




## Article

# The Influence of Small-Scale Sporting Events on Participants' Intentions to Recommend the Host City

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**Abstract:** Tourism, including sports tourism, is an important driver of social and economic development. Sports tourism events, and small-scale sporting events in particular, are a powerful resource for promoting tourism in the host city, as a viable way of developing sustainable tourism in the local community. This study aims to analyse the impact of functional quality, outcome quality, satisfaction, and perceived value on intentions to recommend the host city among participants in a small-scale sporting event. A total of 866 runners in a 21-km recreational race participated in this study. A multi-item scale was used and a confirmatory factor analysis of the model was carried out, and the presence of gender differences in the relationships was ascertained using a multigroup analysis. The results revealed a direct effect of functional quality and satisfaction, and an indirect effect of outcome quality and value on intentions to recommend the city. Intention to recommend the city and functional quality showed differences between males and females. In conclusion, managing quality is a key strategy in encouraging participants in small-scale sporting events to recommend the host city.

**Keywords:** small-scale sporting events; running involvement; recommending the destination; quality; satisfaction



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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the main social and economic activities in the 21st century and serves as an important driver of employment and revenues [1]. In recent decades, tourism has diversified and sport has become one of the main supplementary activities in tourist destinations [2]. From small communities to whole countries, sporting events are used as tools for a variety of purposes and are viewed as a catalyst for economic, cultural and tourist development in the locations where they take place [3,4].

Sporting events can lead to immediate changes directly linked to these events (impacts), e.g.: new sports facilities; planned or unplanned long-term effects (legacies), such as an increase in rates of sports practice; and strategically designed changes where the sports event is used to achieve a primary objective and to trigger indirect benefits that would otherwise have occurred at a slower pace (leveraging), such as promoting the city as an appealing tourist destination [5,6].

In recent years, middle- and long-distance running events (half-marathon and marathon races) have become increasingly popular, making them attractive tourism products drawing growing numbers of participants year after year (Number of Running Events in the U.S. from 2012 to 2016, by Distance of Race, 2020) [7]. Scholars have identified small- and medium-scale sporting events, such as the Media Maratón Ciudad de Granada (Granada Half Marathon), as a viable way of developing sustainable tourism in the local community, that is, tourism that takes into account present and future economic, social, and environmental aspects, including the needs of residents, visitors, the environment and industry [8].

Sporting events represent a growing sector that offers opportunities for local economic development, and for promoting and revitalising tourism [9,10]. These events are becoming increasingly important [11], as they encourage tourism and play a key role in tourist destinations' development and marketing plans [12]. One of their aims is to attract local visitors and visitors from further afield (i.e., sports tourists) [13].

Small-scale sporting events can be powerful resources with social and economic benefits for host cities [9,14], therefore political representatives foster these kinds of events to help attract tourists and energise their cities. However, most studies analysing the potential impacts and/or benefits of sporting events focus on spectators and large-scale events [15,16], and there is a need for more research on the impact of small- and medium-scale sporting events on tourist recommendations and on participants' experiences in particular [17]. There are also very few studies on future intentions based on participants' evaluations of sporting events [18–21].

Moreover, research has largely overlooked gender differences in perceptions of quality, value, and satisfaction with sports services [22], especially in relation to outcome quality and future intentions. The existing literature includes studies that show the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between customer satisfaction and future intentions [23], with women reporting greater overall satisfaction than men [24]. Several studies focusing specifically on sporting events observe significant gender differences in satisfaction levels [25].

Despite gender differences in evaluations of tourist destinations and tourist motivations, with men tending to show a greater interest in activities and more active destinations [26], women travellers currently make up a large segment of the travel market and their participation in tourism has increased [27]. It is important to take gender equality into consideration in the tourism sector, where sustainable development is championed from an economic, social, and environmental perspective that often overlooks gender equality when discussing sustainable tourism [28]. Finding out more about women who travel for leisure and understanding their needs and priorities should be one of the foundations of tourist marketing initiatives [27].

Therefore, it is essential that the organisers and promoters of sporting events identify the value judgements made by participants, especially in relation to functional quality and outcome quality as precursors of value and satisfaction, which, in turn, predict future intentions (recommending the city) among participants [29,30]. The aim of this study is to ascertain whether overall quality, outcome quality, satisfaction, and perceived value are related to intentions to recommend the city among participants in a small-scale sporting event.

