

The Development of Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events

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Abstract

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with the following objectives 1) To study integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events. 2) To examine the factors influencing the decision to participate in international running events. 3) To investigate the service marketing mix (7Ps) factors that affect the decision to participate in international running events. 4) To analyze the influence of social media on the participation in international running events. The findings reveal that successful marketing strategies for international running events require clear objectives and distinctive product positioning, incorporating creative elements with local identity, culture, traditions, cuisine, and tourist attractions into the event design. These elements should be reflected in race apparel, medals, trophies, and the overall atmosphere to enhance participants' experiences, which can then be shared on social media platforms. This approach fosters loyalty and encourages repeat participation and event promotion. Additionally, integrated marketing communication tools must be utilized to effectively engage potential participants and stimulate interest. Among the 7Ps of service marketing, the distribution channel emerged as the most influential factor affecting participation decisions. Structural equation modeling analysis further indicates that the marketing mix factors directly influence social media exposure, and both marketing mix factors and social media exposure directly impact the decision to participate in international running events. Indirectly, social media exposure mediates the relationship between the marketing mix and participation decisions.

Keywords: integrated marketing communication strategy, international running events, service marketing mix, social media platforms, factors influencing the decision

1. Introduction

1.1 The Background of the Study

According to the 12th National Health Development Plan of Thailand (2017-2021), the first strategy emphasizes proactive measures to enhance the health of Thai people. Part of this strategic plan focuses on promoting exercise and overall well-being among the population. This aligns with the Ministry of Public Health's policy declaration, which designated the year 2020 as the Year of Exercise. The Department of Health was tasked with motivating and organizing activities to encourage the public to engage in physical exercise. Additionally, the strategy includes leveraging challenging technologies to involve the younger generation in initiatives aimed at improving the health of Thai people and preventing diseases (12th National Health Development Plan). When examining the statistics on running as a form of exercise, it is evident that physical activity has gained significant interest among Thais for several years. Specifically, the number of people engaging in running has shown a remarkable increase. In 2011, there were 5.5 million runners in Thailand, which rose to 11.96 million in 2016 (Rakphuang, 2018), and further increased to 15 million in 2017. The continuous growth in the number of runners highlights not only the health benefits but also other aspects such as entertainment, joy, honor, and tourism associated with running (Suthisima, 2011). Consequently, the organization of running events in Thailand has seen a significant rise. This surge is also facilitated by social media, where participants share photos and the atmosphere of the events online

The Kasikorn Research Center estimated that in 2020, running events in Thailand would generate a cash flow of approximately 1,700 million THB from the participation of 4-6 million runners. However, the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the postponement and cancellation of more than 1,000 scheduled running

events between March and December 2020. In 2021, many running events were also canceled. By 2022, it was anticipated that around 1,400 running events would take place. According to the "Wingnaidee" running events website, in October 2022, there were 53 running events, 82 events in November, and 59 events in December, averaging 10-20 events per week, totaling over 1,600 events. This indicates a gradual recovery of running events to 20% of pre-COVID levels, with an estimated economic value of around 6,000 million THB.

From the aforementioned details, it can be seen that the running event industry can generate economic value in two aspects: 1. Direct Economic Value: This is the value generated through participation in various running events. Out of the 20 million runners in Thailand, 2 million runners, or 10%, register for an average of four events per person per year, spending at least 5,000 THB per person per year. This results in a total market value of 10 billion THB. 2. Indirect Economic Value: Organizing running events creates a positive impact on the entire supply chain related to these events. For example, running events held in provincial areas encourage participants and their followers to stay in hotels, incur travel expenses, and purchase goods from local vendors. Additionally, participants may buy new running shoes, outfits, or other running gear, contributing to the circulation of money within the country. Participating in provincial running events incurs expenses exceeding 5,000 THB per event. If attending four events per year, the total spending amounts to approximately 20,000 THB per person per year. Running shoes typically cost between 1,500-8,000 THB, and running outfits and gear range from 1,000-5,000 THB on average.

