

CAPTIVATING SPECTATORS: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF MARKETING MIX ELEMENTS ON SPORTS EVENT ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This research study explores the influence of Marketing Mix components on spectator interest and engagement in sports events, with a focus on the traditional rugby football rivalry between Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, known as “Rugby Football,” in Thailand. Drawing on the 7Ps marketing mix theory, the study utilizes a composite-based approach to identify key factors within each element that contribute to spectator interest and subsequent engagement. The findings reveal that “Product,” “People,” and “Physical Evidence” significantly influence spectator interest in tracking sports competition results and promoting their involvement. Practical implications emphasize the importance of service quality, staff adequacy, appropriate event timing, engaging halftime shows, and stadium decoration, to enhance spectator interest. Theoretical implications highlight the role of the Marketing Mix elements as stimuli to attract individuals without prior interest in sports. Overall, this research provides valuable insights for sports competition managers to develop targeted strategies that foster increased interest and engagement among spectators, enriching the sports event experience and industry growth.

Keywords: Sports Management, Marketing Mix, IGSCA, Rugby Football, Engagement

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, the sports industry has experienced continuous growth in competitiveness (Statista, 2023). According to Statista (2023), revenue in the sports market is projected to reach \$31.88 billion in the United States by 2023, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.91% for the period 2023 to 2027, leading to an estimated market value of \$37.16 billion by 2027. Consequently, sports managers are striving to efficiently organize competitions to attract consumer interest and generate higher revenue (Perić et al., 2019; Theodorakis et al., 2015).

Previous research has shown that Marketing Mix elements can significantly improve sports management strategies (Memari et al., 2020; Watjanasontorn et al., 2019; Westerbeek & Shilbury, 1999). The Marketing Mix theory, including components that effectively influence consumer behavior and organizational objectives, plays a crucial role in this context (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Napontun & Pimchainoi, 2023; Pheunpha, 2021; Sriram et al., 2019). However, studies examining each individual Marketing Mix element in sports events remain limited, and do not include a thorough exploration. Elements such as the appeal of half-time shows, event souvenir prices, seating comfort, and convenient entrance-exit systems, require further investigation. Past research mainly focused on the variables influenced by the marketing mix, such as satisfaction, repeat attendance, and venue image (Min, 2020; Watjanasontorn et al., 2019), leaving a significant gap in the understanding of the importance of each individual Marketing Mix component in developing effective strategies for sports events.

To address this gap, this study explores the 7Ps of sports management, comprising 1) Product, 2) Price, 3) Place, 4) Promotion, 5) People, 6) Process, and 7) Physical Evidence (Kotler & Keller, 2009). By utilizing a composite-based approach, the study aims to identify key factors within each Marketing

Mix component that contribute to spectator interest in sports teams and their subsequent engagement (Langga et al., 2021; Senachai et al., 2023; Wu & Li, 2018).

Past research has suggested that various factors, such as attitude and motivation, might significantly influence spectator behavior in sports (Funk et al., 2002; Madrigal & Chen, 2008; Robinson & Trail, 2005; Trail et al., 2008). However, limited studies have specifically identified the initiating factors leading to spectator interest in sports teams and subsequent engagement (James, 2001). Notably, Litman and Spielberg (2003) found that curiosity might be a crucial factor influencing spectator interest and subsequent behavior, particularly in terms of the interest in following match results (Park et al., 2011). Hence, this research emphasizes the significance of factors related to the interest in following match results, driven by Marketing Mix components. The study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Wu & Li, 2018) to analyze the interplay between marketing stimuli, spectator responses, and the mediating role of psychological processes in shaping spectator behavior during sports events. By focusing on these aspects, the study aims to contribute valuable insights for sports managers in formulating effective strategies to enhance spectator interest and engagement in sports events.

This study employed a case study approach, focusing on the traditional rugby football rivalry between Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, known as "Rugby Football." The rationale for this choice rests on two key reasons. Firstly, the research seeks to address the limited exploration of Marketing Mix elements in sports event management, specifically concerning rugby football. This iconic sports event fosters university relations between Chulalongkorn University, one of the top-ranked universities in Thailand, and Thammasat University (U.S.News, 2023). Rugby football has been held since 1937, with the official award presentation commencing in 1960, marking the first officially

recognized competition. Though the event took place annually until 1985, it was later canceled, only to be resumed in 2005 (Dailynews, 2018; Naewna, 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to another suspension, resulting in the postponement of the event since 2020 (Naewna, 2020). Following the official announcement of the next competition date, rugby football continues to garner considerable interest from both students and the general public, maintaining its status as one of Thailand's most popular sports events (Naewna, 2020). The second reason for selecting rugby football as the case study lies in its intriguing spectator interest. Attendees may not necessarily be fervent rugby football fans, but they are drawn to the event due to its tradition and associated festivities. Similar to "THE MATCH Bangkok Century Cup 2022," a football match between Manchester United and Liverpool FC, where some ticket buyers were more interested in the opening performance by popular artist Jackson Wang than the football game itself (Nation, 2022). This phenomenon raises the question of whether Marketing Mix elements can influence spectators who initially lack interest in rugby football, eventually leading to their engagement and renewed interest. Hence, the objectives of this study are twofold: first, to examine the fundamental Marketing Mix components (7Ps) in sports event management, considering how they impact interest in following match results and promote spectator involvement; and second, to explore the differential effects of Marketing Mix components on spectator interest and engagement within two sample groups: 1) individuals with existing interest in rugby football and 2) individuals with no interest in rugby football. This research aims to provide valuable insights for sports event managers and sports tourism developers to enhance Marketing Mix strategies in event management effectively. By achieving these objectives, the study aims to contribute to the advancement of marketing mix strategies for sports event management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974, elucidates the relationships between environmental stimuli, emotional responses, and behavioral reactions (Chou et al., 2022). According to this theory, environmental stimuli (S) lead to emotional responses (O), which subsequently influence behavioral reactions (R). The S-O-R theory has gained popularity in consumer behavior research (Chang et al., 2011; Wu & Li, 2018). Previous studies have extensively applied the S-O-R theory to investigate the impact of environmental stimuli on emotional and behavioral responses (Cui & He, 2016; Lin & Mattila, 2010; Rajput et al., 2020). For instance, Ho et al. (2022) found that marketing mix elements (7Ps) as environmental stimuli (S) can influence the intention to watch live stream. Therefore, in this research, the S-O-R theory serves as a foundation to construct the conceptual framework by designating the marketing mix elements (7Ps) as Stimulus, the interest in following match results as Organism, and customer engagement as Response.