## 2. Theoretical Precedents and Hypotheses

### 2.1. *Intention to Recommend the City and Quality Management*

The concept of quality has evolved from a traditional conception whereby it is understood as the fulfilment of the product or service standards set by an organisation to an external or subjective conception based on meeting users' expectations and needs [25,31]. This is now the most common understanding, giving rise to the emergence of the concept of perceived quality [31,32]. In this way, quality ceases to be objective (producer's perspective) and instead becomes subjective, focusing on consumers' own perceptions [31]. The only relevant assessment of quality is made by the customer; all other opinions are irrelevant [33].

Grönroos [34] identified two dimensions of quality: functional quality and technical quality. Following a similar dimensional approach, Mullin, Hardy, and Sutton [35] and Fernández-Martínez et al. [15] argue that sporting events comprise two main components: core elements, including aspects relating to the sport itself, to players' performance, and to the quality of the match, etc., and peripheral elements, which encompass aspects relating to the facilities, the auxiliary services, the staff, and the transport, etc. Service users perceive the event as a combination of technical and functional dimensions, and perceptions of

service quality can be ascertained by comparing users' perceptions with their expectations of the service [36].

Functional quality covers elements linked to the setting or stadium (aesthetics, accessibility, security, etc.), support services (parking space, catering services, etc.), and interactions between spectators and staff [37]. In the literature, researchers have advocated for the use of specific tools to assess the quality of different services [37,38], including the questionnaire used by Angosto-Sánchez et al. [39] to evaluate quality among recreational race participants, which covers communication, organisation, staff, and additional services.

Outcome quality is one of the main dimensions of quality and is fundamental in evaluating a service [40]. Yoshida [41] attempted to clarify the concept in the sports sector, differentiating between outcome quality for spectators and outcome quality for participants. Spectator sport has three main attributes: the team's characteristics, the players' performance, and the results. Among sports participants, attributes relating to outcome quality include physical condition, sports programmes, and physical changes.

Strong scientific evidence underlines of the interaction between service quality and intentions in sports events [42]. Studies of spectators at sporting events have demonstrated a direct relationship between quality and future intentions [42–44]. Recent studies show differences between outcome quality and functional quality in determining the spectators' future behaviour, outcome quality being more decisive in Theodorakis et al. [37], while for Cabello-Manrique et al. [42] functional quality is more important.

The behaviour of tourists/spectators and the image of tourist destinations can be affected by event quality [45,46]; specifically, in sporting events, the functional quality has a influence on the image of the destination [47]. Meanwhile, Fernández-Martínez et al. [15] found a direct relationship between functional quality and intentions to recommend the host city among badminton spectators.

Despite there being no evidence of sports tourism participants' behaviour in the literature, the following hypotheses can be formulated on the basis of previous studies:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Perceived functional quality among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 1a.** *Perceived functional quality among male runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 1b.** *Perceived functional quality among female runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Perceived outcome quality among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 2a.** *Perceived outcome quality among male runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 2b.** *Perceived outcome quality among female runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

## 2.2. Perceived Value and Intention to Recommend the City

Perceived value refers to customers' assessments of the benefits they receive versus the sacrifice they make to use or consume a product or service. According to Moon et al. [47], it can be defined as the relationship between the benefits received and the sacrifice of intangible resources. Perceived value is closely linked to satisfaction and future intentions, serving as a more accurate predictor of future intentions than of satisfaction [48]. It plays a central role in consumer behaviour and is considered a key element in marketing [29].

A number of studies on tourism and sporting event tourism have found a positive relationship between value and future behavioural intentions [46,49,50]. Perceived value leads to favourable behavioural intentions [51,52], predicting travellers' future intentions [53]. In the specific case of sporting events and their spectators, value is the variable with the greatest influence on future intentions [44]. Moreover, value has a significant impact on satisfaction and should be taken into consideration by event organisers to improve satisfaction levels among spectators.

However, few studies have evaluated the opinions of sporting event participants [30,54]. Crespo-Hervás et al. [29] conducted a study of participants in a trail running race and found a relationship between perceived value and future intentions. No studies linking perceived value to participants' intentions to recommend the host city were identified. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed based on an analysis of the literature:

**Hypothesis 3.** *The perceived value of recreational races among runners is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 3a.** *The perceived value of recreational races among male runners is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 3b.** *The perceived value of recreational races among female runners is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

### 2.3. Intention to Recommend the City and Satisfaction

According to Oliver [55], customer satisfaction can be understood as a positive reaction to a service, which evaluates customers' experiences with a service [56]. Empirical research has shown that satisfaction has a positive effect on intentions in different types of services, including tourism [46,57] and sport [42,43,58]. Future intentions among sporting event spectators can be determined by satisfaction [37,59,60]. Moreover, satisfaction acts as a mediating factor between stimuli (functional quality and destination image) and response (future behaviour) [61].