When discussing the top running events in Thailand that contribute to promoting tourism and becoming travel destinations, the events recognized as Thailand Major Marathons by the Sports Authority of Thailand in 2020 stand out. These marathons are certified for their high standards and international recognition, attracting runners from around the world. The seven main marathon events in Thailand are: 1. Chombueng Marathon, 2. Bangkok Marathon 3. Phuket Laguna Marathon 4. Muang Thai Chiang Mai Marathon 5. Buriram Marathon 6. Bangsaen 42 Marathon (including Bangsaen 21 and Bangsaen 10) 7. Amazing Thailand Marathon. These seven events are notable for their integrated marketing communication strategies, which have led to their immense success. They excel in terms of event size, the number of participants, revenue, and other management aspects, setting a standard for marathons that are widely recognized and popular both nationally and internationally.

When considering the organization of international running events recognized as Thailand Major Marathons, it becomes evident that the service marketing mix (7Ps) is crucial for successfully hosting these events. The 7Ps include product and service, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. These factors significantly influence the decision to participate in running events (Liangraksa, 2021). In addition to these factors, it is clear that international running events must have effective integrated marketing communications (IMC). IMC combines various communication tools to convey messages to runners, aiming to achieve the organizers' expectations of high participant numbers. Effective IMC allows the use of digital tools to reach the target audience in the digital age. This includes digital advertising, digital sales through employees, digital sales promotions, digital news and public relations, and direct marketing through digital channels.

For the reasons mentioned above, the researcher is interested in studying the development of integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events. This interest stems from recognizing that international running events are effective marketing activities that attract a large number of runners. Therefore, it is essential for every running event to consider the factors that influence decision-making, such as the service marketing mix (7Ps) and the impact of social media on the decision to participate in international running events, as well as integrated marketing communication strategies. Overall, these elements contribute positively to the development of marathon events in Thailand to meet international standards. The results of this study can serve as a model for other running events, especially in Thailand, to develop national or international running events that meet consumer needs. Additionally, the study can help develop integrated marketing communication strategies to attract runners from around the world to participate in running events in Thailand, thereby enhancing the standards of running events and establishing them as tourist destinations.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The research on the development of integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events has the following objectives:

1. To study integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events.
2. To examine the factors influencing the decision to participate in international running events.
3. To investigate the service marketing mix (7Ps) factors that affect the decision to participate in international running events.
4. To analyze the influence of social media on the participation in international running events.

1.3 State Hypotheses

The research on the development of integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events proposes the following hypotheses:

1. Marketing mix factors influence exposure to social media: H1
2. Marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events: H2
3. Exposure to social media influences the decision to participate in international running events: H3
4. Marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events, mediated by exposure to social media: H4

2. Method

The research on the development of integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events is a mixed-methods study. The research methods are as follows:

2.1 Qualitative Research

The key informants are the marketing executives or representatives of the Thailand Major Marathons, certified by the Sports Authority of Thailand as marathons of national standard. Currently, there are seven such events, and six have agreed to participate in the interviews. These events are:

1. Chombueng Marathon organized by Muban Chombueng Rajabhat University
2. Bangkok Marathon organized by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation
3. Phuket Laguna Marathon organized by Phuket Marathon Co., Ltd.
4. Chiang Mai Marathon organized by Jog and Joy Co., Ltd.
5. Buriram Marathon organized by Buriram United International Circuit Co., Ltd.
6. Bangsaen 42 Marathon/Bangsaen 21/Bangsaen organized by MICE and Communication Co., Ltd.

The tool used is a semi-structured interview, which has undergone content validity checks to ensure the accuracy of the language and the consistency of the questions with the research objectives. This was reviewed using the Index of Item Objective Congruency (IOC) technique by five experts. Data collection was conducted through interviews with 6 running events. There are 12 participants from 6 groups, including the company owner, marketing and public relations executives, as well as public relations staff. There are 8 males and 4 females, interviews from November 1, 2023, to February 28, 2024. After collecting all the questionnaires, the researcher transcribed the interviews to extract content data. The data were then analyzed through content analysis and categorized based on key themes identified from the in-depth interviews. All information was synthesized comprehensively using a constructionist approach to ensure all relevant topics were covered in an integrated manner.

