The Meaning and Measurement of a Sport Event Experience Among Active Sport Tourists

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Destinations use sport events to attract participants and spectators, who then hold perceptions of both the sport event and destination. This research aimed to a) understand how active sport tourists perceive the meaning of a sport event experience and b) develop a scale for that meaning. Both aims are studied in a post trip context as evaluative research. Two focus groups were used to understand the meaning of the sport event experience among active sport tourists. Results from the focus groups suggest participants attribute meanings related to organizational, environmental, physical, social, and emotional aspects of the sport event experience. Next, semantic differential items were developed to measure the meaning of a sport event experience in the post trip phase. The items were tested with two different sport event participant samples using surveys. A uni-dimensional scale of 11 semantic differential items emerged. These items provide a measure for the evaluative meaning of a sport event experience.

Introduction

Sport events are tourism products for destinations and can vary in size (e.g., small, large). As tourism products, sport events can generate destination imageries for their audiences through the media (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003) or through direct experiences (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007) and can also have a certain meaning in the mind of the sport consumer who travels to participate in the event (sport tourist). Sport tourists attach meanings to a sport event or destination which may influence their likelihood of revisiting the host destination (Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanjiez, 2001) and stimulate economic impact for the host community (Gratton, Shilbi, & Coleman, 2005). The exploration of meaning of the sport event experience has not been
examined extensively in the literature and its conceptualization can assist with the understanding of the relationship between event and destination brand images (e.g., Brown, Chalip, Jago, & Mules, 2002; Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, & Shameem, 2003), co-branding strategies (e.g., Xing & Chalip, 2006), as well as, the overall perceptions of the event. This exploration should be considered within the nature of the event (e.g., small, large), the type of sport tourist (e.g., active, passive) and the travel or trip stage (either pre trip, during, or post trip).

In the sport management and tourism literature, emphasis has been placed mainly on mega events that generate worldwide destination awareness (Ritchie & Smith, 1991; Weed, 2008) and large infrastructure projects in local communities (Essex & Chalkley, 1998; Ritchie, 1984). Large scale sport events such as the Olympic Games, SuperBowl and World Cup (soccer) can have specific meanings for sport consumers (Chalip, 2000). While these larger sport events contribute to a local community’s economy and marketing appeal, smaller recurring sport events such as local marathons and bicycle tours can generate more sustainable economic impact (Ritchie, 2004) and could potentially build a more sustainable image for the community. These smaller events often need relatively low organizing investments and attract significant (for the region) numbers of participants and spectators on a regular basis (Crompton, 1999). Smaller scale events have not been extensively examined in the literature and consequently there is a dearth of information on the aspects that constitute the meaning of a smaller scale event experience, which will be the focus of this research.

The type of sport tourists can influence the formation of meaning of sport event experience. Based on Weed and Bull’s (2004) conceptualization of sport tourism as a phenomenon arising from the spectrum of unique interactions between people, place, and activities, the meaning of a sport event experience may vary among active and passive sport tourists given the different nature of the activity, place, and people involved (Shamir & Ruskin, 1984). An understanding of the aspects involved in the meaning of sport event experience as held by different types of sport tourists may help destinations create a sport tourism image that attracts more or desirable visitors (i.e., event participants and spectators) to their area (Chalip, 2001). Although spectators have been a focus in the sport and tourism marketing literature (Kaplanidou, 2007; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2005) participants have not been examined extensively. This study focuses on the active sport tourist (participant) to contribute new understanding of the meanings associated with a sport event experience.

Sport and tourism activities entail a travel component. The trip or travel stage plays a role in destination image formation and experience perceptions (Vogt & Andereck, 2003). In the pretrip phase, the meaning of the sport event experience is influenced by media coverage, word-of-mouth, or past event or destination experiences (Gartner, 1993) and as a result takes on a variety of forms. The meaning of a sport event experience when captured during the trip can be somewhat different than the pretrip or post trip phases, because direct experiences with the event are recorded and could be more vivid in memory. Post trip perceptions about the meaning of the sport event experience could contain a more holistic memory-based evaluation of the event and the destination where the experience occurred (MacKay & McVetty, 2002). Our research was delimited to the understanding of small scale sport event meaning in the post trip phase among active sport tourists.
In summary, given the importance of sport events as tourist attraction products, few empirical efforts have been made that examine the meaning attached to the experience of a sport event. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to: a) understand the meaning active sport tourists attach to the sport event experience in the post trip phase and b) develop a reliable and valid scale that captures that meaning. To address these gaps in the literature, this paper discusses the theoretical framework that supports the exploration of the concept of meaning. After the literature review, the methods used to examine the meaning of sport event experience are presented, followed by the results, where the meaning of the sport event experience is proposed, and the discussion of the results is presented.

