

Risk Perception of Sports Events: Moroccan Context

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Abstract:- Sports events rank high among the most sought-after recreational pursuits. Nevertheless, these activities come laden with inherent hazards that may lead to severe injuries or even fatalities. Before crafting an effective risk management strategy, it becomes imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of how risk is perceived within this context. Such insights can significantly enhance communication between professionals and participants, ultimately contributing to the formulation of a more robust risk management plan. Risk, as a concept, has been defined in various ways, ranging from intricate technical calculations to the more psychologically-oriented psychometric paradigm. This psychometric approach, deeply rooted in the fields of psychology and decision sciences, has garnered substantial recognition within the realm of social sciences (Sjo"berg et al., 2004).

Notably, the concept of uncertainty, closely intertwined with risk perception, features prominently in numerous behavior theories (Sjo"berg et al., 2004). Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that a consensus on a universally applicable assessment method remains elusive. The characteristics of perceived risk exhibit significant variations among individuals, types of hazards, and situational contexts. The primary aim of this investigation is to shed light on how diverse stakeholders perceive risk in the domain of sporting events, employing the psychometric paradigm. Furthermore, we endeavor to pinpoint the factors that influence risk perception specifically within the context of sporting events.

To accomplish this, we have opted for a qualitative research methodology, affording us a deeper exploration of Moroccan organizations and their perspectives on risk. Our approach hinges on semi-structured interviews guided by a predefined set of questions, conducted with officials and experts affiliated with sports federations in Morocco, as well as the Moroccan Olympic Committee (CNOM). The analysis of the interviewees' responses was executed through manual content analysis, enabling us to address our central inquiry effectively.

I. INTRODUCTION

To this day, sports stand out as one of the most significant global social phenomena (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 2010). As a consequence, the majority of sports activities inherently carry some degree of risk, even when reasonable precautions have been taken. Consequently, it is imperative for governing bodies to demonstrate their awareness of

potential risks within their respective sports and their commitment to implementing appropriate measures for risk control. This standard practice is typically facilitated through the utilization of a risk management process. Despite the established importance of risk assessment within the framework of comprehensive risk management systems across various industries, its application has not been widely acknowledged within the sports and recreational sectors.

Therefore, it becomes essential to comprehend the role of risk assessment and recognize its contribution within the broader context of risk management. The overarching matter of risk management within major sporting events has gained escalating significance in recent times, driven by factors such as globalization, the escalating popularity of sports (Preuss, 2004), and notable incidents like the World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11), the Atlanta Olympic bombing, as well as substantial security expenditures such as the \$3 billion allocated in Athens for the 2004 Olympic Games. As Chappellet (2001, p. 18) aptly articulated, "the ultimate success of these events can indeed be defined by the extent to which they manage to avoid, or at the very least, mitigate most of the risks."

Events possess the capacity to give rise to both internal and external risks and crises, a consequence of their sheer size, scope, utilization of equipment, and the attraction of substantial crowds to specific locations over defined periods. These potential risks encompass a wide spectrum of operational aspects, spanning guest and staff well-being, overcrowding, environmental hazards, and compliance with local regulations. It's noteworthy that these risks can emanate from sources both within and outside the organizing entity and may be instigated by members of the public, suppliers, or even the event organizers themselves due to inaction.

As underscored by Getz (2002), instances of festival crises and failures are not uncommon, with the primary cause of event mishaps often attributed to a lack of advanced or strategic planning. This deficiency can be attributed to the limited proficiency and knowledge of event organizers in systematically planning and managing risks. Allen et al. (2008) further emphasize that a substantial proportion of event incidents stem from managerial incompetence, underscoring the imperative for all event managers to acquaint themselves with the principles of risk and risk management.

Indeed, event organizers bear a responsibility to ensure the provision of a secure environment for attendees, participants, staff, suppliers, and even sponsors. The practice

of risk management equips event organizers with the tools to conceive and execute events in the safest manner feasible while concurrently mitigating potential losses (Berlonghi, 1994). Hence, it becomes imperative for event organizations to formally devise plans and construct strategies aimed at addressing the potential repercussions of unforeseen circumstances.

In the context of large-scale events, there exists a substantial body of literature that has delved into the risks associated with hosting the Olympic Games (Neirotti & Hilliard, 2006; Taylor & Toohey, 2007; Toohey & Taylor, 2008). However, these studies have primarily centered around respondents' overall assessments of risk, with only limited exploration into the dynamic evolution of participants' risk perceptions in a cause-and-effect framework. Consequently, our understanding of the factors influencing risk perception remains somewhat underdeveloped, and it remains unclear whether risk perception exerts an influence on event outcomes. Intriguingly, while prior empirical research has identified risk perception as a significant predictor of future behavior, most studies on risk perception within the context of mega-events have not probed the relationship between risk perception and behavioral intention.

In light of these considerations, our central inquiry emerges: What are the factors that shape risk perception within the domain of major sporting events?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Sport Event*

As per the literature in sports economics, particularly studies conducted by Roche (1994) and Llopis-Goig (2012), sports events possess distinctive characteristics that set them apart. These events are typically characterized by their grand scale, global significance, brief yet precisely defined duration, and are typically organized by a country or city that competes vigorously to secure the privilege of hosting them. They have the unique ability to draw substantial numbers of participants, including athletes, and spectators, hailing from both local and international backgrounds. Moreover, these events garner extensive coverage from international media outlets and necessitate substantial investments in various aspects such as infrastructure, logistics, and security. Typically, they are overseen by a local organizing committee comprised of representatives from national and local government authorities as well as international sports federations.

To exemplify the concept of a mega-sporting event, two of the most prominent and widely attended events globally, the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, have been chosen. When it comes to sporting events that wield a profound impact on the economy and developmental trajectory of the host country, it is these two - the Olympic Games and the World Cup of soccer - that stand out prominently.

➤ *Sport Event Risk*

Risk is commonly defined as any potential threat capable of adversely affecting an organization's ability to attain its objectives and effectively execute its strategies. The Australian and New Zealand standard (AS/NZS ISO 31000: 2009) provides a definition of risk as "the impact of uncertainty on objectives." In a similar vein, Glaesser (2006: 38) characterizes risk as "the result of both the extent of potential damage and the likelihood of its occurrence." Meanwhile, Berlonghi (1994: 19) perceives risk as "a genuine possibility of incurring a loss or being exposed to potential losses." These definitions collectively highlight the essence of risk, which involves an element of uncertainty and the potential for this uncertainty to lead to harm or loss for an organization.

Such harm or loss can encompass various forms, including physical harm such as injuries, fatalities, and property damage, as well as negative repercussions like damage to an organization's public image, legal actions, or financial setbacks (Allen et al., 2008: 588). These risks can be attributed to any factor capable of influencing the outcome of an event or its associated activities, posing a threat to the event or the organization responsible for it. Risk may stem from hazards associated with the environmental characteristics of the event site, the nature and utilization of equipment, or the conduct of stakeholders involved in the event, such as spectators.

As articulated by Leopkey and Parent (2009a), risk extends its impact not only to the organizing committee of an event but also encompasses all event stakeholders, including participants, spectators, sponsors, and others. Risks can be categorized into those originating from internal factors and those stemming from external influences. Consequently, event managers must possess a comprehensive understanding of and the ability to manage risks that pertain not only to their own organization but also potential external risks linked to the broader political, economic, environmental, social, and technological context in which the event unfolds.

➤ *Perception of Event Risk*

From the perspective of event organizers, risk management holds a pivotal role in the realm of event management, given that risk can directly precipitate the failure of an event. Consequently, the considerations pertaining to risk management may carry even greater significance than the initial planning and design phases. Philip & Kiren (1990) conducted a study analyzing the process and outcomes of risk management in the context of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.

Their findings indicated that the 1988 Winter Olympics achieved a relative cost-effectiveness due to the presence of a well-structured risk management plan. In a similar vein, Chang and Singh (1990) proposed that the two-step risk management process employed by the risk management committee of the 1988 Winter Olympics could be adapted for the planning of virtually any event.