2.2 Marketing Mix

The Marketing Mix, widely accepted in strategy formulation, comprises controllable variables that organizations can combine to meet the target market's needs (McCarthy & Perreault, 1984). The Marketing Mix is a versatile tool that can be used to develop both long-term strategies and short-term tactical programs (Palmer, 2012). The most popular and enduring Marketing Mix framework is McCarthy's, which originally consisted of 12 components but was later consolidated into the 4Ps currently in widespread use: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place (McCarthy & Perreault Jr, 1964). However, due to the increasing complexity of customer preferences, three additional Ps were introduced

primarily for service industries by Booms (1981), resulting in the 7Ps as follows: 1) Product, 2) Price, 3) Place, 4) Promotion, 5) People, 6) Process, and 7) Physical Evidence. In the context of sports event management, the 7Ps are frequently utilized as they are perceived as the most comprehensive and relevant components (Min, 2020; Watjanasoontorn et al., 2019). Previous studies have found links between Marketing Mix components and consumer interest. Effective management of each Marketing Mix element can foster spectator interest (Fulop, 1988; Lee & Hoffman, 2015; Warasanti & Rustiadi, 2021). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed accordingly:

- H1: Product positively influences interest in following match results.
- H2: Price positively influences interest in following match results.
- H3: Place positively influences interest in following match results.
- H4: Promotion positively influences interest in following match results.
- H5: People positively influence interest in following match results.
- H6: Process positively influences interest in following match results.
- H7: Physical Evidence positively influences interest in following match results.

2.3 Product

A product is anything that can be offered to the market to capture attention, acquire, use, or consume and may satisfy a need or a want (Singh, 2012). In the context of sports, the primary product is the sporting event itself, which is easily observable. However, the effectiveness of the core product, such as the sports competition, is beyond direct control (as sports competition is the main product). Nevertheless, all other related products, such as entertainment, video screens, and various conveniences, can be considered extensions of the core product and are relatively more controllable (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020).

2.4 Price

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) define Price as the amount of money sacrificed to acquire something, the sum of money charged for a product or service, or the value exchanged for receiving a product or service. Price is also a crucial component of the Marketing Mix that generates revenue (Kotler et al., 2007). In the context of sports, pricing can be described as the configuration and adjustment of charges levied on customers in exchange for products and services. Appropriate pricing decisions are highly relevant to sports teams, as they indicate the level of support customers are willing to provide through their purchases (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020).

2.5 Place

Place (also known as distribution) is another critical Marketing Mix component. It refers to the process and methods through which products or services reach customers (Dhasan & Kowathanakul, 2021; Martin, 2014). In the context of sports events, place involves the process of delivering sports products to consumers. Marketers must consider suitable locations for the target audience, such as residential areas or easy accessibility (Mihai, 2013). Additionally, the physical aspects of the venue play a significant role in customer satisfaction, such as seating suitability (Min, 2020). Therefore, these decisions are often related to providing the products to consumers at the time and location they desire (Greenwell et al., 2002).

2.6 Promotion

Promotion encompasses the communication tools that marketers primarily use to inform consumers, including advertising, public relations, personal selling, direct marketing, and sales promotion (McCarthy, 1960). In sports, Promotion helps increase consumer awareness and higher sales. It serves as a tool to disseminate information, stimulate purchases, and impact consumer decision-making processes (Išoraitė, 2016).

In the realm of sports, promotional efforts can be linked to various objectives, such as raising awareness, spur-ring demand, promoting products, and experiences (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020). Thus, it plays a pivotal role in sports as the success of sports events is influenced by the marketing promotions implemented, which in turn, affect the sales success of the sporting activities organized.

2.7 People

In the marketing context, People refers to the individuals directly or indirectly involved in providing services to customers and holds significant influence over them (Rashid et al., 2019). The success of an organization heavily relies on the workforce engaged in either product manufacturing or service delivery (Noypa et al., 2021; Sabir et al., 2019). Their actions directly impact the outcomes experienced by customers. Therefore, recruiting, developing, and training personnel becomes crucial for gaining a competitive edge (Kar, 2010). In sports events, personnel play a pivotal role in ensuring the efficiency of the competition. From the customer perspective, personnel represent the service providers, and their behavior during the event and various interactions influence customers' overall evaluation (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020).

2.8 Process

Process relates to the processes and mechanisms involved in delivering the services to customers (Jitsoonthornchaikul, 2022; Mohammad, 2015). It helps customers compare different services and products, facilitating their final purchase decisions (Nouri & Soltani, 2015). In the context of sports competitions, Process refers to the steps customers are required to take to receive the sports service, and the processes followed by service providers to deliver the sports events (Smith, 2012). This includes actions such as providing easy-to-find seating, ticket purchasing procedures, and crowd management. A well-functioning process ensures efficient service delivery and customer

satisfaction (Ratten, 2016).