**Theoretical Frameworks on Attributions of Meaning**

Our intention in this article is to understand what constitutes the meaning of the experience of a small scale sport event among active sport tourists in the post trip phase. The concept of meaning finds its origins in the early work of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), who examined meaning as a psychological cognitive state. In their work, Osgood et al. proposed that meaning is a relational or process concept which suggests each evaluated object may vary in attributions toward their meaning. The attribution of meaning or the analysis of meaning relates to stored mental representations otherwise called schemas that are used by the individual to interpret a stimuli (in this case, a sport event; James & James, 1989). Schemas are cognitive structures that represent organized knowledge about different categories such as self, other people, events and objects. For example, a consumer’s schema about Amazon.com may include product categories and attributes such as wide assortment, fast service, reliability, recommendations, and overall evaluations. (Bagozzi, Gurhan-Canli, & Priester, 2002, p. 142)

What is less clear about schemas is the organization of cognitive or affective structures in a person’s mind. Schema or organizational structure may depend on processing objectives (Bagozzi et al., 2002). Consumers organize information contingent on the nature of the processing objective (e.g., overall evaluation objective, attribute based objective; Park & Wyer, 1994). So, when consumers process information in terms of an overall evaluation objective, the organization of information in memory was found to include attribute-item clusters and a general evaluative concept of the product (Park & Wyer, 1994).

When the meaning of an entity is examined, cognitive and affective components emerge (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gartner, 1993). The latter two components associate with the conceptualization of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) given that the concept of attitudes has been defined as an evaluative response toward an object. When individuals attach meaning to an entity, they provide an evaluation about the thoughts and feelings they have about that entity (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Attaching meaning to an entity, a sport event in this case, can also be explained by attribution theory, where the individual makes certain associations about the entity that explain and support the meaning of sport event experience in their minds (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Attributions about the meaning of a sport event experience can be
different among individuals with direct experience with a sport event, leading to more complex (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and affective perceptions (MacKay & McVetty, 2002) that are produced using an attitudinal lens assessment (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). A sport event may produce more complex perceptions regarding the meaning of its experience in the post event or post trip phase. According to Mehrabian (1980), reactions toward a certain entity are mainly emotional in nature and represent the common core of human response to all types of environments. Mandler (1982) agrees with Mehrabian in the sense that the objective of the analysis of meaning is to describe what is found in the environment. These attributions of meaning are a form of cognition (James & James, 1989) that can feature a descriptive meaning (Mandler, 1982) or denotive meaning (Osgood et al., 1957) among other explanations. Other research related to the meaning and measurement of destination image suggests the existence of functional, psychological, attribute-based and holistic components that have common and unique aspects (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). The destination image meaning was later conceptualized by tourism researchers to feature cognitive, affective, and conative components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beelerl & Martin, 2004; Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Gartner, 1993; Pike, 2002; Pike & Ryan, 2004) rendering a more attitudinal structure to the concept. Recent research regarding the meaning of sport events among participants in the attachment phase (Funk & James, 2006) of a charity cycling event identified three types of meaning attached to the event that included functional, psychological, and symbolic aspects (Filo, Funk, & O’ Brien, 2008). The latter research targeted a charity event, which can have distinct elements for the participants, thus leading to different meaning attributions due to the cause associated with the event (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004).

Given that this study is focusing on the post trip phase, the direct experience of the participants of the event should be considered in terms of its contribution to theoretical approaches related to the creation of meaning of the sport event experience. Active sport tourists recall and process information about the event which activates a valuation procedure described to include cognitive appraisals in terms of relevant to the object schemas (Mandler, 1982). These subjective evaluations of meaning can be affective (connotative) in nature (Osgood et al., 1957) or represent emotional cognitions (Reiszenzein, 1983). Emotional cognitions refer to the conscious processing of an emotion by the individual who can then apply a label to the notion and intensity of that emotion (James & James, 1989). James and James suggested that emotional cognitions are represented by a single latent component. Certainly, the term emotional cognitions can be received as contradictory by attitude theorists who have tested the tripartite model of attitudes and found discriminant validity in cognitive and affective responses (Bagozzi, Tybout, Craig, & Sternthal, 1979). However, in the post trip phase, it is plausible that emotional cognitions dominate the meaning of sport event experience assuming a more evaluative role (Gardial, Clemons, Woodruff, Schumann, & Burns, 1994).

