

Reactions to a Recurring Sports Event in a Non-Traditional Location

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ABSTRACT

This project analyzed the affect of moving an event, the Irish Student Trampoline Open, from its traditional location in the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland for the first time. The specific research focus was on participant's perceptions of moving the event and their loyalty to the event. To acquire data members of the Stirling University Trampoline and Gymnastics Club were interviewed both prior to, and during the Irish Student Trampoline Open, and at the event a brief written survey was distributed to participants from many teams.

INTRODUCTION

"The ultimate nonfinancial goal for any event is to become a tradition for that date and that particular site" (Solomon, 2002). The Irish Student Trampoline Open (ISTO) has achieved that goal. It is an annual trampoline competition held in late March, in the Republic of Ireland. Since its conception in 2002 the ISTO has become the largest trampoline competition in Ireland and generally sees between 450 and 500 participants (Irish Student Trampoline Open, "About ISTO"). In 2010, for the first time, the ISTO was held in Northern Ireland instead of the Republic of Ireland. As very little information is readily available on recurring sporting events, and less yet on the effects of moving the location of a recurring sporting event, the ISTO of 2010 presented the perfect opportunity for research.

Previous research on recurring events tells us that they are likely going to be patronized by a high percentage of repeat visitors, who are familiar with the event process and venue (Graham et al., 1995). The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of a recurring sporting event, when it is held at a new location. This was done through examining if there was excitement over the new location, and determining if moving the ISTO 2010 impacted the participant's decisions to attend the ISTO, and assessing if other factors are more or less important in deciding to attend.

METHODS

The research was done utilizing a mixed method approach. In addition to observation of the event and first hand participation in the event in both 2009 and 2010, face-to-face interviews, and a written survey were utilized. All participants were given informed consent forms prior to being interviewed or surveyed. The interview consisted of seven questions with plenty of room for clarification and expansion and was done with 16 members of the Stirling University Trampoline and Gymnastics Club during the week prior to the ISTO 2010. Follow up interviews were given at the competition consisting of six questions to 9 of those participants. Interviewee answers were transcribed during the interviews by the researcher. Analysis of the interviews was done by including quotations from the interviews, along with the researcher's thoughts, opinions, and reflections on these quotations. The written survey consisted of nine closed ended questions utilizing ordered responses, unordered responses, and scaling. 125 surveys were randomly distributed amongst participants at the ISTO 2010 on Saturday March 27th. Sixty-seven of those surveys were returned, however the informed consent form was unsigned on two rendering them unusable. Sixty-five surveys were properly completed and turned in, which is a response rate of 52%. Analysis of the surveys was done using the Statistical Practices for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The bulk of the data presented comes from the quantifiable SPSS results.

RESULTS

The data presented in the following section was collected and analyzed based on the responses given by participants who submitted their surveys or agreed to partake in interviews. The survey responses are displayed in

descriptive form with supporting graphs, tables, or charts. The most relevant qualitative interview responses are quoted or described.

Figure 1. below show the results to the question “When you found out ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast how did you feel?” We must take these answers as given, however answers to the same question in interviews led to the suspicion that some people may have responded about their excitement to the ISTO in general, rather than their excitement in regards to the location. For example, one interviewee answer was “I can’t wait for ISTO” and when asked to clarify their feelings in response to it being in Belfast they then said “ehh Belfast is nothing special but, it’s ISTO, I’ve been looking forward to it for months!”

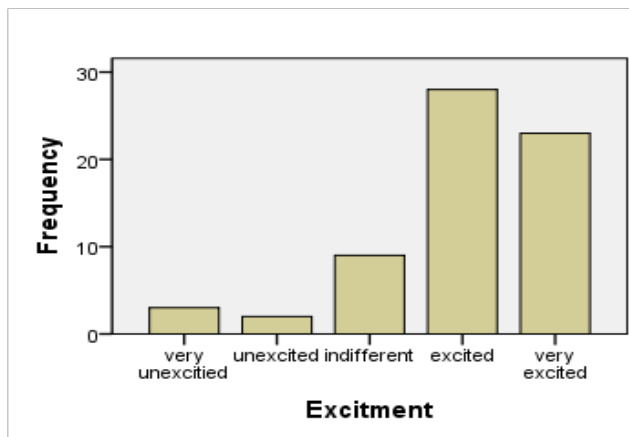


Figure 1. Level of excitement upon hearing the ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast

Figure 2. indicates the results for the first question in the survey “What team are you a member of?” Of the 37 teams present at the ISTO 2010 responses were returned from members of 17 of those teams. As we can see responses were returned in varying frequencies between 1 and 10 representatives per team.