2.9 Physical Evidence

Physical Evidence refers to the environment or everything customers can see, hear, and feel about an organization (Makuzva & Ntloko, 2018; Saupi et al., 2019). Sports products are intangible, making it challenging to market them as consumer goods. Physical Evidence represents the tangibility that can be seen and/or felt by customers for sports products to become more tangible (Betts, 1994). For example, venue design, in-event soundtracks, and scoreboards are aspects of Physical Evidence that significantly impact customer impressions (Bitner, 1992).

2.10 Interest in Following Match Results

The interest in following match results is a crucial behavior that reflects the curiosity of sports viewers about the competition outcomes (Park et al., 2011). Interest is often instrumental in explaining why sports consumers turn their attention to sports teams and engage in various behaviors (Litman & Spielberg, 2003; Park et al., 2011; Reio Jr et al., 2006). As a signal, interest is significant in understanding sports consumers as it leads to other behaviors (Wirtz et al., 2013). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H8: Interest in following match results, positively influences customer engagement.

2.11 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is a widely accepted concept in marketing research due to its potential impact on the attitudes and behaviors of other consumers towards a brand (Fehrer et al., 2018; Rattanaburi, 2023). Customer engagement has several dimensions and can be studied from multiple perspectives, including knowledge, understanding, emotions, behavior, and social aspects (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Manosuthi et al., 2021a; Ng et al., 2020; Senachai et al., 2023). Many

researchers support the idea that behavioral engagement is a significant expression of customer engagement since it encompasses both cognitive and emotional aspects (Brodie et al., 2013; Heinonen, 2018). This research focuses on behavioral engagement, which represents behaviors beyond purchase, and can be specifically identified as customers showing significant interest in a brand or company, such as evaluating performance or providing useful feedback (Carlson et al., 2018).

The literature review provides the framework for this study, consisting of 8 hypotheses and 9 variables, as shown in Figure 1.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and Data Collection Method

In this study, questionnaires were distributed to undergraduate students at

Chulalongkorn University, aged 18 and above, who had previous experience attending the Chulalongkorn University vs. Thammasat University Traditional rugby football sports competition. After excluding respondents who had participated in roles such as organizer, cheerleader, and athlete (as they were already involved in the event), a total of 330 valid responses were collected from spectators.

The sample size of 330 spectators, who were solely spectators and not directly involved in organizing the event, exceeded the suggested sample size of 200 (Tye-Din et al., 2010). Hence, this sample size is deemed appropriate and sufficient for analysis.

3.2 Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools consisted of a questionnaire, divided into three sections. The first section gathered demographic information from the respondents, such as gender,