Following the literature, this study works from the assumption that the meaning of a sport event experience can be encoded as a schema in a consumer’s mind and the schema formation may include information that is related to cognitive and affective aspects. Given the importance of sport events for communities as a tourism development tool, this study aims to understand the meaning of a sport event experience by sport participants who are also tourists. In summary, the meaning
Method: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

To understand the meaning attached to a sport event by its participants, two methods were used: a qualitative approach (focus groups) for the conceptual development part of this study and a quantitative approach (mail and web surveys) for the development of the measurement scale. Focus groups were used in the qualitative phase of the study followed by a pilot test with a convenience sample of active sport tourists. Following pilot testing, data were collected using mail and web surveys from two different sport events. For the first sport event, a mail survey was used with a census sample of event participants to test the scale items. For the second sport event, mail and web surveys were used with another census sample of sport event participants to further test the scale. The following sections describe these procedures in greater detail.

Qualitative Approach

The first step of the research was to understand and identify the meaning of a sport event experience (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Marketing literature supports qualitative approaches that generate items to construct scales such as literature searches, experience surveys, insight-stimulating experiences, critical incidents and focus groups (Bagozzi, 1994; Churchill, 1979). Focus groups “provide preliminary research on specific issues in a larger project” (Morgan, 1997, p. 17) when combined with other research methods and they contribute in the creation of survey items (Morgan, 1997). This study used focus groups to explore the aspects of meaning attached to sport event experience. The script used in the focus group discussions can be found in Table 1 and the questions were developed based on propositions on brand equity by Keller (1993) given that the concept of a brand can associate with the meaning attached to a product or service/experience.

Two focus groups were used in this research. One focus group consisted of eight cyclists (six males and two females, ages 19–55) who belonged to a university cycling club. The other focus group consisted of four participants (two males and two females, ages 30–55) of a cycling multiday event. Focus group sessions

Table 1  Questions Utilized in the Two Focus Groups
Consisting of Cyclists to Examine the Meaning Attached to a Sport Event Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Groups Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When you think of a sport event as a participant what words come to mind?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What are the benefits that you get from participating in a sport tourist event? Any costs or negative outcomes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What are your overall attitudes toward the event and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What other emotions do you have of participating in this event?</td>
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occurred in a conference room at a university under the guidance of a moderator and one assistant moderator. The assistant moderator took notes during both focus groups. The duration of each focus group was one hour and participants were paid $15 for their participation. The discussion was audio recorded and later transcribed. Other information recording items included paper and pencil exercises and flip charts. The discussion was semistructured and the moderator ensured all participants contributed to the discussion by asking each member of the group to share their thoughts. One of the discussion segments was a free elicitation of three words that come to mind about the event which the focus groups participants wrote down independently. A commentary from each participant on their word choices followed to understand in depth the meaning of the sport event experience given that these participants had already participated in that event.

**Focus Group Data Analysis**

After the completion of the focus groups, note-based analysis of the data were completed (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The moderator prepared a brief written summary of the key points after the end of the focus groups and discussed the key points with the assistant moderator to reach agreement. Themes were identified and agreed upon between the moderator and assistant moderator based on the frequency (how many times something was said), specificity (detail), emotion (how emotionally they were expressed), and extensiveness (how many people said something). The themes derived from the note-based analysis were the following:

a) Organizational aspects (e.g., safer routes, avoid roads/use trails, organized transportation, convenient, expensive/inexpensive entry fees, registration deadlines, good services such as showers);

b) Environmental aspects (e.g., beautiful scenery, country side, new places, the best of an area);

c) Physical activity aspects (e.g., healthy, endurance, perseverance, good physical condition, training);

d) Social aspects (e.g., socialization, meeting other people, vacation with family and friends);

e) Emotional aspects (e.g., relaxing, exciting, enjoyment, pride, happy, friendly, range of emotions before, during and after, self-fulfillment, accomplishment, challenge).

The theme word descriptors in parenthesis are directly from the focus group data. Some examples of participants’ comments about selected attributions about the meaning of the sport event experience included:

**Environmental.** One participant offered: “The [event] brings in mind images of enjoying nature …”

Another participant commented on the environment exposure opportunities the event provided: “When you go on a trail you come to places you do not even get to when you drive your car.”

Another participant explained: “They [participants] don’t have to drive their cars everywhere, they can ride their bicycles, enjoy nature …”
Another participant commented: “The sights are just great … the scenery and seeing places you have never been and get to see different things . . . I have always enjoyed that as part of a vacation and part of just living . . .”

**Physical Activity.** For this theme, all participants indicated exercise was the major benefit they received from participating in these types of events. For example, one participant commented: “I think it’s a very healthy pastime.”

**Social.** One participant noted:

You know . . . it is just a great place to meet people because you meet people basically like-minded. Wanting recreation, wanting some physical activity on their vacation, so . . . already you are off to a good start, you know, of just getting along with people. And people do, I mean people can be riding along and you may not know people around you but all of a sudden you start talking and it is very friendly.

Another participant offered: “People have time to talk to you or they have time to help you and nobody is looking at their watch and nobody has an appointment they had to get to. So, you get quality conversations with people.”