Previous research has underscored the importance of participants' perception of the aforementioned risk management strategy. However, it's worth noting that much of the existing literature tends to be conceptual or descriptive in nature. For instance, Taylor & Toohey (2007) observed that safety was not a primary concern, particularly among local participants during the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. While security measures were generally viewed neutrally and were not seen as detracting from the overall Games experience, nearly half of the respondents reported that their family or friends expressed apprehension about attending the Games due to potential terrorist threats (Taylor & Toohey).

Furthermore, Taylor and Toohey (2007) posited that risk perception tends to escalate in the lead-up to participation, especially among those who ultimately decide not to attend. Neirotti & Hilliard (2006) found that the perception of insecurity at the 2004 Athens Olympics contributed to a decline in attendance compared to previous Olympic Games. However, interestingly, both studies concurred that participants in the 2004 Olympics did not perceive terrorism as a significant threat to their safety during the Games. Instead, the primary motivation for participants' attendance was the desire for a "once in a lifetime experience."

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Hence, our research endeavor involved the execution of an exploratory study focused on Moroccan sports event organizers. The primary aim of this article was to provide a contextual framework for a theoretical model drawn from existing literature. This framework was established through an examination of event managers' perceptions concerning the risks that impact the performance of sports events in Morocco. To achieve this, we adopted a qualitative research approach. We conducted semi-structured interviews with experienced managers and experts within the sports event domain. These interviews were designed to elicit insights into the factors that shape their risk perceptions when organizing sports events. Our research participants were carefully selected from three major cities: Casablanca, Rabat, and Marrakech.

To accomplish this objective, we reached out to a diverse group of event managers in Morocco, encompassing both paid employees and volunteers. The selection of the specific types of events and interviewees was guided by several key criteria, including their level of renown, experience, and the positions of responsibility they held within these organizations.

IV. MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual model developed for this study incorporates various factors that influence risk perception in major sporting events. These factors have been drawn from the works of multiple researchers, including Alhakami and Slovic (1994), Cha (1997), Cvetkovich (1999), Earle and Cvetkovich (1995), Fischhoff et al. (1978; 1979), Flynn,

Burns, Mertz, and Slovic (1992), Frewer, Howard, and Shepherd (1998), Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera (1986), Lindel and Earle (1983), Maderthanner et al. (1978), MacGregor, Slovic, Mason, and Detweiler (1994), Siegrist (1999; 2000), Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000), Cvetkovich (2000), Sjoberg and Drottz-Sjoberg (1991), Slovic (1986; 1987), and Van Eiser and Spears (1986).

The literature has extensively explored these variables and their impact on risk perception when applied to the context of sporting events. The following section presents a review of the findings from this body of research.

➤ *Perceived Risk Characteristics*

• *Knowledge*

Several researchers have delved into the connection between knowledge and risk perception, and their collective findings suggest a clear relationship. Specifically, they have determined that heightened levels of risk knowledge are linked with reduced levels of perceived risk (Hines et al., 1986; Sjoberg & Drottz-Sjoberg, 1991; Slovic, 1987). Additionally, Mun (2003) identified that the lowest perceived risk in sports activities is associated with a higher degree of perceived risk. Notably, this lower perceived risk is primarily linked to the dimensions of voluntariness and knowledge. These findings align with the observations of other researchers, such as Lindell and Earle (1983), who reported that individuals who participated in sports more frequently tended to exhibit greater risk awareness and harbored fewer fear-based perceptions of risk.

• *Trust*

The role of trust in information sources and institutions has emerged as a crucial determinant of risk perception in recent discussions. Cha (1997) has argued that a lack of trust within a community can lead to the dismissal of risk information provided by these sources and institutions. This skepticism, in turn, contributes to an elevated perception of risk.

Trust serves as a mechanism to simplify decision-making in the context of sports activities. Instead of individuals having to make intricate, knowledge-based judgments, they often place their trust in experts whose opinions are deemed reliable (Earle & Cvetkovich, 1995). Siegrist (2000) demonstrated the substantial impact of trust on the perception of both benefits and risks. Those who placed trust in authorities tended to perceive less risk compared to individuals who did not extend such trust (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2000).

• *Experiment*

Numerous researchers have undertaken investigations into the interplay between experience and risk perception. The findings consistently reveal that higher levels of perceived risk are correlated with lower levels of experience (Richardson, Sorensen & Soderstrom, 1987). Experience, in this context, is recognized as a significant determinant of how individuals gauge their sensitivity to risk.

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with ample experience dealing with persistent and extreme risks may exhibit reduced levels of concern. For instance, individuals residing in proximity to hazardous facilities often demonstrate a lesser degree of apprehension about associated risks compared to those who live farther away (MacGregor, Slovic et al.). This phenomenon underscores the influence of personal experience in shaping risk perceptions.

• *Perceived benefits and risks*

Certain studies have identified significant correlations in the relationship between perceived benefits and perceived risks (Alhakami and Slovic, 1994). Siegrist and Cvetkovich (2000) further observed negative correlations between perceived risks and perceived benefits when trust was factored into the equation. When participants perceived numerous benefits associated with a technology, they tended to rate the associated risks as lower than those who viewed the technology as non-beneficial. These findings have led to the suggestion that modifying benefit perceptions could potentially alter risk perceptions (Frewer, Howard & Shepherd, 1998).

The need for consistency in one's beliefs and the inclination to avoid cognitive dissonance may help explain the negative association between risk and perceived benefits (Alhakami & Slovic, 1998). In essence, the drive for cognitive coherence tends to devalue risks and elevate benefits for technologies or scenarios perceived as favorable, while the opposite effect occurs for those seen as unfavorable.

For a visual representation of these factors influencing risk perception in sporting events, please refer to the proposed conceptual model depicted in Figure 1.

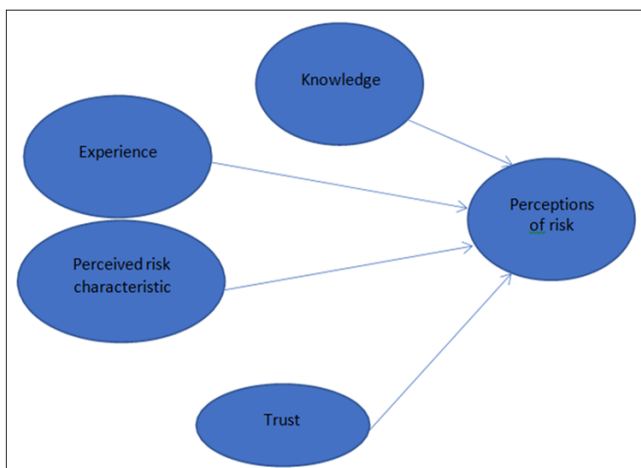


Fig 1 Proposed Conceptual Framework for Factors Affecting Risk Perception in Sports Events.

V. RESULTS

The research findings point to a notable complexity that event managers encounter when it comes to devising and executing effective risk management measures within their organizations, particularly in contrast to other sectors. It is intriguing to note that the influence of social pressure stemming from personal relationships was not a topic discussed by the respondents. Instead, the respondents identified the presence of substantial barriers hindering the implementation of risk planning practices and behaviors.

Primarily, the significant growth of the sector has given rise to a proliferation of small-scale operators who often grapple with limited resources in terms of time, finances, and motivation to prioritize comprehensive event risk planning strategies. This multifaceted challenge underscores the unique landscape that event managers navigate in their efforts to ensure safety and mitigate risks within their events.

The motivation behind this study stemmed from a growing need to gain deeper insights into the implications of risk perception within the context of major sporting events. Prior research has underscored that risk perception concerning these events plays a pivotal role in shaping participants' satisfaction with the event. Nonetheless, there has been a relative dearth of knowledge concerning the factors that impact risk perception, and the extent to which risk perception influences individuals' intentions to participate in such events remains unclear.

The present study sought to validate a conceptual model that examines the intricate interplay between risk perception, event satisfaction, risk perception orientation, and behavioral intention. Our findings, consistent across different study samples, consistently showed that individuals with prior event experience and heightened event interest tended to exhibit lower levels of risk perception. Importantly, reduced risk perception was directly linked to higher levels of event satisfaction. Interestingly, our results indicated that prior experience with the event had more pronounced effects within the selected sample.