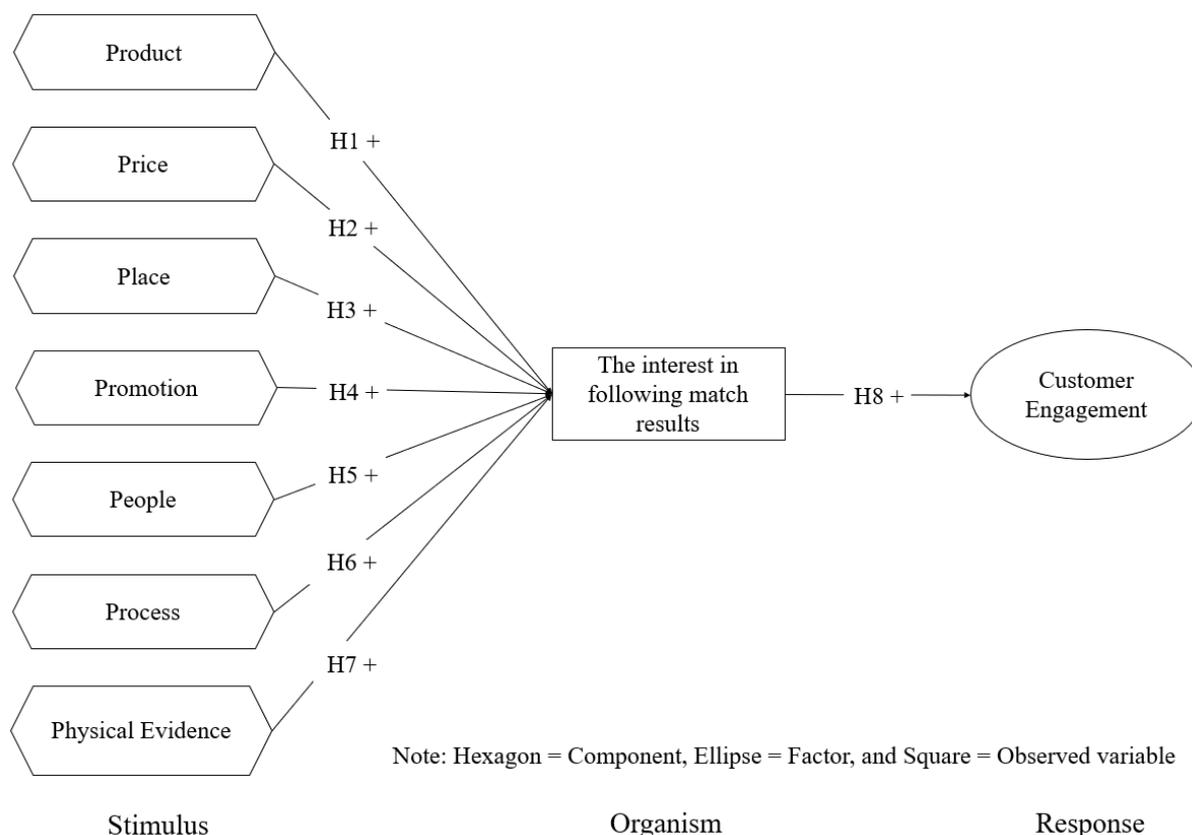


Figure 1 Research Framework and Hypotheses

Table 1 Data Collection Tools

Factor or Composite	Variable	Measurement Items	Reference
Product	Appropriateness of timing	The appropriateness of the timing in organizing the competition.	Min (2020)
	Fun and excitement	It's fun, exciting, and enticing to watch.	
	Halftime shows	The halftime performances are interesting and captivating.	
Price	Admission cost	The admission price to watch the competition is reasonable.	Min (2020)
	Souvenirs cost	The price of souvenirs available for sale at the event is reasonable.	
Place	Ease of transportation	The competition venue is easily accessible.	Min (2020)
	Seating	The seating for watching the competition is comfortable and suitable.	
Promotion	Communication channels	The media used for promoting the competition is appropriate.	Min (2020)
	Public relations activities	The activities organized for promotion are appropriate.	Matic et al. (2019) Min (2020)
People	Service	The staff provides impressive service.	Min (2020)
	Staff adequacy	There are staff members maintaining cleanliness and ensuring sufficient safety.	Matic et al. (2019)
Process	Signpost	There are clear direction signs.	Min (2020)
	Entry-exit system	There is a convenient, fast, and secure system for entering and exiting the competition venue.	
	Emergency backup system	There is a backup system in case of emergencies.	
Physical Evidence	Decoration	The competition venue is well-decorated and suitable.	Min (2020)
	Music	The music played at the event creates a sense of involvement in the competition.	Min (2020)
	Souvenirs received from the organizers	The souvenirs received from the organizers evoke memories of the traditional rugby football competition.	Kong and Chang (2016)
The interest in following match results	The interest in following match results	You are interested in following the competition results.	Behnam et al. (2021)
Customer Engagement	Provide constructive suggestions	You have provided valuable advice and useful information for organizing the event.	Carlson et al. (2018)
	Event evaluation	You have actively participated in evaluating the event's outcomes.	

age, education level, and interest in rugby football. The second section focused on marketing mix factors related to the management of the Chulalongkorn University vs. Thammasat University Traditional rugby football sports competition. The questions in this section were adapted from previous research by Matic et al. (2019), Memari et al. (2020), Min (2020), and Kong and Chang (2016), and were adjusted to fit the specific context of this study. The questionnaire for the third section addressed customer interest and engagement in the Chulalongkorn University vs. Thammasat University Traditional rugby football sports competition. The questions in this section were derived from past research by Behnam et al. (2021) and Carlson et al. (2018) and were adapted to suit the context of this study. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

4.RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Analysis Results

Table 2 presents the details of the demographic characteristics of the spectators, consisting of 330 respondents who participated in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 66.7% of the sample. Most of them fell within the age range of 20 to 25 years, making up 57.6%. Regarding educational background, a significant pro-

portion had completed a bachelor's degree or its equivalent, representing 88.5%. Additionally, a substantial portion of the respondents indicated an interest in the traditional rugby football sport, accounting for 67.3%.

4.2 Test Results of Construct Validity and Model Fit Indices

In this study, Integrated Generalized Structured Component Analysis (IGSCA) was employed to assess the structural model (Hwang & Takane, 2004). The statistical software GSCA Pro 1.2.1, developed by Hwang et al. (2021), was utilized for the analysis of the structural equation model (e.g., Fakfare et al., 2021; Khanngoen et al., 2023; Napontun & Pimchainoi, 2023; Napontun & Senachai, 2023). The analysis results, as presented in Table 3 and 4, revealed that the Rho coefficient, used to measure the internal consistency, ranged from .891 to .962. These values exceed the recommended threshold of .7 (Hwang & Takane, 2014). Furthermore, the factor loadings used to assess the accuracy of the structural model via factor analysis for grouping similar items within each variable ranged from .822 to .963, surpassing the recommended threshold of .7 (Hair et al., 2020). Values for Average Variance Extracted (AVE), utilized to test for convergent validity, ranged from .694 to .926, meeting the recommended criterion of greater than .5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 Characteristics of the Sample Population

Respondent Profile	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	110	33.3
	Female	220	66.7
Age	Less than 20 years	47	14.2
	20-25 years	190	57.6
	26-30 years	52	15.8
	31-35 years	41	12.4
Education	Bachelor's degree	292	88.5
	Master's degree	33	10.0
	Doctorate degree	1	.3
	Other	4	1.2
Interest in Rugby football	Interested	222	67.3
	Not Interested	108	32.7

To assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) was examined and found to have values ranging from .13 to .901. These values are below either the recommended threshold of less than .85 in the stringent criteria (Henseler et al., 2015) or less than .9 in the acceptable criteria (Gold et al., 2001; Teo et al., 2008). However, it should be noted that Process and Physical Evidence exhibited slightly higher HTMT values exceeding .9, as reported by Rasoolimanesh (2022). Nevertheless, HTMT is generally applicable only to reflective based on constructs or factor-based

models and is not suitable for use with independent variables. In this study, composite-based models were utilized, and thus, follows the recommendation of Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) to employ full-blown linearity tests to assess the accuracy of the classification of types.