**Emotional.** Most of the participants commented on the enjoyment they received from their participation in the event. An assortment of quotations included: “I totally had fun,” “It was exciting,” “Just go out to ride, physically, emotionally . . . you know, you might have had a crabby day, but you start biking, big smile on your face, feeling better.” Another focus group participant discussed the accomplishment he/she felt completing the event: “It [the event] is an accomplishment . . . Another participant commented on the preparation for the event and the challenges: “I got more prepared for them [cycling events] but it is still a challenge to get through some of the days. But it is a lot of fun there. There is a certain amount of pride for doing it.”

In summary, the focus group data analysis suggested meanings attached to the experience of a smaller-scale sport event by active sport tourists as captured in the post event phase. These meanings included organizational, environmental, physical activity, social, and emotional attributions. (See Figure 1)

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**Development of a Measurement Scale**

**Instrumentation**

One of the objectives of this study was to develop a reliable and valid measurement of sport event experience that can be used by event organizers, destination marketers, and academic and marketing researchers. To develop the scale, the DeVellis’s (2003) protocol was followed. The steps included the following: a) determine clearly what was going to be measured using theory to delimit the meaning of the construct, b) generate a large pool of items “that are candidates for eventual inclusion in the scale” (DeVellis, 2003, p. 63) and reflect the scale’s purpose, c) determine the format for measurement, d) review by experts of the initial pool of items, e) include validation items, f) administer the items to a development sample, g) evaluate the items, and h) optimize scale length. The following section describes how each step was administered.
Figure 1 — The aspects of meaning attached to a small scale sport event experience by active sport tourists in the post trip phase through a qualitative analysis.
**Step 1.** The first step referenced theory to delimit the meaning of the construct. This was achieved through a thorough literature review that revealed a gap in the literature and through the qualitative approaches previously discussed. To examine the meaning of sport event experience, two focus groups were used which led to the framework that proposed the meanings attached to a sport event experience (Figure 1).

**Step 2.** The second step generated a large pool of items to reflect the scale’s purpose (DeVellis, 2003). This stage of the scale development process requires redundancy of items in order for the relevant items to come together and “the irrelevant idiosyncrasies to cancel out” (DeVellis, 2003, p. 65). The initial pool of items \( n = 41 \), including redundant items, was derived from the theme descriptors that were acquired from the two focus groups and from previous literature that overlapped with those themes. For example, the measurement of the meaning of destination image uses a set of four semantic differential items that measure emotional aspects of a destination/attraction (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

**Step 3.** The next step in the scale development process determined the format for measurement. Semantic differentials were used as suggested by the early work on the measurement of meaning by Osgood et al. (1957). Semantic differentials are widely used in attitude measurement as summary evaluative judgments of a behavior or object (e.g., Ajzen & Driver, 1992) but also in image measurement (Dickson & Albaum, 1977; Kaid, 2004) which can associate with aspects of the meaning of sport event experience. The semantic differential measurement format tends to yield primarily three dimensions (activity, potency, and evaluation) with a set of opposite adjectives (Osgood, 1953). The scale items included a set of opposite adjectives that described the phenomenon based on data from the focus groups. Data analysis from the focus groups yielded aspects of meaning of the sport event experience, from which the initial adjective list (41 items) was based upon. Consequently, the words were not developed to match the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions; they were based on the qualitative approach. The primary researcher of this study generated the opposite word and requested feedback from the study’s coresearchers. Feedback was received and initial changes were made. The scale adjectives were rated on a seven-point response format. Specifically, the seven points were labeled as extremely, quite, slightly, neither, slightly, quite, extremely, and respondents checked a line that represented their perception of the sport event for all sets of opposite adjectives. The question was worded as follows: how would you describe all aspects of the [event name] based on how you feel now [approximately a month after the event] about the event according to the set of opposite adjectives below? The respondents then saw a statement indicating “For me the [event name] is …” and then they provided their responses on the set of opposite adjectives. The seven-point scale format was used in the pilot test and the two survey studies that followed for validation.

**Step 4.** The fourth step included a review of the initial item pool \( n = 41 \) by experts. Four doctoral candidates from the sport, tourism, and recreation field and two tourism faculty members were asked to confirm or invalidate the definition of the phenomenon and evaluate the items’ clarity and conciseness (DeVellis, 2003, p. 86) by providing comments. After adjusting some of the items based on their comments, the items were pilot tested with a small purposive sample of active sport
tourists using a web survey including the 41 items and a few demographic questions. The aim of the pilot test was to reveal discrepancies and further purify the measure. The sample for this pilot web survey was achieved by snowball sampling. According to Babbie (2001), “this procedure is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate” (Babbie, 2001, p. 180). The requirement for completing the web survey was active participation in an organized sport event which required travel away from home during the past year. As such, people who participated in a sport event told friends who participated in an event to complete the scale evaluation and so on and so forth. Forty-four sport tourists of various events (e.g., marathons, triathlons, golf tournaments, cycling events) participated in the pilot testing of the scale. Participants rated the scale items and provided qualitative comments on the content validity of the scale items. After this phase of the study, 13 items were dropped because of poor comprehension and four items were reworded, yielding 28 items for the next step.