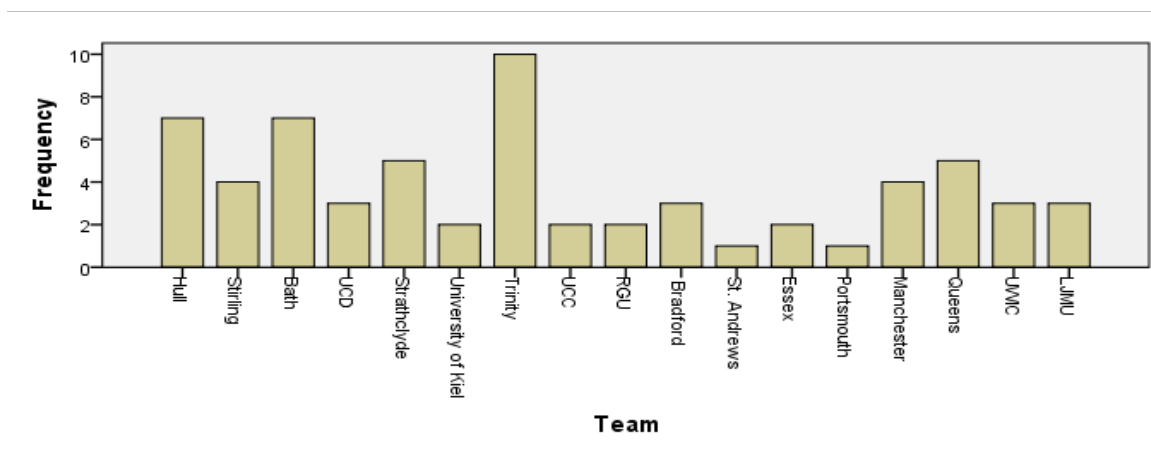


Figure 2. Survey participants by team

For the question “where is your permanent residency” the results are indicated by Figure 3. shown below. The answers are consistent with the previous question in showing that the greatest number of survey participants came from, or attend school in England, and the Republic of Ireland. Less than 20% of respondents came from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales or other countries.

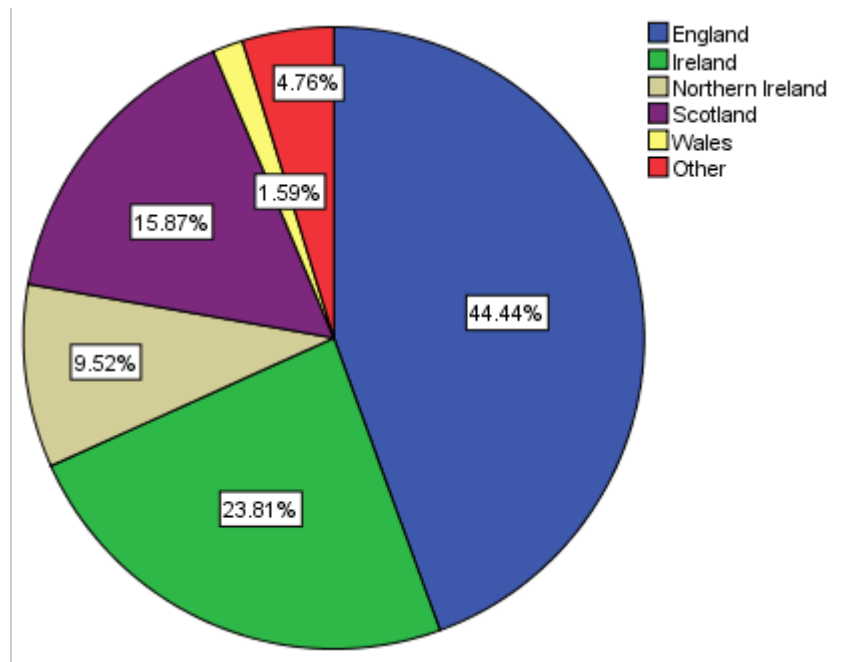


Figure 3. % of survey participants by home country

The Pearson’s chi-square test shows if there is a relationship between two variables, or if they are independent. A significance of .05 or less indicates a relationship. The Pearson’s chi-square tests were run to see if there is a relationship between the excitement level upon hearing that the ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast, and either what team the person is a member of, or the persons home country. The results showed a significance of .456 between a person’s team and their level of excitement, and .697 between their home country and their level of excitement upon hearing the ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast, indicating no relationship in either case. After hearing one interview participant from Belfast say, “I’m so glad it will be on my home turf this year, my family can come, I’ll get to show the team around, and I’ll know where the f*** I am instead of being lost all the time,” it was predicted pride for people from the Northern Ireland, or resentment from participants from the Republic of Ireland might cause a relationship between the aforementioned variables. However, performing the Pearson’s chi-square tests easily disproved this idea.