The most significant discovery in our study is that lower risk perception is associated with greater participant satisfaction with the event. However, this heightened satisfaction does not necessarily translate into a greater perceived likelihood of participating in future events. Furthermore, our results hint at the possibility of moderating relationships between these predictors that may vary among specific population subgroups. These findings shed light on the intricate dynamics at play in the context of risk perception, event satisfaction, and behavioral intentions among participants in major sporting events.

Furthermore, our study revealed that seeking information as a means to mitigate risk did not lead to a reduction in risk perception among national and international participants. This discovery aligns with the findings of Sjöberg (1998), who similarly found that knowledge about a specific subject had minimal impact on risk perception. Sjöberg (1998) suggested that these weak effects might be attributed to cognitive limitations, which hinder individuals from effectively processing and utilizing the information presented, thus leading to limited influence on their risk perception.

In light of our overall results, it becomes evident that prior experience with the event and a genuine interest in it are the primary precursors influencing the risk perception associated with major sporting events. Furthermore, our findings highlight that a perceived low level of risk is more strongly associated with heightened event satisfaction than with the likelihood of individuals deciding to attend future iterations of the Games. These insights underscore the central role played by prior experience and event interest in shaping perceptions of risk and their consequences in the context of major sporting events.

In summary, our study findings reveal that the factors influencing risk perceptions and their consequences are more intricate than previously indicated, necessitating the consideration of cultural variables and other characteristics closely tied to behavioral intentions. The lack of support for certain conceptual variables in the context of mega-events can be attributed to how these concepts were operationalized.

This study underscores that the nature of perceived risk associated with large events is intricate and multifaceted across different groups. As noted by Boholm (1998), our understanding of risk is shaped by socially and culturally structured conceptions. Moreover, it's important to note that event satisfaction does not directly translate to a likelihood of attending future events. This suggests that there are other influencing factors at play in the decision-making process, prompting the need for further investigation into these factors.

The insights presented here should prompt event organizers to conduct research on potential participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of what attracts or dissuades them in terms of risk. The growing importance of risk management in event organization aligns with the development of numerous programs and the establishment of comprehensive risk management systems. While it's reasonable to hypothesize that lower levels of risk perception would lead to increased event satisfaction and attendance intention, our study suggests that lower risk perception does not necessarily translate to an intention to participate. Therefore, it is crucial to consider and identify decisive factors that can inform the development of marketing principles and practices that remain effective across different cultural contexts and levels of interest and participation. These results emphasize the importance of assessing cultural orientation when evaluating risk perception and its implications for marketing efforts.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the intricate and diverse nature of how risk is perceived in various groups in the context of mega-events. It supports the overarching concept proposed by cultural theory, which asserts that the way risk is perceived is contingent on the societal milieu in which the event occurs (Sjöberg, 2000). In simpler terms, how people perceive risk is influenced by the social environment in which they are situated. As pointed out by Boholm (1998), our comprehension of risk is fundamentally shaped by ideas deeply rooted in society and culture. The contrasting outcomes observed between national and international samples underscore the significance of Olympic organizing committees crafting risk management strategies tailored to the unique cultural backgrounds of different population segments.

Additionally, it's important to consider that event satisfaction does not seem to directly correlate with the probability of participants attending future Games, in both of the examined groups. This indicates that there are separate factors at play in their decision-making process. To put it differently, a participant's satisfaction with the event doesn't automatically equate to a commitment to future participation, implying that other elements play a role in their decision. This discovery underscores the notion that perceived event satisfaction and the likelihood of future participation are distinct aspects that merit individual investigation.

Securing a major sporting event requires the cooperation of various parties, each with their own defined roles. These roles are interconnected, and the success of one relies, to some extent, on the fulfillment of responsibilities by others. Occupational health and safety laws address these intricate relationships by establishing concurrent, overlapping, and non-delegable obligations for most of the individuals involved in planning and executing the event. Furthermore, these laws necessitate that those holding these obligations collaborate to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants.

This combination of legal provisions encourages event organizers to collaborate with all stakeholders to establish a framework for effectively distributing risk management responsibilities. This allocation is determined by each stakeholder's capacity to oversee activities that pose potential risks (Windholz, 2016).

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