Next, three sport management and sport tourism faculty were asked to check face validity of the items in relationship to the focus groups findings. One item was dropped due to disagreement by the reviewers on the wording.

Step 5. The next step in scale development involved the inclusion of validation items. This was achieved by including five items in the survey that supported the construct validity of the measurement. These items were borrowed from the brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997) and used by researchers (e.g., Musante, Milne, & McDonald, 1999) to measure the brand personality of sport events from the spectators’ perspective. Brand personality and the meaning of sport event experience were expected to correlate since they both measure some aspect of a product or service encounter.

Step 6. In the sixth step, the items were administered to a development sample. Twenty-seven items remained at this step (see Table 2 for the list of items). The list of final scale items (purification of the measure) was yet to be determined with the mail survey, which was administered to the development sample (i.e., participants of an annual cycling event held in a tourism destination). The cycling event was staged on long distance trails in a midwest state in the United States and had two “legs.” The first leg was a two-day bicycling tour and covered a distance of approximately 35 miles per day and attracted largely novice riders. This leg included a night’s stay in a community considered to be a tourism destination. The second leg consisted of five days (cyclists who participated in this leg also participated in the first leg). It included accommodations along the designated route, covered approximately 320 miles, and attracted largely seasoned riders. The event occurs annually and has been staged for the past 11 years as an event that promotes trails and raises funds for the sponsoring nonprofit organization.

The study’s population included active sport tourists who registered and paid for either the two- or seven-day bicycling tour (the seven-day included the two-day event). The contact information for the population (N = 981) was obtained from the event organizers at the beginning of October 2005. The statistical analysis of this study required independent observations which led to the refinement of the population to study households (N = 720) and not individuals (one person per household was selected randomly). The measurement instrument for the survey was a self-administered four-page questionnaire. A modified Dillman (2000) mailing procedure was used excluding the prenotice letter and a final third contact
by certified mail. To achieve a high response rate, an incentive was offered to the recipients of the questionnaires. The incentive was the chance to win one of two $50 discounts from next year's event registration fee. In total, 720 questionnaires were mailed on November 1, 2005 along with a detailed personalized cover letter. One week later, a reminder postcard was mailed to the entire sample to thank those who already responded and to remind nonrespondents that their responses were important to the research project. Two weeks after the postcard, a second mailing to the nonrespondents occurred. The modified Dillman survey administration method yielded a satisfactory response rate \( n = 495, 70.3\% \) minimizing the potential impact of nonresponse error. Nonresponse bias checks were performed between respondents and nonrespondents on demographic data and no significant differences between the two groups were found.

Step 7. The seventh step in scale development evaluated items in terms of their discriminant and convergent validity and the eighth step was to optimize scale length. These two steps are reported in the results section of this study.

## Results

The following section provides the results of this research. The description of the sample is presented followed by factor analysis results and construct validity tests. A validation of the results provided by the initial sample with another sample of event participants is also presented in this section.

### Description of Initial Sample

The initial sample's primary purpose of the trip was to attend the sport event. The sample consisted of 54% males and 46% females. The average age of the sample participants was 50 years old. Most of the participants (91%) came from the state where the event took place, but not the communities involved in the sport event. The annual household income distribution of the respondents featured 47% above $80,000, 21% between $60,000 and $79,999, 19% between $40,000 and $59,999, and 13% below $39,999.

### Development of the Scale With the Initial Sample of Active Sport Tourists (Participants)

The first step in the evaluation of the 27 items from the survey sample involved the estimation of frequencies and descriptive statistics to check for missing data patterns and the means associated with each of the items. These results are shown in Table 2. Those items which featured means close to the middle of the scale (4.0) at the “neither” label and those items with 5% or more missing data were dropped from the analysis (four items). The range of responses for the items featured 450 people for the lowest number of responses per item and 487 people for the highest. The actions taken for the scale items based on missing data and means are depicted in Table 2.