Satisfaction is key to repeat visits and purchases, with events used as a tool to trigger economic, cultural, and tourism growth in the locations where they are held [3,4]. Research has also shown that visitor satisfaction influences spending at sporting events, with spending and consumption rising significantly when satisfaction exceeds expectations [62].

Satisfied customers perceive the quality of a service and represent a competitive advantage, although many organisations struggle to understand and maintain this advantage [63]. It is very important to analyse satisfaction with sporting events to ensure that they are correctly managed, as this knowledge can be used to develop management and marketing strategies aimed at attracting and retaining different types of visitors [25,64]. To satisfy users, it is necessary to listen to them [31] and to ascertain the influence of sociodemographic variables, needs, and demands, etc., in order to achieve optimum satisfaction [39]. This information allows organisations and event managers to draw up strategies to segment and improve the service, and to anticipate and adapt to users' changing tastes and preferences [25,31].

In addition, according to Brown, Essex, Assaker, and Smith [65], intentions to attend similar events are also more likely when satisfaction levels are higher. Satisfaction is associated with intentions to visit a city again [46], including among sporting event spectators [15]. Thus, regardless of whether visitors participated in an event or attended as spectators [65], a satisfactory experience can increase their intentions to recommend the place [66]. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

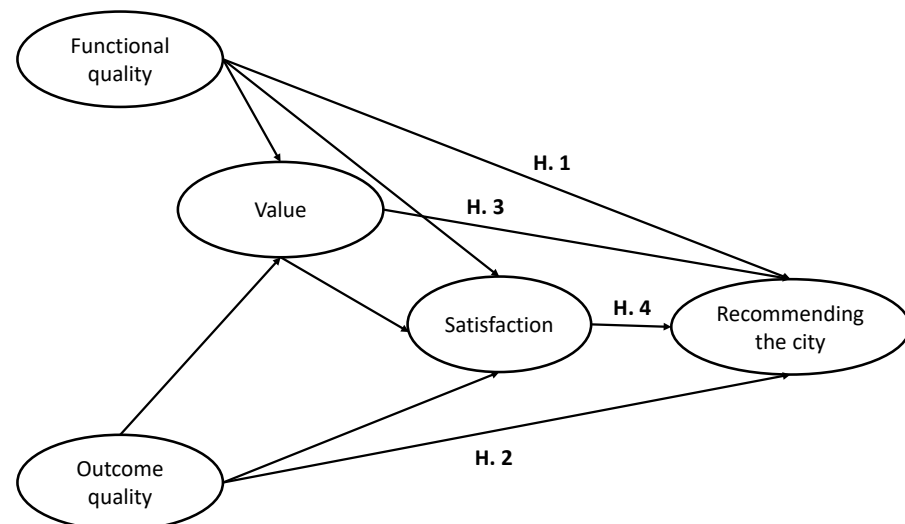
**Hypothesis 4.** *Satisfaction among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.*

**Hypothesis 4a.** Satisfaction among male runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Satisfaction among female runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city.

#### 2.4. Explaining the Model

The proposed model encompasses the following constructs: satisfaction, value, outcome quality, functional quality, and recommending the city. The relationships between functional quality, outcome quality, value, and satisfaction have been analysed in a range of studies [29,30,42], indicating a dependency relationship between the constructs. Our study is innovative in that it explores the relationships between these constructs and intentions to recommend the city among sports tourists who participate in small-scale sporting events, analysing the presence of gender differences. Four main hypotheses, each comprising two sub-hypotheses, have been formulated to study the direct and indirect relationships between the different constructs and intentions to recommend the city by gender (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Proposed model for analysis.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Participants and Sampling

In this descriptive and cross-sectional study, a total of 866 runners in a 21-kilometre recreational race participated, who were randomly selected. The total participants were 4200 runners; this means that there was a margin of error of 2.95% for a 95.5% confidence level. Men comprised 84.4%, the mean age of the participants was  $41.63 \pm 9.27$  years. Most of the participants had a higher education qualification (66.3%), and 89.9% were currently working. 77.2% of the sample were married or living with a partner. Only 8.1% had a federation licence. Just over half (54.6%) had participated in the race before, while 77.8% described themselves as frequent participants in this type of race.

