

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# An Investigation of Affect Transfer of Social Responsibility in Ski Events Among Tourists and Employees

Babak Taheri<sup>1</sup>  | Linda W. Lee<sup>2</sup>  | