



Growth Of Sports Tourism In India: Opportunities And Challenges

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Abstract: Growth and development of sports tourism has emerged as an important parameter which can contribute to overall development of an economy. Thus, to facilitate the development of economy, promotion of local culture, and to attract more customers, it is necessary to study sports tourism. In this context, the present research has focused on establishment of sports tourism in India as India is now emerging as a sport major economy especially owing to its performance in Cricket, Hockey, Wrestling, Football and other Olympic sports.

The research found that sports tourism offers considerable economic benefits, comprising job creation, infrastructure development, and augmented cultural alteration, which can have positive ripple effects across the country. But by focusing on sustainable practices and safeguarding that local communities benefit, India can create a robust sports tourism industry that contributes to its socio-economic development while preserving its cultural heritage.

Index Terms - India, Sports, Sports Tourism, Opportunities Challenges

Introduction

Sports tourism is a relatively new concept in tourism. Mainly, tourism is considered as a means to travel for pleasure while sports tourism is a recreational activity [1]. Sports tourism is a sub type of tourism wherein either individuals participate in the sport(s) or observe various sports activities that takes place at the destination. Its purpose is to enjoy and attend various sports events while acting as a tourist to the host destination of the sport. In the recent times, sports tourism has gained popularity among people. This is because it serves as a getaway plan for the weekends or as a reason for visiting the destination while contributing to the tourism of the destination in question [2].

Sports tourism is a broad concept which entails various forms of sports events like event-based tourism, adventure sports, recreational sports and nostalgia sports events. Environment presents multiple mediums for recreational and adventure sports in its natural environment as well as in artificial terrain. The event-based sport competitions are held in the natural environment as well as in artificial terrain. These include events on passes and peaks which is categorized as mountain tourism, rapids that is water tourism and canyons and caves visits [3]. These are also for educational and research purposes for children and scholars. This is because many a times research students travel to multiple destinations for research purposes where they are studying the various sports events which are conducted in Indian and abroad. Several schools also promote sports events and take their students to such events to witness and learn from the athletes [4]. Another type of sports event discussed is nostalgia sports event. Nostalgia sports events are the ones wherein the destination holds some historical significance of the sport such as sports halls and famous sports events historical sites [5].

Sports tourism has a series of impacts on host communities and destinations. Well-planned and well-implemented sport events can have multiple impacts on the host destination. Such impacts can be economic, social/cultural and environmental impacts that sports events possess [6]. Economic impacts of sports tourism are considered as 'hard impact' and are seen to be beneficial by the local stakeholders. A few of its benefits are employment, prolonged tourism season, increased tourism, new tax revenue and many more. In contrast to economic impacts, social/cultural impacts are considered as 'soft impacts' of sports tourism. These mainly focus on local resident's quality of life, enhanced social cohesion and pride, a new destination image and the potential to increase sports participation among the locals [7]. Environmental impacts are both positive and negative. Positive impact is seen in terms of developed sports infrastructure on devastated land which improves the quality of the site. There are many lands which are of no use to the farmers for crop plantation because those are not productive. However, if these lands are utilized for organizing sports events then, it does not impact the local residents of that area since utilization of the land is improving the quality of that land. While local stakeholders consider the environmental impact as negative because of the increased pollution due to such events. Some other negative impacts include increased heat conditions and poor air quality. Therefore, it is suggested that the organizers of the sports events should consider creating climate-resilient events, infrastructure, and legacies [8].

Based on above discussion it can be stated that growth and development of sports tourism has emerged as an important parameter which can contribute to overall development of an economy. Thus, to facilitate the development of economy, promotion of local culture, and to attract more customers, it is necessary to study sports tourism. It also facilitates the involvement of the local government, policy promotion and marketing, local employment opportunities and the exposure of marketing media. A deep dive into the complexities of all these topics and the relevance of sports tourism in the growth of tourism industry is only possible with a deeper analysis into sports tourism [9]. In this context, the present research has focused on establishment of sports tourism in India as India is now emerging as a sport major economy especially owing to its performance in Cricket, Hockey, Wrestling, Football and other Olympic sports.

I. OPPORTUNITIES IN SPORTS TOURISM

Economic Benefits

Sports activities such as competitions, championships, tournaments and leagues have huge contribution towards the economic development of the country. Sports tourism has a high demand on the economic system in terms of income and added value [10]. The economic impacts associated with sports tourism have a high impact on new employment opportunities development for local residents which in turn improves the national economic health. The economic improvements in the locality lead to improved infrastructure and facilities. This economic growth results into the improved standard of living of local inhabitants [11]. On the contrary, there are also some negative impacts of increased sports tourism which includes price inflation, increased cost of living and temporary employment and unemployment of locals [12].