Participants were asked how long they have been competitive trampolinists because the longer the trampolinist has been competitive, the more familiar they are with how competitions are organized and run. Long time competitors are also likely to be familiar with a greater variety of competitions, and know what makes one experience better or worse than another. Table 1. is the breakdown of the frequencies between the number of years a competitor has been trampolining and how excited they were when hearing the ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast. To test if these variables are related or independent a Pearson’s Chi-squared test was run, Table 2. is the output of that test. The significance of .033 clearly indicates a relationship between these two variables.

Table 1. Level of Excitement by number of years competing

	Excitement					Total
	very unexcited	unexcited	indifferent	excited	very excited	
Years 1-2 years	1	0	4	12	15	32
3-4 years	0	2	2	7	4	15
5-6 years	2	0	1	2	1	6
7 + years	0	0	2	7	3	12
Total	3	2	9	28	23	65

Table 2. Chi-Square Test Between Level of Excitement and Number of Years Competing

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.469^a	12	.033
Likelihood Ratio	16.732	12	.160
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.593	1	.207
N of Valid Cases	65		

a. 15 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .18.

The participants were asked how many times they have attended the ISTO including the ISTO 2010. This question was included because it can be assumed that the more times the trampolinist has attended the ISTO, the more familiar they are with the ISTO, and the more they were able to compare the ISTO 2010 in Belfast to the ISTO's of other years. Table 3. is the breakdown of the frequencies between the number times the person has attended the ISTO, and how excited they were when hearing the ISTO 2010 would be in Belfast. Underneath that is Table 4. showing the output of running a Pearson's chi-squared test between these variables. The Pearson's chi-square test had a significance of .029 showing that the number of times a person has attended the ISTO and their level of excitement upon hearing the ISTO would be in Belfast are strongly related.

Table 3. Level of Excitement by number of times at the ISTO

		Excitement					Total
		very unexcited	Unexcited	Indifferent	excited	very excited	
Times	1	0	0	5	11	14	30
	2	1	0	1	11	9	22
	3	1	1	1	4	0	7
	4 +	1	1	2	2	0	6
Total		3	2	9	28	23	65

Table 4. Chi-Square Test Between Level of Excitement and Number of Times at the ISTO

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.798^a	12	.029
Likelihood Ratio	25.779	12	.012
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.429	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	65		

Being that previous research on recurring events has told us they are likely to be patronized by a high percentage of repeat visitors who recognize the venue, event process, and system it is not surprising that there is a relationship between the number of years being a competitor, or the number of times attending the ISTO, and the level of excitement. As the previous four tables show, it is the repeat visitors and long time competitors who were

less enthusiastic about the events new location, while newcomers to the sport and event were more enthusiastic. This is consistent with what was expected based on the previously cited research on recurring events.

In regards to asking what affected participants decisions on whether or not to attend the ISTO 2010 in interviews common answers included money, past experiences, if friends on the team were going, and timing. With less common answers including the location, friends from other teams going, peer pressure, and hearing hype about the event. Most of the interviewees cited multiple reasons for going or not going, rather than having just one deciding factor. In the surveys participants were asked to rate how much location, cost, other teammates going and other teams going will affect their decision to attend future ISTOs. They ranked these issues “On a scale of 1-4, 1 meaning it will not affect your decision at all, 4 meaning your decision will be entirely based upon this.” Figure 4. shows the results.