Additionally, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) of the components was tested and found to be less than 5 (Table 4), indicating no significant multicollinearity issues (Hair et al., 2011). Consequently, the test results, it can be concluded that the structural equation model demonstrates construct

Table 3 Results of Structural Model Analysis and Model Fit Indices

Measurement Items	Mean	SD	Weights	Loadings	AVE	Rho
Product					.779	.914
Appropriateness of timing	4.1	.873	.389	.876		
Fun and excitement	4.17	.915	.395	.915		
Halftime shows	3.94	.948	.348	.856		
Price					.859	.924
Admission cost	4.13	.782	.542	.928		
Souvenirs cost	3.99	.797	.537	.926		
Place					.85	.919
Ease of transportation	4.31	.816	.54	.922		
Seating	4.11	.903	.544	.923		
Promotion					.91	.953
Communication channels	4.08	.745	.524	.954		
Public relations activities	4.05	.838	.524	.954		
People					.926	.962
Service	4.22	.828	.527	.963		
Staff adequacy	4.19	.849	.512	.961		
Process					.853	.945
Signpost	4.04	.790	.347	.909		
Entry-exit system	4.02	.843	.362	.928		
Emergency backup system	3.93	.862	.373	.933		
Physical Evidence					.804	.925
Decoration	4.21	.835	.385	.928		
Music	4.23	.913	.367	.881		
Souvenirs received from the organizers	4.11	.949	.363	.88		
The interest in following match results	3.97	1.326	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Customer Engagement					.694	.819
Provide constructive suggestions	2.16	1.502	.593	.822		
Event evaluation	2.55	1.586	.608	.843		
GFI=.995, SRMR=.04						

validity. Furthermore, the model fit indices, presented at the end of Table 3, indicate that the value for the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was .995, surpassing the recommended threshold of .9, while the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was .04, below the recommended threshold of .08 (Benitez et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2020; Manosuthi et al., 2021b). Hence, the measurement model exhibits adequate model fit.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing Results

The results of hypothesis testing, including path coefficients, standard errors (SE), and 95% confidence intervals (CI), using the statistical software GSCA Pro 1.2.1 developed by Hwang et al. (2021), are presented in Table 5 and Figure 2. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1,

indicating that product has a significant positive influence on the interest in following match results ($\beta = .252$). Additionally, Hypothesis 5 is supported, showing that people has a significant positive influence on interest in following match results ($\beta = .334$). Furthermore, Hypothesis 7 is supported, suggesting that physical evidence has a significant positive affect on interest in following match results ($\beta = .198$). Lastly, Hypothesis 8 is supported, revealing that interest in following match results also has a significant positive influence on customer engagement ($\beta = .209$).

The significant path coefficients indicate that the proposed model effectively captures the relationships between the constructs, providing empirical evidence for the formulated hypotheses. The influence of Product, People, and Physical Evidence on spectators' interest in following match results highlights their importance in engaging and retaining spectators

Table 4 Results of Discriminant Validity and Collinearity Analysis

HTMT	Product	Price	Place	Promotion	People	Process	Physical Evidence	VIF
Price	.807							3.051
Place	.886	.889						2.626
Promotion	.813	.779	.777					3.448
People	.828	.766	.85	.805				3.269
Process	.824	.766	.858	.865	.831			3.539
Physical Evidence	.818	.763	.841	.828	.866	.901		4.203
Customer Engagement	.343	.336	.211	.324	.13	.389	.252	

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Result
H1: Product → IR	.252	.073	[.107; .393]	Support
H2: Price → IR	.09	.071	[-.052; .228]	Not Support
H3: Place → IR	-.022	.078	[-.172; .128]	Not Support
H4: Promotion → IR	.005	.08	[-.159; .151]	Not Support
H5: People → IR	.334	.09	[.154; .507]	Support
H6: Process → IR	-.13	.081	[-.293; .03]	Not Support
H7: Physical Evidence → IR	.198	.091	[.051; .407]	Support
H8: IR → Customer Engagement	.209	.053	[.099; .312]	Support

