure 1: Sem Results of the Research Model**

Hypothesis testing results show that the first hypothesis, the impact of brand image on tourist engagement, is statistically significant, with a path coefficient of .132 and a p-value of .013, indicating that brand image has a positive impact on tourist engagement. In other words, an increase in brand image leads to an increase in tourist interaction. Hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis testing results show that the second hypothesis, the impact of emotional experience on tourist engagement, is statistically significant, with a path coefficient of .243 and a p-value < .001, indicating that emotional experience

has a positive impact on tourist engagement. In other words, an increase in emotional experience leads to an increase in tourist interaction. Hypothesis 2 is accepted. The impact of environment consciousness on tourist engagement is statistically significant, with a path coefficient of .527 and a p-value < .001, indicating that environment consciousness has a positive impact on tourist engagement. The impact of tourism engagement on destination recommendation intention is also statistically significant, with a path coefficient of .527 and a p-value < .001, indicating that tourism engagement has a positive impact on destination recommendation intention.

**Table 7: Multi-Group Test Results**

Hypothesis		Estimate		p	Results
		Active	Passive		
Structural weights	Nested comparison model	$\Delta\chi^2 = 40.667, df = 22$		.013	Accepted
H1	BI → ENG	.129	.140	.011	Accepted
H2	EE → ENG	.226	.242	***	Accepted
H3	EC → ENG	.492	.535	***	Accepted
H4	ENG → INT	.570	.598	***	Accepted

According to Table 8, the SEM analysis results with the moderating variable for the two groups of active and passive sports tourism using AMOS show the existence of a moderating effect. The difference between the models of the active and passive groups is statistically significant with  $\Delta\chi^2 = 40.667, df = 22, p = .009$ . Specifically, based on the difference in the magnitude of the standardized estimate weights for the passive group, the influence of all tested relationships is stronger for the passive group than for the active group. In particular, the influence of emotional experience/brand image/environmental consciousness on tourist engagement, thereby promoting their intention to spread the word and share their experiences, is greater for the passive group than for the active group. This result demonstrates that the passive tourism group reacts strongly to emotional factors and interacts strongly, which can be explained in relation to the excitement and comfort of the tourists' moods. This first confirms the importance of segmenting sports tourism groups according to their roles for event/destination managers.

Survey results of domestic tourists in Da Nang show that tourist engagement is influenced by destination image, emotional experience, and environment consciousness. Environment consciousness has the strongest influence on tourist engagement, indicating that people's perceptions are increasingly changing, with them focusing on their own health and social values. Therefore, once they have positive experiences with a destination, they are willing to recommend it to family and friends and post positive comments about the destination. Furthermore, this study is the first to measure the differences between active and passive sports tourism groups, noting the differing influences on their emotional expression, attitudes, and behaviors.

The results highlight the crucial role of emotions and environmental awareness in shaping the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of tourists in the context of

sports tourism in Vietnam. These results are consistent with previous studies. Firstly, brand image influences tourist engagement. These results reinforce the findings of Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007) and Cheung et al. (2023). When tourists' perceptions and feelings towards a destination or sporting event are positive, it creates engagement, promoting the intention to return. However, in the context of sports tourism, destination image such as infrastructure, accessibility, or event catalog are not the main drivers or the most powerful factors influencing tourist engagement; rather, environmental awareness and emotions are. This result is consistent with the research of Zhou et al. (2024) and Cerqueira et al. (2025). A tourism environment that focuses on immersive experiential spaces stimulates excitement, curiosity, and promotes long-term engagement. It also confirms the view that stimulating, memorable, and emotional aspects are key characteristics in the context of sports tourism. A noteworthy result is the increasing prevalence of environmental sustainability awareness in the community, further enriching and strengthening knowledge about sustainability. It further reinforces the arguments of Paul & Roy (2025) and Alashiq and Aljuhmani (2025) that individuals with environmental knowledge and awareness tend to exhibit environmentally friendly and socially engaged behaviors. In the context of sports tourism, this means that tourists seek sporting activities that align with their personal values, experiences, and destination. They play a role as beneficiaries and stewards, conserving the natural resources of the destination. This perspective supports the research findings of Higham et al. (2016), Hoai et al. (2019), and Paul and Roy (2025). The results confirm the strongest relationship between tourist engagement and recommendation intention, reinforcing the findings proposed by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021) and Cheung et al. (2023). These experimental results demonstrate a strong causal relationship between engagement and positive post comments, referrals, and the need to return. Furthermore,

engagement plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between emotional experiences and actual behavior.