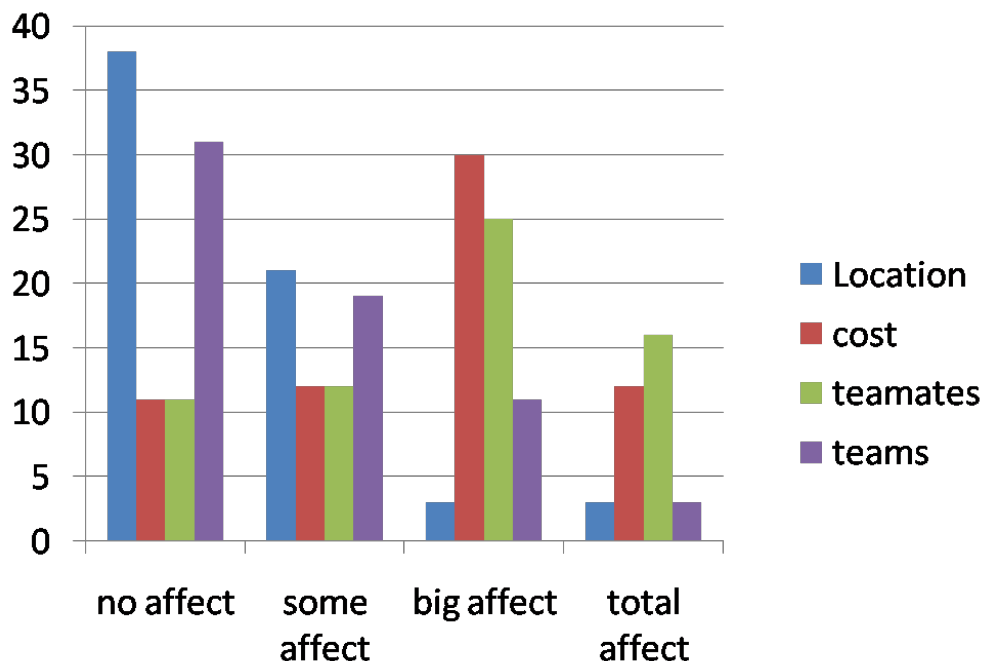


Figure 4. influences on deciding to attend the ISTO

To summarize cost and other teammates going affect a greater number of people’s decisions on whether or not to attend the ISTO than the location or other teams going.

The final question on the survey was “Do you plan on attending the ISTO again in the future” with the choices of yes, no, and not sure. The results were 53 people said yes, 12 people were not sure and zero respondents said no

Some additional topics were covered in the interviews that were not covered in the surveys. When asked about past ISTO experiences particularly in regards to the running of the competition, it was found for the most part that participants felt it was well organized and run, and expected it to be the same in Belfast for the ISTO 2010. Another aspect of the event that was commented upon was that the themed night out had switched to after the competition rather than before, this seems to have improved one persons perception of how safe competing would be as she said, “I can’t believe they finally changed the theme night out to after the competition my first year not going, after late nights out I always got scared I’d muss up and get hurt.”

Another topic discussed was sightseeing, in years past, people did a fair amount including Dublin City bus tours, Guinness factory tours, and visiting the city center. Though none of these activities were organized by the team, almost everyone interviewed mentioned having done some tourism related activity. Not all the experiences mentioned were positive, one anecdote was told about being ripped off and the fact that it had put a damper on that interviewee’s entire ISTO weekend. When asked if they did any sightseeing in Belfast interviewees who attended the ISTO 2010 had unanimously visited the Belfast Botanic Gardens Park as they had to walk through it to get to the competition venue. There is no way to know if any would have gone to see the gardens if they had a choice. No other sites were mentioned this was quite a difference from the year before.

People found the competition conformed mostly to their expectations, however some were surprised or impressed by the coverage the event was receiving, there were camera crews from the BBC throughout most of the competition, which was a change from past years. Only one interviewee complained outright about the weekend compared to past years saying “the nights out here were utter rubbish and there was nothing to do, last year was much better.”

CONCLUSIONS

There was a correlation between being a returning participant and a low level of excitement for the event being held in Belfast. However, moving the event did not seem to affect participant’s perceptions of the event being one worth attending. Participation levels also did not decrease, but increased. The event reached its capacity months in advance as was the case for the ISTO 2009. The ISTO continued to grow in 2010 with 550 competitors coming from increasingly far distances, with participants from the University of Kiel in Germany. (Irish Student Trampoline Open www.isto.ie) Overall the location of the event did not seem to be a large determining factor on how the event did, or whether people participated, though it may have affected which people participated with many attendees being first time ISTO participants, rather than multiple year returnees with an established history with the event.

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations on this research project. While the information studied did seem to show a correlation between returning participants and their enthusiasm about moving the recurring event from its traditional location it is important to keep in mind that more research would need to be done. In particular getting more information from people who chose not to attend the ISTO 2010 would be beneficial. Budgeting and a lack of access made it impossible to travel around and do interviews prior to the event with members from every team. This means the only team that thoughts and opinions of members not attending the ISTO 2010 were gathered from was the University of Stirling. Overall the opinions of trampolinists not attending the ISTO 2010 were therefore highly underrepresented. Furthermore of the 37 teams that had members participating in the ISTO 2010 competition responses were only turned in from 17 teams meaning certain populations within the total population were unrepresented. Also not being able to see the future effects of moving the ISTO is a limitation, seeing if there was a decrease in returning participants at the ISTO 2011 and other future ISTOs would be valuable information. Furthermore, the research done was in regard to a specific event at a specific time, in order to get a true indication of the effects of moving a recurring sporting event, many other events would need to be studied. In particular the researcher predicts that the results of this study would be vastly different from those on an event with a much longer history, the 9 year old ISTO is well established, but could hardly be compared to traditions where generation after generation have participated in the event at the same location and how people would respond to changing that location. The final major limitation is that qualitative data is difficult to disseminate, the conclusions drawn from them are less certain than that of clear cut data drawn from statistics, so quotes from the interviews could have been interpreted differently by different people.

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