Note: IR= Interest in following match results

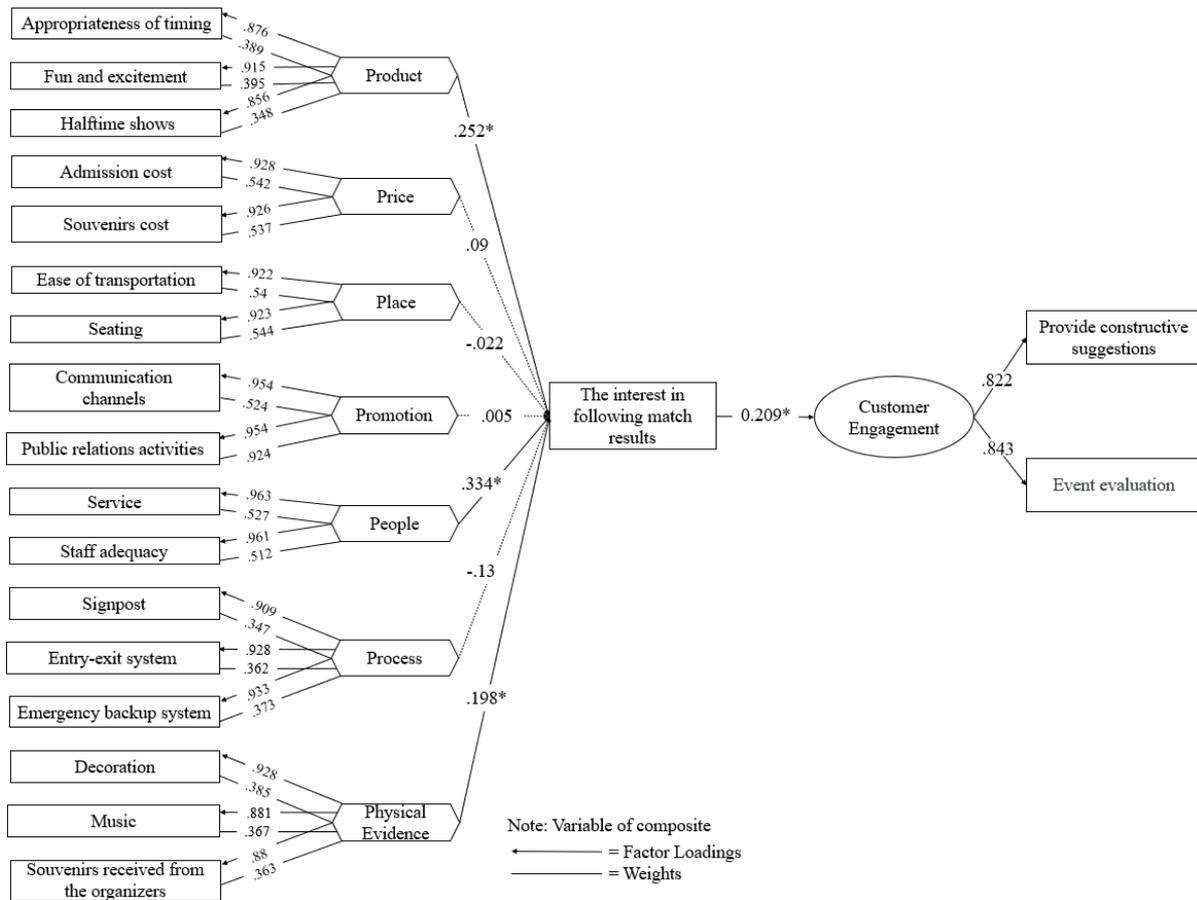


Figure 2 Path Diagram of the Tested Hypotheses

Note * = .05 significance level

in sports events. The positive impact of these factors on customer engagement underscores their potential to enhance overall spectator experiences and foster a loyal fan base.

4.4 Group Comparison Results

The results of the group comparison test, utilizing path coefficients, standard errors (SE), and 95% confidence intervals (CI), between the group interested in rugby football and the group not interested in rugby football are presented in Table 6 and Figure 3. For the group not interested in rugby football, Product, People, and Physical Evidence significantly influenced their interest in following competition outcomes. Conversely, in the group interested in rugby football, none of the Marketing Mix elements exhibited a significant influence on their interest in following competition outcomes.

Furthermore, the tests revealed that interest in following competition outcomes significantly influences customer engagement in the group interested in rugby football, but not in the group not interested in rugby football. This suggests that the level of interest in rugby football has a notable impact on customer engagement, particularly in the group with an existing interest in the sport, while it does not seem to play a significant role in customer engagement for those without an interest in rugby football.

5. DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the fundamental components of the 7Ps marketing mix in sports event management, which influence interest in tracking competition results and the level of participation. The test results revealed that

“Product,” “People,” and “Physical Evidence” significantly influence the interest in tracking competition results. Conversely, “Price,” “Place,” “Promotion,” and “Process” did not show a significant influence on spectators’ interest in tracking competition results. When comparing the variables that are essential components of significant factors

(e.g., halftime shows, fun and excitement, and decoration) with those that are not (e.g., admission cost, souvenirs cost and signpost), it is evident that the former components have a more significant impact on generating interest from the spectators.

According to the S-O-R theory, “Product,” “People,” and “Physical Evidence” are

Table 6 Group Comparison Results

Path coefficients	Interested Estimate	SE	95%CI	Not Interested Estimate	SE	95%CI
Product → IR	.188	.161	[-.149; .48]	.28*	.077	[.127; .428]
Price → IR	.32	.183	[-.052; .67]	.004	.068	[-.133; .136]
Place → IR	-.337	.173	[-.719; .032]	.144	.081	[-.002; .305]
Promotion → IR	.148	.15	[-.191; .405]	-.068	.082	[-.235; .096]
People → IR	.234	.197	[-.132; .639]	.325*	.087	[.151; .486]
Process → IR	-.077	.21	[-.456; .368]	-.117	.086	[-.298; .047]
Physical → IR	.286	.178	[.072; .627]	.163*	.102	[.032; .404]
IR → CE	.481*	.085	[.297; .638]	.125	.07	[-.025; .252]

Note: IR = The interest in following match results, CE = Customer Engagement, * = .05 significance level