A research conducted by [13] stated that alcohol consumption in sports tourism is observed to hold a positive relationship with economic development. During sports tourism, alcohol consumption causes a high elevation in the economic growth of the country and leads to FDI inflows. Sports tourism also contributes to the country's foreign exchange reserves and provides direct and indirect employment to a broad segment of population [14]. The growth of sports tourism in India has increased job opportunities for the local residents for preparing handcrafted specialty of their city for the tourists to take back as souvenirs. The local residents also take up the jobs of tourism guides or brokers for organizing the tickets for the sports events. This creates multiple job opportunities for the local residents and improves their economic conditions. Thus, sports tourism holds wide range of benefits in the economic growth of the country considering the rich culture and craftsmanship in India.

The research conducted by Idrees et al., (2021) [13] stated that sports tourism holds a positive impact on Gross Domestic Product. Therefore, it is suggested to the policy makers and the Indian Government to focus on increasing the investment in sports and related tourism. This will give a further boost to the sport tourism industry which in turn will boost the economic growth of the country.

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructural development is backbone for hosting any sports event, let alone for development of sports tourism. These include Sports Venues like Stadiums, arenas, golf courses, racetracks etc.; transportation infrastructure incorporating airports, roads, and rail systems that connect venues to cities; accommodation like hotels, resorts, and other lodging facilities; public utilities: reliable water, electricity, waste management, and telecommunications systems and health and safety services incorporating medical facilities and emergency response systems [16].

Improved infrastructure enhances the capacity of the country to host tourists, leading to more spending in local businesses, job creation, and enhanced revenue streams [17]. Destinations that successfully host major sporting events improve their international profile thereby attracting more tourism and investment. Improved and updated infrastructure ensures the movement of tourists, thereby contributing to cross-cultural experiences and crossovers during international sports events. The sports facilities like friendly tourism guides, and numerous programs for players to participate and for viewers to watch should be established. Sport-effective indoor and outdoor areas, and other such activities should be well-established in a developed sports tourism industry as well [18]. Even mountain areas are used for sports events. Therefore, the mountain areas must be developed in terms of infrastructure for sports events to be organized in hilly areas. Accessibility to proper communication network is needed for the smooth organization of sports events. It is also source for creation of jobs for the local residents which in turn can improve their economic conditions [19].

Some examples of successful investments in sports infrastructure incorporate Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar made huge investments in new stadiums, road systems, and metro lines [20]. This showcased how countries build extensive infrastructure to attract global sporting events.

Another example is the current investment by UK government on Wimbledon has made this sport an year-round tourist destination, enhancing both its sporting reputation and economy of the nation [21].

Government Initiatives

Government holds all the power to control or to expand the sports tourism activities in their respective countries. The research conducted by I. Widianingsih *et al.*, (2023) [22] stated that Indonesian government has taken several steps to organize F1 Powerboat (F1H2O) sports event on Lake Toba, Indonesia. F1H2O is the world's biggest motorboat racing competition for motorboats. Participants come from all over the world to participate in this competition organized by Union Internationale Motonautique (UIM). The laws, presidential regulations, government regulations, and ministerial regulations are all designed in such a way which promotes the sports tourism industry in Indonesia.

Governments create such policies that facilitates in the growth of sports tourism. This can incorporate visa regulations to confirming hassle free customs processes for tourists attending international events. This enhances the overall experience of the tourist thereby creating a positive image of the country. Governments may also create such strict and abiding laws for organizing events which ensure safety and endorse inclusivity [23].

Governments contend to host major international sporting events. This is because Governments understand that hosting such events will increase visibility and reputation of their country on the global front. Hosting such events necessitates huge government investment. Such opportunities facilitate the Government in attracting foreign investment, thus augmenting a nation's international image [9].

There are multiple initiatives which Indian Government has also undertaken to promote sports tourism in India. India is issuing on-arrival visa to visitors from over 180 countries, the UDAN regional connectivity rollout, the adoption of digital payments, and the focus on infrastructure. These initiatives have been undertaken by the Government of India to promote sports tourism in India. India is also expanding its roots to host international sports events which will promote tourism in India and also benefit its reputation in the global front [24].

Community development is another important aspect contributing to sports tourism. The local businesses support the growth of sports facilities, transportation and accommodation for the tourists. Collaboration of multiple parties is needed to establish a well-equipped sports tourism network in the country. These include government, banks, private corporations, intermediaries, foundations, city councils, community development corporations, existing local businesses and residents. Establishing a well-equipped sports tourism network is possible with efficient talent management. India is focusing on establishing an efficient talent management network who can efficiently manage all the pre-requisites needed for establishing a well-equipped sports

tourism network. This can be identified as an opportunity for India to establish its roots in organizing international sports events [25]. All these parties if work in collaboration, can support the establishment of a well-developed sports tourism which can in turn benefit the national economy and lead to infrastructural development in their country [26].