#### 3.2. Measures

A multi-item scale was used to carry out the study (Table 1). Firstly, to measure the quality of the race, 14 items from the questionnaire developed by Angosto-Sánchez et al. [39] were used. Three items were proposed to measure the outcome quality perceived by the runners. The perceived value was measured using a single item, while satisfaction was measured using three items, all of which were taken from the EPOD2 instrument [38]. The intention to recommend the city was measured using three items proposed by Hosany et al. [66].

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics.

Constructs	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading
Quality	The staff are willing to help or give advice	5.19	1.14	0.731
	Volunteers offer a friendly service	5.52	0.91	0.648
	The race has been well promoted and publicised, with sufficient practical information provided	4.75	1.30	0.695
	During the event, clear and precise information on the procedure for the race is provided	4.94	1.24	0.753
	It was easy to sign up for the race	5.20	1.18	0.544
	The results and the podium can be seen by all spectators	4.53	1.41	0.588
	There are sufficient, adequate refreshment stations throughout the race course	5.30	1.18	0.583
	The race bag is adequate and complete	4.38	1.46	0.537
	There are sufficient support services throughout the race course (toilets, changing rooms, cloakroom, massage area, stands, etc.)	4.21	1.54	0.643
	There are easily accessible commercial facilities (cafés, bars, etc.) near the start/finish of the race	5.27	0.96	0.610
	Signage at the event enables participants to easily find the starting point.	4.98	1.24	0.693
	There is sufficient parking space available near the starting and finishing points of the race	3.79	1.63	0.573
	The physical elements used at the event are visually appealing (banners, fences, starting point, finishing point, etc.)	4.97	1.09	0.772
Outcome quality	The race route is well signposted and safe	5.19	1.10	0.649
	I was well-prepared to participate in the race	4.37	1.14	0.793
	I achieved a good result in the race due to my preparation	4.69	1.20	0.857
	I enjoyed running the race	5.44	0.98	0.768
Satisfaction	It was a good decision to run this race	5.48	0.93	0.972
	It was a good decision to run the Granada half marathon	5.53	0.89	0.982
	I am pleased to have signed up for the race	5.51	0.91	0.972
Recommending the city	I will recommend Granada to other people	5.68	0.72	0.888
	I will tell other people positive things about Granada	5.73	0.66	0.924
	I will encourage my friends and family to visit Granada	5.81	0.51	0.866
Value	Generally speaking, I think the half marathon is worth the money spent	5.36	0.96	—

The respondents answered the different items using a seven-point Likert scale: 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Several sociodemographic questions were also included, such as age, gender, education level, weekly sports practice, and experience of similar races.

### 3.3. Procedure

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the university. The heads of the participating organisations were informed about the objectives and purpose of the study, which was conducted once their approval was obtained. The data and the anonymity of the participants were preserved in compliance with the Spanish Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on Personal Data Protection and Guarantee of Digital Rights (Ley Orgánica 3/2018, de 5 de diciembre, de Protección de Datos Personales y garantía de los derechos digitales). The principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013, Brazilian revision) were followed. Prior to data collection, all participants gave their informed consent. The time to answer the questionnaire was ten minutes, and the questionnaire was self-administered in the presence of a researcher.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Means, standard deviations, factor loadings, and the T-test were calculated. The correlations between the study constructs, Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated. Common method bias was calculated using Harman’s single factor test. All analyses were performed using the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 22.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). Acceptable Cronbach’s alpha values lie around 0.70, while correct Cronbach’s alpha values range between 0.80 and 0.90 [67]. Adequate CR values should be greater than 0.6 [68], while adequate AVE values should be greater than 0.5 [69]. Podsakoff, McKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff [70] state

that a total percent variance under 50% indicates that the study results are not significantly affected by common method bias.

A confirmatory factor analysis of the model and a subsequent multigroup analysis were carried out using the Analysis of Moment Structure programme (AMOS, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). The objective of the analysis was to establish whether the model that relates overall satisfaction, value, quality, outcome quality, and recommending the city was the same for all groups of runners, divided by gender. The procedure described by [71] was used. Firstly, the model was tested on each group of runners separately (total sample, model 0; male runners, model 0a; female runners, model 0b). Secondly, the variance of the model between groups was assessed. This involved specifying a model with equal parameters for all groups and comparing this model with a less restrictive model with parameters free to take any value, using the maximum likelihood method [72]. The adjustment of the model was made by examining different indices: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI), and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). The  $\chi^2$  value (CMIN) and the  $\chi^2$  value/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) were also used. RMSEA values  $<0.07$  indicate an acceptable fit [73] and RMSEA values  $\leq 0.06$  indicate a good fit [74]. CFI values  $\geq 0.95$  are considered to be acceptable [74]. Small ECVI and AIC values suggest a good model fit [75]. With respect to the  $\chi^2$  value/degrees of freedom ratio, a perfect model would show a value of 1.00, and ratios below 2.00 would be considered to be indicators of a very good model fit, while values below 5.00 would be considered to be acceptable [74,76,77]. Measurement invariance between groups was evaluated using the  $\Delta\chi^2$  test and the recommendations from Chen [78] and Cheung and Rensvold [79], which state that cut-off  $\Delta$ CFI values  $\leq 0.01$  and  $\Delta$ RMSEA values  $\leq 0.015$  indicate the absence of differences between the models. Finally, the standardised regression coefficients for the relationships and critical ratios were calculated to estimate group differences using AMOS.

#### 4. Results

As Table 2 shows, overall quality received a positive evaluation, with women scoring it higher than men. The other constructs were also scored positively, with no differences observed by gender. Recommending the city obtained the highest score, followed by satisfaction and value (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, t-test, and significance levels. Correlations, Cronbach's alpha on the diagonal, AVE, and CR.

	Total	Men	Women	1	2	3	4	5	AVE	CR
1. Functional quality	4.87 ± 0.80	4.83 ± 0.79 **	5.06 ± 0.80 **	(0.886)	0.392 **	0.588 **	0.531 **	0.580 **	0.52	0.90
2. Outcome quality	4.83 ± 0.89	4.83 ± 0.91	4.85 ± 0.83		(0.731)	0.498 **	0.318 **	0.425 **	0.65	0.84
3. Satisfaction	5.50 ± 0.89	5.50 ± 0.86	5.51 ± 0.99			(0.974)	0.657 **	0.771 **	0.95	0.98
4. Recommending the city	5.74 ± 0.57	5.73 ± 0.56	5.78 ± 0.57				(0.865)	0.537 *	0.79	0.92
5. Value	5.36 ± 0.967	5.35 ± 0.95	5.44 ± 1.03					-	-	-

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

The results of the exploratory factor analysis explain 37.36% of the total variance, suggesting that the results of the study were not significantly affected by common method bias. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency for each of the constructs, achieving adequate values. The values obtained for each of the constructs in the CR test were above 0.6. Convergent validity was tested by calculating AVE, which showed values above 0.5 for each of the constructs. The correlation matrix between factors showed positive and significant relationships between all of them, so that discriminant validity could be verified (Table 2).

To determine the relationships between the constructs and to identify any gender differences, the validity of the model was first checked. Table 3 shows that the fit indices for the analysed model were adequate for all runners (model 0), for male runners (model 0a), and for female runners (model 0b).

**Table 3.** Adjustment statistics for the models. Comparisons of conditions using measurement invariance procedures.

Goodness-of-Fit Indices and Model Comparisons for Tested Models							
Model	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	CFI	RMSEA	ECVI	AIC
0	557.039	238	2.341	0.952	0.054	1.461	681.039
0a	440.779	238	1.852	0.956	0.051	1.700	564.779
0b	292.691	238	1.230	0.955	0.056	5.631	416.691
1	1155.832	476	2.428	0.931	0.046	2.111	1403.832
2	1210.202	497	2.435	0.927	0.046	2.130	1416.202
3	1225.337	503	2.436	0.926	0.046	2.134	1419.337
4	1245.171	507	2.456	0.925	0.047	2.152	1431.171
5	1313.136	537	2.445	0.921	0.047	2.164	1439.136

Comparisons of Conditions Using Measurement Invariance Procedures							
	Model	Dif. DF	Dif. CMIN	<i>p</i>	Dif. CFI	Dif. RMSEA	
Assuming model 1 to be correct	2	21	54.371	0.000	0.004	0.000	
	3	27	69.506	0.000	0.005	0.000	
	4	31	89.340	0.000	0.006	0.001	
	5	61	157.305	0.000	0.010	0.001	
Assuming model 2 to be correct	3	6	15.135	0.019	0.001	0.000	
	4	10	34.969	0.000	0.002	0.001	
	5	40	102.934	0.000	0.006	0.001	
Assuming model 3 to be correct	4	4	19.834	0.001	0.001	0.001	
	5	34	87.799	0.000	0.005	0.001	
Assuming model 4 to be correct	5	30	67.965	0.000	0.004	0.000	

Note. Model 0, total runners; model 0a, male runners; model 0b, female runners; model 1, no parameters constrained to be equal across groups; model 2, factor loadings constrained to be equal; model 3, structural weights and factor loadings constrained to be equal; model 4, structural covariances, structural weights, and factor loadings constrained to be equal; model 5, structural residuals, structural covariances, structural weights, and factor loadings constrained to be equal. Dif. CMIN = difference between model and the other models; Dif. DF = difference between model and the other models; *p* = significance level between models.

The validity of the factor structure for the model linking overall quality, outcome quality, value, satisfaction, and recommending the city was adequate, as the goodness-of-fit indices were adequate for all runners, for male runners, and for female runners (Table 3). After the model's factor structure was validated, a factor invariance test was performed to compare the models based on the runner's gender. Considering the difference in  $\chi^2$  between the unconstrained model (Model 1) and the rest of the two runner groups, a significant difference was found. There was also a difference when comparing models 2, 3, 4, and 5. The difference in  $\chi^2$  does not support the invariant hypothesis, but the remaining indicators contradict this conclusion. On the other hand, the CFI and RMSEA scores are very similar in all models, with differences of 0.01 and 0.015, respectively, indicating factor invariance by gender in the models (Table 3).

The results in Table 4 show that overall quality and outcome quality are direct precursors of perceived value and satisfaction for all runners, and for runners divided by gender. Perceived value is a direct precursor of satisfaction in male runners, female runners, and all runners. Overall quality is a direct precursor of recommending the city in all runners, and in male runners. No direct relationship was observed between overall quality and recommending the city among female runners. Satisfaction was a direct precursor for recommending the city among all groups. With regard to indirect relationships, overall quality, outcome quality, and value were precursors of recommending the city via satisfaction among all groups of runners.



**Table 4.** Comparison of standardised parameter estimates of direct and indirect effects of the total users structural equation and modelling by gender.

			Total Runners		Male Runners		Female Runners		Male Runners vs. Female Runners
			Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	
			Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta	z-Score
Value	←	FQ	0.537 **		0.497 **		0.682 **		0.824
Value	←	OQ	0.363 **		0.411 **		0.196 *		−0.731
Satisf	←	FQ	0.256 **		0.238 **		0.381 **		1.125
Satisf	←	OQ	0.316 **		0.348 **		0.278 **		0.745
Satisf	←	Value	0.490 **		0.464 **		0.499 **		0.58
Rec city	←	FQ	0.234 **	0.313 **	0.264 **	246 **	0.014	0.691 **	−2.621 **
Rec city	←	OQ	−0.058	0.295 **	−0.021	0.284 **	−0.183	0.341 **	−1.606
Rec city	←	Value	0.013	0.289 **	−0.009	0.248 **	0.121	0.421 **	1.099
Rec city	←	Satisf	0.589 **		0.534 **		0.843 **		1.03

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ . FQ = Functional quality; OQ = Outcome Quality; Satisf = Satisfaction; Rec city = Recommending the city.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the relationship between functional quality, outcome quality, satisfaction, and perceived value and intentions to recommend the city among participants in a small-scale sporting event, identifying the presence of any gender differences. These data are useful for scholars, revealing the relationship between the constructs analysed and the influence of gender on the model, and for event organisers and tourism companies, allowing them to implement strategies to improve sports tourism services based on the findings. This could lead to increased satisfaction and stronger intentions to recommend the host city, enhancing the benefits of organising these kinds of events.

The descriptive statistics show a positive overall assessment of the event and of intentions to recommend the city, but it is important to consider the ways in which the different constructs are related to one another, and the effect of functional quality and outcome quality, which are precursors of future intentions [29,30], on satisfaction and intention to recommend the city in particular, transforming sporting events into tools to promote tourism, and boost economic and social development in the host city.

As a logical first step in a study of this kind, common method bias was calculated using Harman's one-factor test, obtaining a value under 50%, which is the cut-off value proposed by Podsakoff et al. [70] for concluding that common method bias has no significant effect on the study results. The reliability and validity of the instruments and constructs used in the study was then evaluated. The results showed that all four constructs had significant correlations, demonstrating the validity. Adequate values were obtained when calculating AVE and CR. AVE values are between 0.52 and 0.95, all of which are higher than the value proposed by Hair et al. [69]. CR values are between 0.84 and 0.98, all of which are higher than the value proposed by Baggozi and Yi [68]. Likewise, the Cronbach's alpha values for each of the constructs were greater than 0.7, reaching almost 0.9 in most cases, which, according to Streiner [67], may be considered adequate.

To find out if there are relationships between the constructs and the presence of gender differences, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the model to check that it linked functional quality, outcome quality, value, satisfaction, and recommending the city. The model was the same for gender-separated runner groups. First, the model was tested individually in each group of runners (total sample, model 0; male runners,

model 0a; female runners, model 0b). Several indices were used to measure the fit of the different models. The RMSEA values for the three models indicated a good model fit [74]. The CFI values for the three groups were very similar and were considered to be acceptable [74]. The CMIN/DF values for the three groups were below 3, which may be considered adequate [76,77]. Overall, the fit indices for the original model were acceptable, therefore the model was deemed adequate.

A multigroup analysis was subsequently carried out to analyse measurement invariance between groups. The  $\Delta\chi^2$  between the different models was checked and differences were observed. However, according to the recommendations on  $\Delta$ CFI and  $\Delta$ RMSEA by Chen [78] and Cheung and Rensvold [79], the results showed the presence of invariance between the models by gender, as they all displayed values with a difference of less than 0.01 and 0.015.

The concept of quality proposed by Grönroos [34], followed by Mullin et al. [35] and Fernández-Martínez et al. [15], formed the basis for the model analysed in this study. Firstly, functional quality was found to be a precursor for value and satisfaction among participants in the half marathon. Outcome quality is also a precursor of value and satisfaction. Therefore, quality is a precursor of value and satisfaction among recreational race participants. It is interesting to note that functional quality has a higher beta value than outcome quality when it comes to predicting value. This is an important finding as value, understood as an evaluation of sacrifices and rewards [47], has a significant influence on satisfaction [29,48], and is a factor that may be addressed by sporting event organisers.

It is also relevant that outcome quality has a higher beta value than functional quality in relation to satisfaction. This can be explained by considering satisfaction as a sum of evaluations of the service received [56]. Moreover, according to Yoshida [41], satisfaction among sporting event participants is associated with performance.

Having established the importance of functional quality and outcome quality for value and satisfaction, it is now time to check the hypotheses. The results confirm Hypothesis 1, which states that perceived functional quality among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city. A number of studies have corroborated this idea [37,42–44], although they explore sporting event spectators rather than participants, and study future intentions rather than recommending the city specifically. Fernández-Martínez et al. [15] found a relationship between functional quality and recommending the city among sporting event spectators. Therefore, functional quality may be assumed to be a precursor to intentions to recommend the city among participants and spectators at sports tourism events.

The sub-hypotheses 1.a y 1.b were also confirmed. However, significant differences were found in this relationship by runners' gender. Among the male runners, functional quality had a direct effect on intentions to recommend the city; among the female runners, there was no direct effect but there was an indirect effect via value and satisfaction. This difference may be owed to the beta values, although there were no differences in the relationships between functional quality and value and satisfaction by gender. Beta values are always higher among female runners, which could suggest that they value functional aspects of sports services more highly. These results are similar to those obtained by Nuviala et al. [22] among sports service users, where women displayed higher values in the relationships between quality, value, and satisfaction, and evaluated quality more positively than their male counterparts.

The results indirectly confirm Hypothesis 2 and its sub-hypotheses (2.a and 2.b), which state that perceived outcome quality among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city. No direct relationship was found between these constructs, although there was an indirect effect via satisfaction. Outcome quality is a precursor of value and satisfaction among participants at these types of events. Therefore, organisers should seek to improve perceptions of outcome quality among runners as much as possible by adapting the race to different levels, or improving participants' training by giving advice through the communication channels used for the event. Communication has been

shown to be a very important tool in sports service users' evaluations and loyalty [80]. No significant differences were found by gender, therefore any strategies adopted would be likely to have the same effect on both genders.

Like outcome quality, value has no direct relationship with intentions to recommend the city, but it has an indirect effect via satisfaction. Therefore, perceived value is a precursor of intentions to recommend the city, confirming Hypothesis 3 and its sub-hypotheses (3.a and 3.b). Several studies of tourism have obtained similar findings [51–53], including Crespo-Hervás et al. [29], who also studied runners but focused on future intentions. Although it has no direct relationship with intentions to recommend the city, value has a high beta value in predicting satisfaction. Due to the importance of perceived value in consumer behaviour, which is viewed as a key component of marketing [29], event organisers must take particular care to establish strategies to enhance perceived value. No gender differences were observed between the runners for this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4 (satisfaction among runners in recreational races is an antecedent of recommending the city), and sub-hypotheses 4.a and 4.b were confirmed by the results of the study. Various studies have shown how satisfaction [37,42,43,57] has a positive effect on intentions in different types of services, including tourism and sports services, acting as a mediator between different constructs [61]. Satisfaction is central in the decision to engage in repeat purchases or visits [3,4]. Therefore, boosting satisfaction can increase intentions to recommend the city as a tourist destination. It is important to develop strategies to enhance participant satisfaction with recreational races in order to boost the promotion of tourism in the city. No gender differences were observed in the results, which pointed to several strategic directions open to organisers of sports tourism events, such as improving functional quality and outcome quality as primary precursors of satisfaction.

### 5.1. Managerial Implications

From a practical perspective, the results of this study have a number of implications for organisers of sports tourism events, especially small-scale sporting events, which attract large numbers of tourists. The study has shown the importance of managing functional quality and outcome quality to improve satisfaction among sports tourists and encourage them to recommend the city hosting the event to others. Perceived value has also proven to be a precursor of intentions to recommend the host city.

It is crucial that managers of participatory sports tourism events devote the resources needed to achieve positive standards of functional quality. Adopting measures to improve evaluations of tangible aspects, response capacity and reliability among human resources, accessibility and safety, signposting on the route, and assistance for participants, etc., are key strategies for enhancing functional quality, perceived value, and satisfaction among participants and increasing the likelihood that they recommend the host city.

Achieving a good outcome quality is another important tool for increase participant satisfaction. When participants come away with a positive perception of a sporting event, their satisfaction increases and gives rise to further positive behaviour. Satisfaction can be enhanced by increasing intrinsic motivation among participants. To do this, the event should be adapted to participants' true abilities and their physical preparation should be improved. Both strategies require communication between the event organisers and the participants.

Equally important is to improve the perceived value of sports tourism events by emphasising the cost-benefit ratio of the event using strategies to explain and even assist with costs and to publish the results achieved by participants.

Facilitating the intent to recommend destinations should be prioritised for organisers of small-scale sporting events. The results of this study show the importance of functional quality and the need to create strategies to enhance outcome quality.

### 5.2. Limitations

There are a few limitations. These include the limitations that are inherent to the study design and the empirical focus on a single sporting event. Other important limitations include the considerably lower proportion of female runners than male runners in the sample, which may have influenced the search for gender differences. In addition, participants' results and rank in the race were not included to analyse outcome quality objectively.

### 5.3. Future Lines of Research

Future descriptive research could include variables that were not taken into consideration in this study, such as participants' results (personal assessment of race time and position), economic, motivational aspects, and other dimensions related to sustainable tourism. It would be very interesting to advance the study of personal green practices with a "zero waste" objective, based on the "rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle" model [81], which aims to reduce the economic and environmental costs of the materials used by participants and organisers.

Other aspects related to destination image could also be considered, such as the cultural, artistic, and/or natural heritage, tangible or intangible, of the host city and its relation to the future intentions of the participants. It would be interesting to replicate the study in different cities or at similar events in other sports to allow the results to be generalised. In addition, a series of quasi-experimental studies exploring the effect of different strategies to improve functional quality, outcome quality, and perceived value on the assessments made by participants in these types of sports tourism events could be carried out.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, the results show that the perceived value and satisfaction among participants in recreational races are precursors of functional quality and outcome quality. These results highlight the importance of quality management for sports tourists participating in small-scale events. Functional quality and satisfaction are direct precursors of recommending the host city among participants in small-scale sporting events, but there are differences between men and women in this ratio. Outcome quality and value are indirect precursors of intentions to recommend the city via satisfaction among runners as a whole, and among the groups of runners divided by gender.

These results confirm the need to manage both functional quality and outcome quality to transform sports tourism events into tools for promoting the city hosting the small-scale sporting event. Functional quality and outcome quality can have a positive or negative influence on participants' or tourists' future behaviour, especially when it comes to their intentions to recommend the city, therefore organisers of small-scale sporting events should pay particular attention to elements relating to the quality of the event. It is important that organisers of small sporting events and authorities responsible for tourism governance collaborate with complementary activities that enhance value, and promote a positive image of the destination and sustainable tourism. The results of this research are important for destinations interested in hosting small-scale sporting events, bringing new development possibilities.

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## Abbreviations

EPOD2	Sports Organisations Perception Scale: version 2
CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
ECVI	Expected Cross Validation Index
AIC	Akaike Information Criterion
CMIN	chi-squared
CMIN/DF	chi-squared/degrees of freedom

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