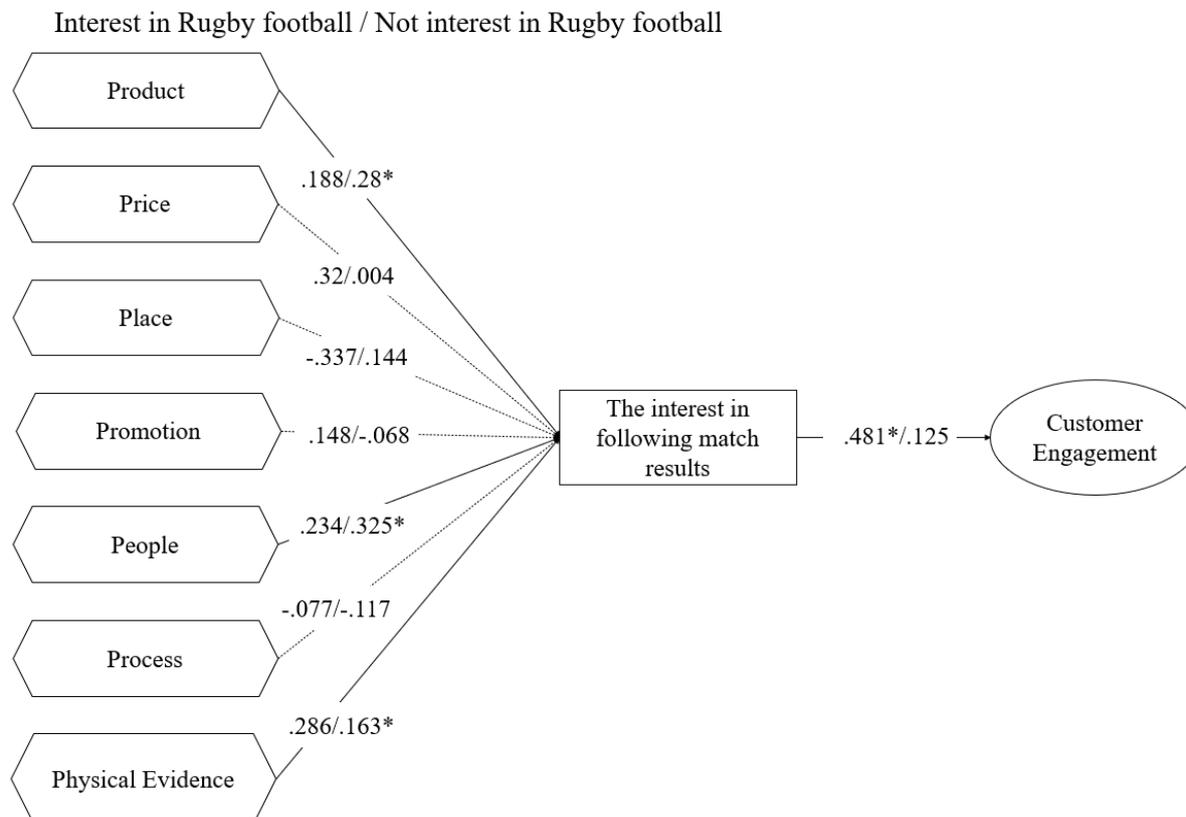


Figure 3 Path Diagram of the Group Comparison Analysis

Note: * = .05 significance level

key factors that stimulate emotional responses within this context, resulting in an increased interest in tracking competition results, ultimately leading to greater spectator engagement. The study also found that People had the highest impact ($\beta=.334$), encompassing variables such as the quality of service and staff adequacy. As People allows for real-time interaction with customers, organizations can effectively engage with the audience (Kotler, 2001). By providing event-related information and delivering it in an interesting manner, personnel can generate interest and encourage spectators to actively follow the competition results (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Therefore, if employees have the ability to provide excellent customer service, and event organizers allocate sufficient personnel, it may lead to customers being impressed with the competition management and becoming interested in following the competition's outcomes.

Furthermore, the study showed that Product had the second-highest impact ($\beta=.252$), consisting of factors such as appropriateness of timing, excitement, and halftime performances. Given that Product is easily observable during sporting events and has a clear influence on the excitement and interest in the sport, it has the ability to attract viewers' interest in tracking competition results. This is consistent with previous research that highlighted the significant role of Product in attracting interest from spectators (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020).

On the other hand, "Price," "Place," "Promotion," and "Process" did not have a significant impact on the interest in tracking competition results, which aligns with the findings by Ho et al. (2022). It is stated that "Price," "Promotion," and "Process" have no influence on the intention to watch. These factors were not sufficiently captivating to draw spectator interest in tracking competition results. For example, "Price" merely represents the pricing of the products (e.g., ticket prices and souvenir costs) and its relevance to sports event management (Mihai, 2013). Similarly, "Promotion" and "Process" did not significantly influence spectators'

intention to watch the competition, as they lacked the ability to generate interest.

However, there is a discrepancy in the findings regarding "Place," as this study contradicts the results of Ho et al. (2022), which claimed that Place had an impact on spectator intentions. While Place is considered an essential component of the Marketing Mix (Mihai, 2013), it may not be significant enough to generate sufficient interest from spectators in the context of sports event management. Nonetheless, the study confirmed that "Physical Evidence" had a significant impact ($\beta=.198$), comprising elements such as venue decoration, music, and souvenirs received from organizers. Physical Evidence is highly observable during sports events (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020), portraying the event's atmosphere effectively and adding excitement and interest to sports events. Consequently, Physical Evidence possesses the capability to attract spectator interest in tracking competition results.

The test results further indicated that the interest in tracking competition results positively influences spectator engagement ($\beta=.209$), as it demonstrates the viewers' interest in the sports event and stimulates them to seek more information by themselves. This ultimately leads to their behavioral response (Kotler et al., 2021), which is consistent with the findings of Wirtz et al. (2013), showing that interest in video content affects viewers' participation on social media platforms.

Objective two of this study aimed to explore the differential impacts of Marketing Mix components on two distinct sample groups: those interested in rugby football and those not interested in rugby football. The results of the group comparison revealed that the marketing mix components, namely "Product," "People," and "Physical Evidence," significantly and positively influenced the interest in tracking competition results in the group not interested in rugby football. However, in the group already interested in rugby football, none of the Marketing Mix components had a significant impact on their interest in tracking competition results.

The findings suggest that the Marketing Mix components, particularly “Product,” “People,” and “Physical Evidence,” possess the capacity to captivate individuals who initially lack interest in rugby football. These components contribute to creating a compelling sports competition experience, which can attract the attention of spectators who were previously disinterested in rugby football (Mihai, 2013). They evoke the essence of a vibrant and easily observable sports event, thereby igniting the initial spark of interest in rugby football among these spectators.