2.2 Quantitative Research

The population for this research includes runners who have participated in Thailand Major Marathon events certified by the Sports Authority of Thailand for their recognized standards. The seven marathon events are: 1) Chombueng Marathon, 2) Bangkok Marathon, 3) Phuket Laguna Marathon, 4) Muang Thai Chiang Mai Marathon, 5) Buriram Marathon, 6) Bangsaen 42 Marathon/Bangsaen 21/Bangsaen 10, and 7) Amazing Thailand Marathon. The sample for this research was determined using the Structural Equation Model (SEM) analysis technique. Based on the concept that the appropriate sample size should be 10 to 20 times the number of observed variables, this study includes 68 observed variables. Thus, the suitable sample size ranges from a minimum of 680 samples (10 times 68 variables) to a maximum of 1,360 samples (20 times 68 variables). To ensure sufficient data for analysis, the researcher collected data from 1,360 samples. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, a non-probability technique. The quantitative research tool was a questionnaire designed according to the study's objectives and conceptual framework. The questionnaire consisted of five parts and underwent content validity checks by five experts from both outside and within Mahasarakham University. Reliability analysis was conducted before data collection. Data collection took place from November 1, 2023, to February 28, 2024, targeting runners who had participated in any of the seven Thailand Major Marathon events. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 1,350 were returned, achieving a response rate of 99.26%. The sample comprised 890 males, 440 females, and 20 individuals identifying as non-binary or with other gender identities. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Inferential statistical methods, such as multiple correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), were also employed. The results were presented in tables accompanied by descriptions and summaries.

3. Results

3.1 Qualitative Research

The ultimate goal of organizing international running events by Thailand Major Marathon organizers in Thailand is to meet the standards set by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and to have these events listed in the international marathon calendar. Success in organizing these events hinges on the collaboration between the private sector, government, and local communities, fostering a sense of ownership and cooperation across all dimensions. Such collaboration also drives the local economy by integrating sports and tourism, generating revenue for local areas.

In terms of marketing strategies for organizing international running events, clear objectives must be established, such as promoting public health, creating a global running event, or boosting tourism. The product positioning of the running events must be prominent, such as obtaining certification from the IAAF. Creative ideas should incorporate local identity, art, culture, traditions, food, and tourist attractions into the event concept, running shirts, medals, trophies, advertisement banners, performances, and cheering squads. This ensures that runners have a shared experience when participating, which leads to positive impressions that are then shared on social media. This approach rapidly builds awareness and reduces promotional costs. Additionally, it fosters loyalty, encouraging participants to return and promote the event by word of mouth. Inviting elite runners and international participants further enhances the international atmosphere, making local runners feel part of a global event.

The marketing communication strategies for international running events integrate various tools as follows:

1. Advertising: Event organizers advertise through social media, including their own Facebook fan pages, targeted ads on Facebook, and advertisements on relevant running-related Facebook pages and groups. Additionally, they use their event websites to post race information, advertising banners, and registration links, which may also be featured on sponsor websites. For provincial events, organizers put up cut-out advertisements at key locations to raise awareness and promote the events locally.
2. Public Relations: Organizers disseminate information by sending press releases to news websites and important provincial websites. They also send official letters to various provincial agencies to further promote and recruit runners for the events.
3. Sales Promotion: Various promotional tactics are used to entice registrations, such as offering gold prizes, commemorative shirts, early bird discounts, special medals for long-time participants, special dolls for the top 100 finishers, and prizes for achieving new personal best records.
4. Personal Selling: Organizers participate in promotional booths at various expos and events both in Thailand and abroad to raise awareness and recruit international runners.
5. Direct Marketing: For domestic runners, direct marketing is primarily conducted through their own Facebook fan pages. For international runners, organizers rely on their event websites to distribute information and send invitation emails to past participants.
6. Marketing Events: Press conferences are held, inviting local and national media, partners, and sponsors to ensure confidence and promote the event. On the day of race kit distribution, media presence and sponsor activity booths engage runners with product samples and interactive games.
7. Social Network Marketing: Facebook is heavily utilized for marketing, including the event's own fan page, the registration organizing company's fan page, running-related pages, and running groups. Influencers and celebrities are also invited to participate and create content, significantly enhancing public awareness and engagement.

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Therefore, it can be seen that the organizers of successful international running events within the Thailand Major Marathon series have effectively employed social media strategies by integrating various platforms to communicate and market their events. This approach has successfully connected consumers with event information, encouraging them to register for the runs, fostering engagement, and building loyalty among participants, who then return to register again in subsequent years. Additionally, these loyal participants help spread the word to other runners, increasing participation in future events. This comprehensive integration of marketing communication strategies exemplifies excellent strategic planning.

The results of the quantitative research revealed that most respondents were male runners aged between 31 and 40 years old. They were mostly single, had a bachelor’s degree, and worked in the private sector with an average monthly income of approximately 15,000 - 30,000 THB. In the past two years, most runners had registered for half marathon events and had been participating in running activities for about 3-4 years, with a frequency of 3-4 events per year. The most common time for participating in running events was between 12:01 AM and 6:00 AM, and they usually participated alone, staying in hotels or resorts near the event venues. Most runners spent less than 5,000 THB per event. Middle-level runners (with 3-5 years of experience) primarily participated in international running events for exercise purposes.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) Factors Influencing the Decision to Participate in International Running Events

Marketing Mix Factors (7Ps)	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level of Opinion
Product	4.40	0.88	High
Price	4.19	0.66	High
Place	4.58	0.64	Highest
Promotion	4.26	0.67	High
People	4.56	0.64	Highest
Process	4.51	0.84	Highest
Physical Evidence	4.44	0.67	High
Total	4.42	0.686	High

The service marketing mix factors (7Ps) that influence the decision to participate in international running events were found to be at a high level overall. When considered individually, the highest-rated factor was distribution channels, followed by people and process. For product factors, the top-rated aspects were the high standard and reputation of the event, the presence of first aid units along the route, interesting and suitable running routes, and the use of chip-timed bibs. For price factors, the highest-rated were the appropriateness of the price for the items or equipment received, the price reflecting the event's image, and the price relative to the running distance. Distribution channels were rated highest for convenient, fast, and uncomplicated payment processes, multiple payment options such as credit or debit cards, modern and convenient registration systems, and straightforward registration steps. Promotion factors were rated highest for comprehensive publicity, special prices for early bird registrants, and accident insurance for participants. People factors were rated highest for having staff at service points or along the race route, sufficient staff to accommodate participants, staff providing attentive service (service-minded), and staff maintaining competition rules fairly. Process factors were rated highest for the presence of first aid units along the route, appropriate safety measures, and secure baggage deposit services. Physical evidence factors were rated highest for the suitability and safety of the event venue, the presence of first aid stations, and spacious, convenient parking. The influence of social media on the decision to participate in international running events was rated very high, with the most influential aspects being receiving information about running events and reading registration details from social media. Runners most frequently

used social media related to international running events between 8:01 PM and midnight, with Facebook fan pages being the most common source of information.

The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events

The structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events initially did not meet the required criteria. Therefore, the model was adjusted to enhance its accuracy by modifying the error terms between two variables using the Modification Index (MI) statistics. This adjustment was necessary to ensure the structural equation model's empirical consistency, showing statistical significance. It was found that 116 paths needed adjustment in the observed variables to achieve a statistically significant empirical fit for the structural equation model in developing integrated marketing communication strategies for international running events. The revised structural equation model is illustrated in Figure 1.

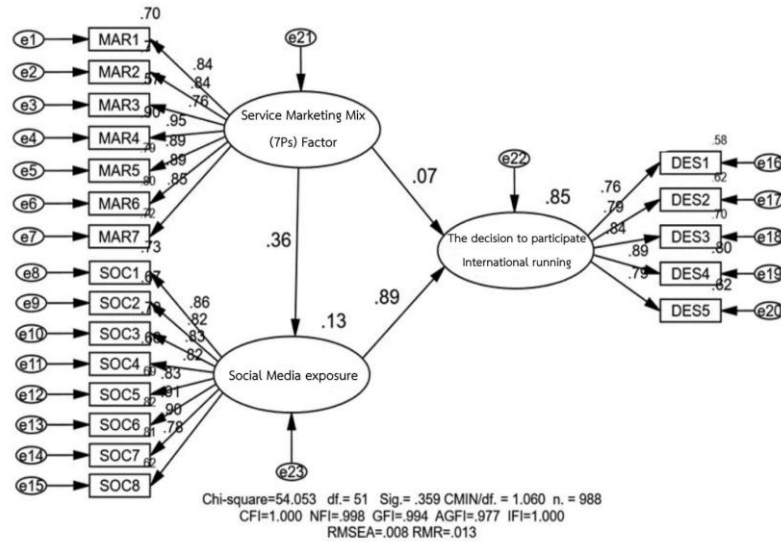


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events After Model Adjustment