After this first evaluation, 23 items remained. Exploratory factor analysis was applied to evaluate the factor structure of the scale items. Given the selection of semantic differential as a measurement item, the concept of meaning of sport
event experience was expected to emerge through the dimensions of evaluation, potency, and activity, although all three dimensions do not emerge consistently across samples and concepts (e.g., Xing & Chalip, 2006). Principal axis factoring was used with varimax rotation (uncorrelated or orthogonal factor assumption) and eigenvalues set to 1. Varimax rotation was used to identify the factor structure of the items independent of each other. The KMO test (.92) and the Bartlett test
of sphericity ($p < .05$) indicated the data were suitable for structure detection. The initial analysis yielded four factors. The communalities analysis revealed that 12 items had values less than .50 and as a result were dropped from the analysis. The remaining items were factor analyzed again to examine the factor structure. The results revealed a one factor structure related primarily to the evaluation aspect of the semantic differential space (Table 3) suggesting the evaluative meaning associated in the post trip phase by the participants. This one factor structure is further validated by the reliability test estimated with SPSS, using Cronbach’s $\alpha$ as the reliability coefficient (DeVellis, 2003). The results supported the reliability of a one factor dimension ($\alpha = .92$).

### Construct Validity

To test the construct validity of the scale, a brand personality scale was used (Aaker, 1997) in the survey instrument. The brand personality concept was selected due to its semantic relevance to attitudinal aspects that could relate to the evaluative meaning of sport event experience. “To establish the construct validity of a measure, the analyst must determine: 1) the extent to which the measure correlates with other measures designed to measure the same thing, and 2) whether the measure behaves as expected” (Churchill, 1979, p. 70). Construct validity consists of convergent and discriminant validity (Churchill, 1979). Convergent validity is whether the scale highly correlates with scales that measure similar concepts (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which the measure is novel and not a reflection of some other variable (Churchill, 1979; Shadish et al., 2002). Convergent validity was tested with CFA (using EQS 6.1 robust statistical analysis) and was compared with the brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997).

Discriminant and convergent validity were tested simultaneously during a measurement model evaluation which used other variables that were included in the survey but were not part of this analysis. For discriminant validity, the variables included in the model were satisfaction with the event (three items) and behavioral intentions (three items) that semantically should not correlate highly with evaluation aspects of the meaning of sport event experience. The covariance between the evaluation factor and satisfaction with the event construct was significant at $p < .05$ and of moderate strength ($r = .54$), while the covariance between the evaluation factor and behavioral intentions was significant at $p < .05$ but lower in strength ($r = .21$). These results discriminated the derived evaluation factor from the other two variables.

For convergent validity, the Aaker (1997) brand personality scale was used [five Likert scale items where the subjects had to provide how much the brand personality items (rugged, sophisticated, sincere, spirited, reliable) described the event]. To test convergent validity of the scale, the covariance between the evaluation factor (11 items) and the brand personality factor (five items) was significant and above average ($r = .61, p < .05$) which supports the convergent validity of the scale. The goodness of fit measures for this model were close to the acceptable threshold ($\chi^2 = 596.68, df = 203, NFI = .85, NNFI = .88, CFI = .89, RMSEA = .07$ with 90% confidence interval between .06 and .07). In addition, convergent validity was demonstrated by the factor loadings of the 11 items on the evaluation factor. All loadings were significant at $p < .05$ and were between .59 and .82 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).
Table 3  Rotated Component Matrix and Communalities of the 23 Remaining Items Designed to Measure the Meaning of Sport Event Experience Based on 403 Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>First Factor Analysis</th>
<th>Second Factor Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extracted Communalities</td>
<td>Factor 1 loadings (α = .92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfulfilling/fulfilling</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/excellent</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stimulating/stimulating</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad/joyful</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadventurous/adventurous</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distressing/relaxing</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring/exciting</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthless/valuable</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloomy/cheerful</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugly/beautiful</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy/healthy</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unorganized/organized</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficient/efficient</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsupportive/supportive</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexpensive/expensive</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 2 loadings (a = .61)

(continued)
### Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factor 3 loadings (α=.48)</th>
<th>Factor 4 loadings (α=.57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy/challenging</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive/competitive</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful/carefree</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive/active</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfriendly/friendly</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polluted/clean</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe/safe</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninspiring/inspiring</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>Cross-loaded on factor 1 and 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eigenvalue**: 6.12  
**Rotated variance explained**: 44.41%  
**Cronbach’s α**: .92  

*Note: Eigenvalues for the first factor analysis were: for Factor 1 = 7.94, for Factor 2 = 2.08, for Factor 3 = 1.39, for Factor 4 = 1.12*
Further Validation of the Scale as One Factor Structure

To validate the one factor structure with another sample of active sport participants, data were collected from a multisport event. The event takes place annually in a university city in a south state of the United States and attracts approximately 300 senior participants. Two methods were used to collect data from the population of event participants ($N = 292$). A mail and web survey were used to collect information on questions related to event perceptions, as well as other questions that were part of the larger project. Most of the participants responded ($n = 168$) resulting in a response rate of 62%.