Conversely, for the group already interested in rugby football, the Marketing Mix components did not have a significant impact on their interest in tracking competition results. This could be attributed to the fact that they already have a pre-existing interest, which motivates them to track competition results independently without relying on the influence of marketing mix components. In this case, the marketing mix may not play a decisive role in stimulating their interest further.

Furthermore, the study revealed that, within the group interested in sports rugby, the factor of “interest in tracking competition results” significantly influenced spectator engagement. In contrast, this relationship differed among those disinterested in sports rugby, as their interest in tracking competition results did not significantly lead to behavioral engagement. This discrepancy may be attributed to the difference in levels of interest between the two groups. Those with a stronger interest in sports rugby exhibited a higher level of engagement, while those without prior interest did not display substantial behavioral engagement.

6.1 Practical Implications

The findings of this model hold significant strategic marketing implications for sports competition managers seeking to enhance spectator interest in tracking competition results, which is indicative of spectator engagement and curiosity (Park et al., 2011). To achieve this, competition managers should place importance on the

“People” aspect, such as service quality and staff adequacy. Providing training to develop a Service Mind and equipping staff with comprehensive knowledge about the sport can help convey accurate information to spectators and effectively capture their interest (da Silva & Las Casas, 2020). Additionally, it is essential for competition organizers to ensure comprehensive staffing during events to deliver excellent service.

Regarding the “Product” aspect, competition managers should carefully plan the timing of events (e.g., match duration) to be appropriate and avoid unnecessarily long schedules. Moreover, the sequence of different activities should be well-organized to create a smooth and enjoyable viewing experience for spectators. Utilizing engaging halftime shows can also leave a lasting impression on spectators, enhancing their overall experience.

Addressing the “Physical Evidence” aspect, competition managers should focus on stadium decoration and music selection to establish an atmosphere that fosters an enjoyable and exciting sports viewing experience. Moreover, distributing unique and branded souvenirs during the event can evoke the ambiance of the sporting competition and leave spectators with lasting memories (Kong & Chang, 2016).

Furthermore, the results of the multigroup analysis offer valuable insights into the Marketing Mix strategies that are vital in sparking interest among individuals who were previously not interested in sports. In this regard, competition managers can concentrate on improving the “People,” “Product,” and “Physical Evidence” aspects to attract individuals with no prior interest in sports and begin cultivating their interest in sports.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This research expands knowledge of Marketing Mix elements in the sports management industry. Firstly, it examines the fundamental components of each Marketing Mix element in the context of a sports competition to develop a comprehensive

model for strategic marketing management in sports competitions. Prior studies have not thoroughly investigated this aspect, particularly in terms of providing a composite-based analysis, which is crucial, facilitating variable management in sports competition management. This study successfully developed a more comprehensive model concerning the Marketing Mix elements for use in sports competition management.

Secondly, this study reveals that certain Marketing Mix elements (specifically, Product, People, and Physical Evidence) influence spectators who attend sports competitions without having a prior interest in the sport but participate for other reasons (e.g., to witness the opening ceremony). This finding aligns with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, which previous research has not specifically explored in this context. Thus, this study confirms that some Marketing Mix elements (Product, People, and Physical Evidence) play a crucial role as stimuli, attracting individuals without a prior interest in sports and generating interest in sports as an organism.

The theoretical implications of this study have substantial significance for the sports industry. By understanding the specific Marketing Mix elements that influence spectator interest and engagement, sports competition managers can devise targeted strategies to attract new spectators and enhance the overall spectator experience. Additionally, the composite-based analysis used in this study offers a practical and efficient approach for evaluating the Marketing Mix elements, aiding sports competition organizers in optimizing their resources and efforts for a more successful event.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, the survey respondents who attended sports competitions were predominantly female, and aged between 20 and 25 years old, leading to a bias towards this specific demographic. Future research should aim to

collect data from diverse population groups with equal representation to minimize the potential bias in the results. This will enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of spectator behavior across various demographics.

Secondly, the use of a multi-group analysis revealed relatively high standard errors (SE) due to the relatively small sample sizes in each group. To address this limitation, future studies should aim to collect larger sample sizes for each group to obtain more reliable and precise estimates. This will reduce the SE and may lead to the identification of additional significant factors influencing spectator behavior.

Additionally, the current research employed a quantitative survey approach for data collection. Future studies could consider adopting a mixed-methods approach to enrich the research findings. For instance, the inclusion of qualitative data through methods like fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) (Manosuthi et al., 2022a, 2022b), Necessary Condition Analysis (e.g., Meeprom et al., 2023; Wattanacharoensil et al., 2023), Meta Analytic (e.g., Manosuthi et al., 2020), or Importance-Performance Map Analysis (e.g., Fakfare & Manosuthi, 2023; Fakfare et al., 2023) could provide deeper insights and a more holistic understanding of the factors influencing spectator behavior in sports competitions.

Moreover, the study found that price-related factors did not significantly influence spectator interest in following the sports competition. This could be attributed to the traditional nature of the sports event, where spectators may already be willing to pay for the experience. Future research could explore the possibilities of price increases for admission fees and souvenir items to study the potential impact on overall revenue for sports competition managers.

In conclusion, while this study contributes valuable insights into spectator behavior in sports competitions, it is essential to recognize its limitations. Future research should strive for more comprehensive and

representative data collection methods, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches, to better understand the intricacies of spectator preferences and interests. This will aid sports competition managers in developing effective marketing strategies and maximizing revenue potential while ensuring an enjoyable and engaging experience for spectators.

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