Table 2. Statistical Values of the Structural Equation Model for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events After Model Adjustment

Index	Criteria	Results	Conclusion	Reference ideas
Chi-Square = 54.053 df. = 51.0				
Sig.	> 0.05	0.359	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Bollen (1989), Sorbom (1996)
CMIN/df	< 2.0	1.060	Meets the criteria	Bollen (1989), Diamantopoulos, Fan and Sivo (2005)
GFI	> 0.90	0.994	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Shevlin and Miles (1998)
AGFI	> 0.80	0.977	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Mueller (1996), Gefen et al. (2000)
NFI	> 0.90	0.998	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Mueller (1996)
IFI	> 0.90	1.000	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Mueller (1996)
CFI	> 0.90	1.000	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Suci, Tavares and Zalmon (2018)
RMR	< 0.05	0.013	Meets the criteria	Diamantopoulos, Siguaw (2000)
RMSEA	< 0.05	0.008	Meets the criteria	Hair et al. (2006), Browne and Cudeck (1993),

From Table 2, the statistical values of the structural equation model (SEM) for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events after model adjustment were analyzed. The model adjustment involved modifying the error terms between two variables using the Modification Index (MI) statistics. The model includes three latent variables: marketing mix factors, exposure to social media, and the decision to participate in international running events, encompassing a total of 20 observed variables. The empirical consistency test results were satisfactory, with a Chi-Square value of 54.053, df = 51.0, Sig. = 0.359 > 0.05, and CMIN/df. = 1.060 < 2.0, aligning with the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2006), Bollen (1989), and Sörbom (1996). After model adjustment, the indices were consistent, and these statistical values met the specified criteria for all seven indices, indicating that the structural equation model for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for international running events is in good agreement with the empirical data. The model's fit indices conform to the criteria, demonstrating that the measurement model is valid (Validity) or OK Fit Confirm at a statistical significance level of 0.05. The results of the influence path tests are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Structural Equation Model Analysis for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events

Hypothesis			λ	SE.	t-value	Sig.
Exposure to Social Media	<--	Marketing Mix Factors	0.36	0.04	10.717	0.000*
Decision to Participate in International Running Events	<--	Marketing Mix Factors	0.07	0.02	3.250	0.001*
Decision to Participate in International Running Events	<--	Exposure to Social Media	0.89	0.04	19.547	0.000*

* *With statistical significance at the 0.05 level

The results of the structural equation model (SEM) analysis for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events include marketing mix factors, exposure to social media, and the decision to participate in international running events, with coefficient weights ranging from 0.76 to 0.95. The multiple correlation coefficients (R2) for each variable range from 57.0% to 90.0%. The summarized results are as follows:

1. Marketing Mix Factors:

- There are seven observed variables (MAR1 – MAR7) with coefficient weights between 0.76 and 0.95, and multiple correlation coefficients (R2) ranging from 57.0% to 90.0%. The marketing mix factors directly and indirectly influence the structural equation model for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for international running events, summarized as follows:

1.1 The marketing mix factors have a positive direct influence on exposure to social media with a coefficient of 0.36, a standard error of 0.04, a t-value of 10.717, and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 < 0.05, explaining 13.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

1.2 The marketing mix factors have a positive direct influence on the decision to participate in international running events with a coefficient of 0.07, a standard error of 0.02, a t-value of 3.250, and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.001 < 0.05, explaining 85.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

1.3 The marketing mix factors have a positive indirect influence on the decision to participate in international running events through the mediating variable of exposure to social media, with a total path coefficient of 0.32 (0.36 x 0.89).

2. Exposure to Social Media:

- There are eight observed variables (SOC1 – SOC8) with regression coefficient weights ranging from 0.78 to 0.91 and multiple correlation coefficients (R2) ranging from 62.0% to 82.0%. The exposure to social media directly influences the structural equation model for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for international running events, summarized as follows:

2.1 Exposure to social media has a positive direct influence on the decision to participate in international running events, with a coefficient of 0.89, a standard error of 0.04, a t-value of 19.547, and a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 < 0.05, explaining 85.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

3. Decision to Participate in International Running Events:

- There are five observed variables (DES1 – DES5) with regression coefficient weights ranging from 0.76 to 0.89 and multiple correlation coefficients (R2) ranging from 58.0% to 80.0%. The decision to participate in international running events is an outcome variable in the structural equation model for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for international running events.