The majority of participants (70.9%) were male. They ranged in age from 51 to 88 years old. The average age was around 69 years old ($SD = 8.81$). Slightly more than a third of participants (37.0%) were between 60 and 69 years old and 48 people (33.0%) were between 70 and 79 years old, whereas around a fifth of the respondents (18.0%) were between 51 and 59 years old, and 19 participants (13.0%) were between 80 and 88 years old. Nearly a quarter of the participants (24.5%) earned a household income in 2006 between $40,000 and $59,999, and 33 respondents (23.1%) indicated their income between $20,000 and $39,999. One in five (21.0%) reported household income between $60,000 and $79,999. Thirty respondents (21.0%) indicated their income was above $80,000, whereas 15 participants (10.5%) reported household income less than $20,000.

The factor analysis of the 11 scale items using principal axis factoring, varimax rotation and eigenvalues set to 1, revealed a single factor structure which explained 68% of the variance and a reliability coefficient of .95. These results are depicted in Table 4.

Discussion

The study aimed to understand the meaning attached to a small scale sport event experience among active sport tourists after the event took place. The results from the qualitative study suggested that the meaning of sport event experience evolves around the organizational, environmental, physical activity, social and emotional aspects of the sport event experience such as fulfillment. These aspects of meaning of a sport event experience can relate to cognitive and affective components expressed through an evaluative approach (Park & Wyer, 1994). Certainly, these results could also relate to functional and psychological aspects of meaning attached to an event (Filo et al., 2008).

The results from the quantitative study yielded a one-factor scale that relates to the evaluation component of the semantic differential space and reflects aspects of meaning attached to the sport event experience. The one-factor scale could imply that in the post trip phase of a small scale sport event, active participants used a global evaluative approach when they retrieved information from their event experience schema (Park & Wyer, 1994). The latter suggestion is also supported by MacKay and McVetty (2002), who in the context of tourism, suggest that actual experience with a destination creates a more affective disposition toward it.

The emergence of the evaluative meaning of the sport event experience in this research may suggest that the size of the event, the type of participants, and
the trip phase could influence the respondents to offer an evaluative approach to the concept of sport event experience. The one viable factor structure (evaluation) that emerged from this study seemed to combine all attributions of meaning of the sport event experience. All three dimensions proposed by Osgood et al. (1957) were not supported by this study, a finding which could be anticipated given that the initial item development did not match these dimensions but rather relied on the qualitative data. Although the semantic differential measurement format tends to yield primarily three dimensions (activity, potency, and evaluation) with a set of opposite adjectives (Osgood, 1953), other factors structures have also been identified in the literature. Research on psychology, sociology, and marketing that used semantic differentials to measure a concept has yielded other factor structures than the evaluation, potency, and activity that were created to describe concepts such as resilience, maternal roles, personality, store image, self image, and images of presidential candidates (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Flagler, 1989; Friborg, Martinussen, & Rosenvinge, 2006; Kaid, 2004).

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) advocated the use of good-bad semantic differentials to measure evaluations and such items are the most frequently used in practice (Bagozzi et al., 2002). A limitation of semantic differentials has been that affective words have been used to measure attitudes and can sometimes confound evaluation and affect constructs. The use of semantic differentials requires respondents to rate an attitude object on general attributes on a “good to bad” continuum that are presumably synonymous with evaluation itself (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Consequently and in combination with the post trip phase where affective dispositions are evident (MacKay & McVetty, 2002), evaluation emerged as the dominant dimension of the sport event experience. This explanation can also be supported by schema theory. Potentially, after the end of the event, the knowledge structure (schema) of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfulfilling/fulfilling</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/excellent</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stimulating/stimulating</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad/joyful</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadventurous/adventurous</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distressing/relaxing</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boring/exciting</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthless/valuable</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloomy/cheerful</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugly/beautiful</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy/healthy</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotated variance explained</td>
<td>68.13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s α</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Validation of the One Factor Structure With Participants From Another Multisport Event: Factor Loadings and Communalities Based on 116 Cases
event is activated through memory, which results in the formation of an evaluation of the event in the mind of the consumer. If the evaluative dimension dominates the thought process of the individuals when asked about the event in the post trip phase, then other dimensions such as activity and potency that relate to the use of semantic differentials could be suppressed.