II. CHALLENGES IN SPORTS TOURISM

Infrastructure and Facilities

Infrastructure has a direct association with the experience of the spectators/ visitor and athletes. Such experiences can make or break the sports tourism for the host destination. Sports tourism industry faces certain challenges in its infrastructure and facilities. For example, poorly maintained or outdated stadiums can spoil the experience of international tournaments thereby decreasing the fan appeal [27]. For sports tourism to develop, nations are required to invest heavily in not only sports-specific infrastructure but also in a wider range of associated facilities. The development of this sector can be determined only on the synchronized inputs of both public and private bodies to build and sustain world-class infrastructure.

There exists a few major concerns in the infrastructure and facilities of organizing sports events. The first of these concerns is to locate relevant places to perform outdoor activities. This is because every place is not suitable to conduct such events. The local population around the area and the facilities available in that area are also to be analyzed before conducting any sports event in a particular place. The second concern is to analyze the conditions in which outdoor sports can be performed as they majorly contribute in the development strategies of the economy. There are furthermore challenges faced with a poorly designed infrastructure for outdoor sports tourism. These include degradation of environment, damage of nature, imbalance in biodiversity and loss to the economic health for the future generations to survive. It is often seen that the tourists prefer to visit places with developed infrastructure for tourists and well-maintained sites. Therefore, tourism planners should take the concern of safety assessment and social and economic sustainability, very seriously [28].

Poor infrastructure development is a major challenge for sports tourism in Kashmir Valley, India. Therefore, a scientific move to remove the hindrances is required. The factors of soft infrastructure have a high impact on sports tourism based on the destination. Sports infrastructure and security establishments can be a challenge if not managed efficiently. Similarly, environment infrastructure, public utilities, and typical tourism infrastructure are challenges in infrastructural arrangements that are usually faced in Kashmir Valley. Therefore, proper infrastructural arrangements should be made for sports tourism to be established in India [29].

Environmental and Social Concerns

The widespread of Covid 19 lead to the cancellation of many mega sports events around the world. This leads to various economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts to the sports industry. This has been identified as a major challenge for sports industries because without social interactions and going outdoor, participations in sports evenetsis not possible. Even, organizing sports events where there will be huge gathering of people was prohibited. This even impacted the physical health of many sports athletes. However, the cancellation of sports events leads to the loss of millions of dollars in tourism revenue for local economies. It also affects the socio-cultural gathering spaces of sports fans [30].

Sports tourism habitually encompasses long-distance travel via different means like air, road, or rail. This leads to significant enhancement of carbon emissions. Big sports events necessitate lots of energy for stadiums, lighting, broadcasting, and transportation. This contributes hugely to the carbon footprint [31].

It is observed that environmental beauty plays an important in the economic development of sports tourism. This is because while playing several sports, players are exposed to the natural beauty of their surroundings like while racing or playing water sports. In such sports both the participants as well as the viewers are exposed to a whole a lot of natural beauty and so it is important to prevent the natural environment from the harmful gases and pollution. With such precautions, environment will be saved and economy will also rise due to increased sports tourists' activities [32]. Sports tourism, particularly adventure sports can intrude the local ecological units, wildlife, and natural sceneries. Friable zones like coral reefs, forests, or mountain are predominantly susceptible [33]. Therefore, for sports tourism to develop, there

should be consciousness on the environment and socio-cultural impacts that it can cause. Otherwise, it will not only lead to downfall of the sports tourism but overall functioning of the region.

India is known for its rich and varied cultural heritage across all the nations. Sports tourism invites loads of visitors to India from all over the world. This directly or indirectly imposes a high amount of social and cultural impact on the host community. The traditions and culture that the visitors bring with them sometimes exploit the culture of the host city and its people. This also pollutes the environment due to more consumption of vehicles in the destination city. Therefore, both environmental and socio-cultural concerns have been witnessed from sports tourism [34].

3.3 Regulatory and Management Issues

Regulatory and management issues in sports tourism are significant features that influence the achievement and sustainability of this developing sector. These concerns can generate obstacles to expansion or add to disorganizations in managing events and tourism activities.

Host cities and countries often levy taxes on the revenues created from sports tourism, comprising of ticket sales, patronages, and distribution rights to name a few. High taxes or compound tax managements can decrease the cost-effectiveness of hosting events and discourage investment [10]. Some countries enforce tourism taxes which can blowup the complete cost for international sports tourists, discouraging presence of lots of audience and sports tourists.

Many times there are inconsistent guidelines regarding sports proceedings, tourism undertakings, safety ethics, and environmental fortification. This absence of uniformity generates misunderstanding and can dissuade international sports tourists [35]. Procurement of licenses to host large-scale sports events frequently encompasses navigating multifaceted bureaucratic processes. This can delay or discourage prospective sporting events [36].