Analysis of Influence Paths in the Structural Equation Model for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events

The analysis of the structural equation model for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events includes the factors of emotional resilience, exposure to social media, and the decision to participate in international running events. The direct, indirect, and total influence paths are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the Analysis of the Path Coefficients in the Structural Equation Model for the Development of Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies in Organizing International Running Events

Variable	Influence	Exposure to Social Media	Decision to Participate in International Running Events
Marketing Mix Factors	Direct	0.36	0.07
	Indirect	-	0.32
	Total	0.36	0.39
Exposure to Social Media	Direct	-	0.89
	Indirect	-	-
	Total	-	0.89
R ²		13.0%	85.0%

Analysis of Hypotheses in the Structural Equation Model for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events

The results of the structural equation model (SEM) analysis for developing integrated marketing communication strategies for organizing international running events, which include emotional resilience, exposure to social media, and the decision to participate in international running events, are summarized as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Marketing mix factors influence exposure to social media.

The test results support Hypothesis H1, indicating that marketing mix factors influence exposure to social media with a path coefficient of 0.36, explaining 13.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 2: Marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events.

The test results support Hypothesis H2, indicating that marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events with a path coefficient of 0.07, explaining 85.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 3: Exposure to social media influences the decision to participate in international running events.

The test results support Hypothesis H3, indicating that exposure to social media influences the decision to participate in international running events with a path coefficient of 0.89, explaining 85.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Hypothesis 4: Marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events through exposure to social media.

The test results support Hypothesis H4, indicating that marketing mix factors influence the decision to participate in international running events through exposure to social media with a total path coefficient of 0.32, explaining 85.0% of the variance with statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results for the Structural Equation Model for Developing Integrated Marketing Communication Strategies for Organizing International Running Events

	Hypotheses	Results	Influence	Path	λ	R ²
H1	Marketing Mix Factors Influence Exposure to Social Media	Accepted	Direct	Positive	0.36*	13.0%
H2	Marketing Mix Factors Influence the Decision to Participate in International Running Events	Accepted	Direct	Positive	0.07*	85.0%
H3	Exposure to Social Media Influences the Decision to Participate in International Running Events	Accepted	Direct	Positive	0.89	85.0%
H4	Marketing Mix Factors Influence the Decision to Participate in International Running Events Through Exposure to Social Media	Accepted	Indirect	Positive	0.32*	85.0%

* With statistical significance at the 0.05 level

4. Discussion

The key components essential for organizing international running events include: 1. International Standard Event Management 2.Creativity 3.Collaboration among Government, Private Sector, and the Public 4.Integrated Marketing

Communication 5. Creation of Positive Runner Experiences 6. Sustainability. Organizing international running events requires adherence to international event management standards, which are clear and widely accepted. This is a crucial factor in establishing the credibility of the event and ensuring participants' confidence in the organization. This finding aligns with the study by Permchart (2020), which evaluated the Bangsaen 21 Half Marathon 2020. The study found that runners were motivated to participate due to their confidence in the quality of management and the certification of the running course to international standards.

Organizing international running events must incorporate creativity to create unique and value-added experiences that are memorable for participants. This could involve designing routes that pass through beautiful tourist attractions, historical sites, or city landmarks, integrating local arts and culture, local cuisine, local performances, and local products to promote tourism. Additionally, incorporating new technological innovations in organizing the events is crucial. This aligns with Atlas (2018), who studied "Sports Tourism: Factors Affecting Marathon Participants," and found that sports tourism is recognized as one of the emerging tourism markets with significant economic potential, attracting a large number of participants and spectators during marathon events. Similarly, Ratre (2020) conducted a study on "Marketing Strategy Development for Adding Value in Sports Tourism: A Case Study of Health Running Events in Ubon Ratchathani Province." The study revealed that most sports tourists who participated in health running events traveled primarily for exercise and to explore new destinations. This finding is consistent with Permchart (2018), who researched "Developing the Potential and Management Processes of Running Events in Thailand to Support Sports Tourism." The study found that sports tourism readiness was relatively high, resulting from continuous development of running events to elevate them to ASEAN and global standards, incorporating innovation and technology to organize runs and creating positive impacts in the area.