An interesting observation about the results of the qualitative and quantitative parts of this research is that all items that loaded on the evaluation factor had some connection with each of the aspects of meaning associated with the sport event experience as evident through the data from the focus groups. For example, poor/excellent can associate with the organization of the event, ugly/beautiful with the environment of the event, unhealthy/healthy with physical activity, and boring/exciting, gloomy/cheerful, distressing/relaxing and sad/joyful, worthless/valuable, unfulfilling/stimulating, not stimulating/stimulating, and unadventurous/adventurous with the emotional meaning. The latter results suggest that the scale could have an emotional orientation, which relates to the affective nature of evaluation (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Mehrabian (1980) indicated that “emotional (affective, connotative, feeling) reactions represent the common core of human response to all types of environments” (p. 7).

The one factor structure could further be explained by schema theory (Anderson, 1977; Markus & Zajong, 1985; Olson & Zanna, 1993) suggesting consumers hold pieces of knowledge or schemata about an entity that are closely associated. Although we do not know how the information related to the event schema was organized in the minds of the active sport tourists in the post trip consumption phase, one assumption that can be made could relate to the instructions related to the question (e.g., For me the [event name] is . . . which was followed by the set of semantic differentials). Based on these instructions, the respondents could have been functioning under an evaluative information processing mode. As such they could have organized the information in memory in terms of both a general evaluative concept and attribute item clusters (Park & Wyer, 1994). Another explanation of the one factor evaluative measurement of meaning is related to the direct experience that the active sport tourists had with the event. Direct experiences are known to create complex strongly associated perceptions (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) and prepare the consumer to respond in an evaluative manner.

Some considerations about the generalizability of the results should be discussed. This scale was derived from the focus group participants of one type of event (i.e., cycling) and validated on a larger scale with samples from two different sport events: a) cycling and b) a multisport event. Both events were of a smaller scale. As such, attention should be paid to the application of this scale to other events of different nature (e.g., different sport, different size of sport event). However, attempts should also be made to examine whether this scale still holds as a unidimensional event evaluation tool to be generalizable to a wider spectrum of events. Greater generalizability will require more psychometric testing which should be addressed through future research.

Implications and Limitations

The contribution of this study relates to the conceptual understanding of the meaning of sport event experience and the development of a valid and reliable measurement tool that captures the evaluation of a sport event experience. The attributions
associated with the sport event experience could be used by both event and destination marketers in efforts of providing highly favorable meanings to the participants of a sport event. The goal would be to attract more people to the sport event who identify with certain meanings attached to a sport event and consequently increase the participation numbers. In addition, destination and event marketers could use promotional images related to fulfillment and healthy activities that promote both the event and the destination. If a match between activity levels offered in a destination and an event exists, then the probability of active sport tourists drawn to the area increases (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Events are branded products through marketing communications (e.g., brochures, websites, magazines, word-of-mouth) where the meaning of the sport event can be controlled to ensure high evaluation of the sport event among target markets. Jago et al. (2003) suggested sport event marketers and destination marketers should work together to capitalize on sport events as poles of tourism attraction. The meaning of sport event experience as proposed in this study can also be used to attract sponsoring companies that strive to offer similar experiences with the event that will enhance their company’s image depending on their sponsor objectives and the size of the sport event (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999).

For practical implications, event marketers can focus on the needs of spectators and participants to capture repeat behaviors of these target markets. Participants and families who accompany them are guaranteed visitors to the destination that hosts a sport event of small or large scales. Understanding the meaning of the sport event experience that active sport tourists (participants) attach to the event can help event marketers to better target participants’ needs. Furthermore, the scale proposed in this study can be used as a global evaluative tool to compare the perceptions of an event’s target markets. Chalip and McGuirty (2004) revealed the formation of four clusters of runners (who could have been potential participants to the Old Coast marathon event in Australia): dedicated runners, running tourists, active runners, and runners who shop; and they concluded each group prefers different activities offered at the destination to be bundled with the event (e.g., dedicated runners preferred marathon official parties as an activity bundled with the event). These results are examples of event marketing customization for participant clusters. These clusters could be segmented based on their event evaluation perceptions. For example, dedicated runners may have higher event evaluation perceptions than running tourists. Based on these perceptions, target marketing approaches can be customized to fit the needs and perceptions of each segment. This scale could be further used to provide comparison of overall event evaluation among different active sport tourist groups such as males and females, novice versus seasoned participants, and participants from different socioeconomic groups.

**Future Research**

Future research should aim to test the sport event evaluation scale among different sizes of sport events as larger events may be evaluated on different aspects than small scale. Future research efforts should also examine professional athletes’ perceptions and evaluations of a sport event which will allow the sport event organizers to gain immediate feedback from their own “customers.” Further testing of the scale with active participants from other sport events such as running, golfing, soccer, or basketball should be undertaken to further validate the sport event evaluation scale.
and show robust application across various types of sports. More research is also needed to understand spectators’ attributions of meaning to a sport event experience. Spectators may attach different meanings to a sport event than participants given their different profiles as sport consumers (Shamir & Ruskin, 1984).

References