## 5.2 Contribution

### *Theoretical Significance*

This is a significant study in empirically testing the behavior of tourists after the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of sports tourism in Vietnam. The study has contributed to generalizing theoretical knowledge about sports tourism behavior in emerging markets. The strong relationship between tourist engagement and environmental awareness has enhanced the social significance of tourist behavior models through the sustainability/ecological factor. This study is the first to confirm the strong role of tourists' environmental awareness in sports tourism in Vietnam. It can be inferred that, after the great damage caused by nature to humanity, they slowed down to consider the causes, changing their behavior and attitudes. This led to different empirical results, recording the impressive impact of appropriate values and ethical norms of environmental awareness on tourist attitudes and behavior. Furthermore, the successful validation of the causal model between variables including BI/EE/EC/ENG/INT has strengthened well-known research frameworks such as SOR theory, empirical evidence linking destination image perception and environment, and tourist sentiment through emotional experiences and interactions, thereby increasing brand awareness on social media, reducing costs, and amplifying community engagement. Simultaneously, the results emphasize this context-dependent nature, prompting a re-examination of the traditional TPB theoretical model in specific contexts, particularly examining its dependence on participant attitudes (active or passive). Therefore, developing contingency models for different tourism/service segments is essential to creating highly effective tourism and service development strategies.

### *Practical Significance*

Recent research shows a shift in the contemporary sports tourism model, with tourists now interested in more multifaceted and immersive experiences rather than simply observing large-scale sporting events. This trend towards multidimensional experiential tourism includes participation in outdoor adventures, local sports, fitness, and themed sports (Wang et al., 2021; Carvache-Franco et al., 2025). Therefore, this study identifies several trends reshaping the sports tourism model. The research emphasizes improving infrastructure and service quality to enhance destination competitiveness. A new trend in tourism also proposed in this study is the integration of tourism with health, education, and local cultural

experiences. This innovative trend promises more fulfilling and diverse experiences, increasing the attractiveness of sports tourism. Physical and mental health training through sports activities and education on cultural heritage preservation not only opens the way to improving the quality of life for tourists but also promotes local economic development and environmental protection.

Research results show the significant influence of environmental awareness on tourist engagement with a destination. This demonstrates the necessity of NETZERO as a long-term strategy that sports event organizers, managers, and stakeholders at destinations need to consider implementing. The construction of sports complexes for major sporting events has resulted in significant costs and social impacts. Therefore, coordination between the nation, event organizers, and the community is needed to implement effective Net Zero solutions, from building infrastructure to support events, transportation, entertainment, and accommodation for tourists, to the production processes of souvenir products. Furthermore, creating special incentives such as visa points, discounted/free admission to historical sites/museums, collaborating with hotel owners to offer discounted services to environmentally conscious tourist groups, and participating in local environmental events are all beneficial. In addition, immersive experiences are becoming a trend. Therefore, event organizers have the opportunity to create services that enhance tourists' emotional well-being through sports activities such as hands-on experiences as coaches, referees, or competing with experts/influencers, or creating sports themes tailored to tourists' interests. A destination/event with the resources to create differentiated services will gain a competitive advantage, leading to further growth, thus creating a cycle of resources - competitive advantage - development.

An indispensable tool in sustainable tourism development today is the support of AI. AI applications are used to manage environmental damage and protect the safety of the natural environment and land. AI also plays a significant role in maintaining and improving the image and quality of tourist destinations. Automated support from chatbots, VR/AR technology, and automated writing and posting enhance destination imagery and customer experience. Therefore, it needs to be designed, built, and implemented appropriately for tourist destinations. Furthermore, these events can foster national pride and strengthen national identity, while community participation through volunteer programs can promote social cohesion. Thus, integrating local culture with sporting events is essential. Programs to show appreciation to tourists, promote the tourism community, and offer incentives for tourists who actively

share their travel experiences will help increase engagement.

Event managers and organizers need to design different communication strategies based on different tourist segments. For active tourists, attention should be paid to building a sense of challenge and personal achievement; therefore, communication messages should be personalized and provide guidance for achieving success. Meanwhile, passive tourists, such as spectators/fans, are interested in community experiences, atmosphere, sportsmanship, cuisine, engagement with the event, event facilities/services, and environmental sustainability. Therefore, event managers/organizers can develop strategies for resource allocation and design suitable service packages for these two groups.

### **Limitations and Directions of the Study**

Despite its contributions, the study also has limitations that need improvement in the future. Firstly, the study only investigated the experiences of domestic tourists when visiting Da Nang for sports tourism, thus limiting the results. A comparative study with international tourists would provide a more comprehensive view. Secondly, the time-specific data does not allow for demonstrating changes in tourists' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, thus limiting the measurement of relationships over time. Furthermore, a combined approach using both qualitative and quantitative data will provide a more in-depth analysis of community dynamics in sports tourism.

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