Organizing international running events requires collaboration among the government, private sector, and the public. Effective cooperation helps in the optimal use of resources, providing support and carrying out activities that lead to sustainability. This is in line with Hamkhamphai (2020), who studied "The Management Model of Sports Tourism Destinations: A Case Study of Khon Kaen International Marathon." The study found that the success factors included clear provincial policies reflecting the objectives and direction of management, allowing the activities to develop into an international sports tourism destination in the future. This also aligns with Phipopphompong (2019), who researched "Spending Behavior of Runners and Factors Influencing Runners to Return for the Lampang Half Marathon." The study revealed that a key strength of successful event organization was the collaboration among organizers, sponsors, and government agencies.

Systematic and integrated marketing communication that uses various channels to disseminate information and generate interest in running events helps raise awareness and enhance participant interest. This aligns with Murphey (2016), who studied "Leadership Factors Leading to Increased Participation and Social Media Use in the Increased Marathon." The study found that runners still prefer word-of-mouth communication. Once runners learn about an event, they often visit the event's website for more information, including Facebook and other social media forms, as effective promotional tools. Additionally, Thaweeapol (2019) conducted a study on "Attitudes and Perspectives of Pacers on the Development of Sports Event Management in Universities: A Case Study of Silpakorn Cha-am Mini Half Marathon." The research revealed that promoting events through social media and using intermediary websites helps better disseminate information to interested groups.

A well-organized international running event must create a positive experience for runners, leaving them with lasting memories and satisfaction. This includes running through scenic routes, participating in a well-managed event with excellent facilities, and incorporating creative elements that make the run enjoyable. Providing opportunities for participants to exchange ideas and experiences through social media, and using modern technology such as apps for registration, displaying running statistics, and video recordings of their run, are essential. This approach aligns with Murphey (2016), who found that organizers should focus on creating an enjoyable experience for runners, which leads to positive impressions and encourages sharing these experiences on social media. Creating such memorable experiences enhances satisfaction and increases the likelihood of participants returning for future events.

Sustainability in organizing international running events is crucial for achieving long-term success and sustainability of these events. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the Social Return on Investment (SROI), which serves as a tool to measure and assess the social impacts and benefits resulting from organizing international running events. These benefits include improved health of participants, which is the highest social return, opportunities to promote tourism in the host area, and economic benefits for both the private and public sectors. This encompasses revenue from registrations, local product purchases, and income from tourism and accommodation, which foster community relations and confidence. SROI evaluation helps event organizers understand the social returns generated and how to improve or further develop these returns for higher future benefits. It also assists stakeholders in comprehending the value and success in enhancing long-term social value. This approach aligns with the study by Wichaikham (2022) on the SROI analysis of the "Chombueng Marathon 2020," which found that the social benefits included improved health, better

quality of life, increased provincial reputation, and enhanced confidence. These benefits significantly contribute to the local population, tourism, and the economy, providing tangible social, economic, and environmental value.

Differences in opinion levels based on demographic characteristics regarding the 7Ps marketing mix factors influencing the decision to participate in international running events. The demographic characteristics of participants in seven international running events revealed a higher number of male participants compared to female participants. This is likely because these international running events in Thailand, where the research data was collected, emphasize exercise, which males tend to engage in more than females. This finding aligns with Onekkasit (2022) research on marketing mix strategies influencing decisions to participate in road running events in Thailand post-COVID-19, which found that most runners were male. Similarly, Phantherdthai (2016) study on factors influencing satisfaction in marathon events also found that most road runners were male. Most international running event participants were males aged 31-40 years, single, holding a bachelor's degree, predominantly employed in the private sector, and earning an average monthly income of 15,000 - 30,000 baht. This indicates that the majority of participants in international running events are those with a keen interest in such activities. Therefore, organizers should tailor the events to suit this demographic data to meet the needs of international participants and achieve the event's objectives. This approach aligns with Serirat (2003) assertion that demographic data significantly impacts target market determination and can be easily measured.