Healthy people are the biggest asset to the country and physical fitness of the people is the foundation of the country's competitiveness. To protect people's right to participate in sports tourism activities, many focal policy decisions are being made by the government. The policy decisions made by the government and the management practices followed by them to implement them for people of all ages are very important and in progress for constant development of the country. Failure to provide equal rights to people can be a challenge for the youth of the country as they will not be able to participate in sports events to show their talent. The medals won from the sport events shows the vigilance of the country and the fitness of its youth. Therefore, it is important to have such regulatory policies in place which can protect human rights and benefit the country [37].

Stakeholders hold a key importance in the growth of sports tourism in the country. It is often a belief of the stakeholders that to enhance the sports tourism industry, the first step is to be taken from small sporting events instead of mega sporting events. Small sporting events support the local businesses and opens up various possibilities for local residents to take part in the event and participate their best. Such events help in tourist revival and improve the region's image. With the support of stakeholders, such small sporting events help in improving public awareness and gain popularity among the sports tourism industry. Due to inadequate management, it is seen that the stakeholders do not support small sporting events and only focus on mega sporting events. This becomes a challenge for the sports tourism in India because most of the athletes start from small sporting events and rise up to mega sporting events with their talent. However, if the stakeholders will not support the small events then, it could be a big challenge for the youth of India [38].

III. CASE STUDIES

Cricket is not just a game for Indians rather it's a religion with a heavy fan base. Billions of Indians follow cricket as a hobby whether they are children or adults. Considering such a sizable following, BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) introduced IPL (Indian Premier League) in 2008. It very quickly gained popularity in the entire world and became the most lucrative annual sporting event for BCCI [39]. IPL soon gained attention of all the cricket viewers worldwide and developed even bigger fan base. Even in pandemic times, IPL's popularity did not see any sorts of fall and continued to entertain the entire audiences. Partnering with multiple Bollywood celebrities and successful businessmen, it continued to expand through each passing year. Many challenges came along the way such as raising funds for organizing such a mega sporting event, getting the relevant sports facilities for the players, arranging transportation and accommodation and many more such hurdles came along the way. But, BCCI continued to constantly work on resolving all the impediments and not lose any opportunity which came their way. IPL's emergence was also dependent on fan engagement, social inclusion and the development of infrastructure to support all the necessities of the event [40]. The extreme support received from the Government of India with their policy implementations in favor of the initiative also supported BCCI with their efforts in making IPL a success. IPL increased sports

tourism in India since it is hosted by India. The matches are held in different stadiums across India. This gives rise to sports tourism in the respective cities where the matches are held and in turn affects the economic growth of India [41].

In 2017, Kabaddi emerged as one of India's most important non-cricketing sport. Since many years, India had an unbeatable international track record as world champions. But still Kabaddi was not a well-recognized sport in India. PKL (Pro kabaddi League) was India's first men's professional kabaddi league introduced by Mashal Sports and Star India in 2014. With its origin, Kabaddi faced a lot of challenges in its establishment. The failure for women's kabaddi league was such that it was discontinued after its first year. However, slowly and gradually when PKL gained some popularity from its fifth season in 2017, doors for more opportunities opened up. The gained popularity lead to sponsorship opportunities, huge player bids, prize money and television viewership [42]. PKL then progressed in homegrown through its visibility, created aspirational value among youth and created revenue through India's own sports. A lot of support was also taken from the government for infrastructural development and policy implementations. Along with immense managerial and economic support provided by the stakeholders, it was finally possible to conduct a mega sporting event, PKL. Every new sporting event introduced by any country needs lots of cooperation from many sectors. It is also important to always keep in mind the economic, social/cultural and environmental impacts which any such sporting events can cause to the nation and appropriate actions for the mitigation of any such impacts should be taken accordingly. Though with efficient management, all the impacts were tackled. PKL being an Indian sport also attracted tourists from across the country. This further gave rise to sports tourism in the cities where PKL was organized [43]. Thus, events such as IPL and PKL drastically increased sports tourism in India.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the growth of sports tourism in India presents significant opportunities and challenges. With an growing awareness in sports events, better-quality infrastructure, and a increasing global profile in sports, India is well-positioned to turn out to be a prominent sports tourism destination. The sector offers considerable economic benefits, comprising job creation, infrastructure development, and augmented cultural alteration, which can have positive ripple effects across the country. However, challenges continue in the form of infrastructural gaps, supervisory hurdles, and environmental sustainability concerns. Addressing these issues will necessitate a cooperative approach connecting government bodies, private sector stakeholders, and local communities. Speculation in world-class sports amenities, well-organized transportation networks, and reliable marketing efforts will be vital to maximizing India's sports tourism prospective. By focusing on sustainable practices and safeguarding that local communities benefit, India can create a robust sports tourism industry that contributes to its socio-economic development while preserving its cultural heritage.

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