When studying the 7Ps marketing mix factors that influence the decision to participate in international running events, it was found that, overall, these factors are significantly influential. The most influential factors individually are distribution channels, personnel, and processes. This aligns with Onekkasit (2022), who researched the marketing mix strategies influencing decisions to participate in road running events in Thailand post-COVID-19, finding that the most influential factors were marketing promotion, distribution channels, physical characteristics, and price. It also aligns with Liangraksa (2021), who studied the marketing mix factors influencing decisions to participate in mini half marathon events at Phutthamonthon Park and found that marketing mix factors were highly influential, with runners prioritizing marketing promotion, product and service, and process. Additionally, it corresponds with Chanchotisathien (2018), who researched factors influencing decisions to participate in the Run for Life marathon in Nakhon Ratchasima, finding that the key factors were process, personnel, and marketing promotion.

Opinions regarding the influence of social media on the decision to participate in international running events are at the highest level. This includes receiving information about running activities from social media and reading registration information from social media equally. The most used channel for receiving information about international running events is the Facebook Fanpage of the event organizers. This finding is consistent with the research by Uraillaksamee (2018), which studied the impact of marketing promotions on marathon runners' decision to participate in Thailand, finding that advertising through websites or online media such as Facebook, Line, and Instagram influences the decision to participate in marathons. It also aligns with the research by Bongkotphannarai (2017), which studied the factors of communication and attitudes influencing marathon participation, revealing that the most accessed information source was www.wingnaidee.com. Additionally, it corresponds with Permchat (2020) study, which found that the most used online media for running information was Facebook, and the overall use of media during the event was at a high level, especially Facebook.

General Suggestions

1. The organization of international running events in Thailand should emphasize the standards set by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), now known as World Athletics. This ensures that the events are conducted according to internationally recognized standards and regulations, including technical management related to running sports, which are regularly updated to align with changes in activities and new technologies. Therefore, information about the World Athletics management standards may be updated, and it is essential to check the latest information from official World Athletics sources throughout the event planning process.
2. The organization of international running events in Thailand should prioritize the marketing mix factors (7Ps) that influence participation decisions. This includes:
 - Product: The quality of the event, including interesting and challenging routes and distances, and appealing ancillary activities such as exhibitions, product booths, or social events.
 - Price: Registration fees should be reasonable relative to the value of the event and what participants receive. Offering early bird discounts and rewards for early registrants is also beneficial.
 - Place: Suitable and convenient locations for the event, with adequate facilities such as parking, public transportation, and pre-race preparation amenities.
 - Promotion: Advertising through both online and offline media channels.
3. The organization of international running events in Thailand should emphasize sustainability by evaluating the event's impact post-event to analyze successes and shortcomings. This continuous improvement process is crucial.

Conducting a Social Return on Investment (SROI) assessment to measure the event's environmental impact, community income generation, value for money, and transparency is beneficial. Such evaluations ensure that the community gains benefits, fosters local involvement, and builds partnerships between organizations and agencies to support and drive marathon development towards sustainability. The primary responsible body could be the Sports Authority of Thailand or the Ministry of Tourism and Sports to oversee and maintain event standards.

5. Limitations

This study has several acknowledged limitations. Firstly, regarding the generalizability of the research findings, despite using a large sample size, caution should be exercised when applying the results specifically to the context of decisions to participate in international running events by runners. This is because the runners participating in international running events in Thailand tend to be a high-income group. Additionally, the research is somewhat limited by the concept of participating in international running events under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing recovery from it, which significantly influences the decision-making process for participating in international running events.

6. Conclusion

The results revealed that marketing strategies for organizing international running events needed to have clear objectives. The product positioning had to be prominent, and creative ideas should have been incorporated by bringing in local identity, art, culture, traditions, food, and tourist attractions. These elements were part of the event concept design, running jerseys, medals, trophies, and cheering teams to ensure that runners had a shared experience and impression, which they could share on social media. This helped build loyalty, encouraging participants to return and promote the event. Additionally, various marketing communication tools had to be integrated to communicate with consumers and encourage them to participate in international running events. The service marketing mix factors (7Ps) that most influenced the decision to participate in international running events were the distribution channels. Analyzing the structural equation modeling for the development of integrated marketing communication strategy for organizing international running events, it was found that the marketing mix factors directly influenced exposure to social media. The marketing mix factors also directly influenced the decision to participate in international running events, and social media exposure directly influenced this decision. Moreover, the marketing mix factors indirectly influenced the decision to participate in international running events through social media exposure.

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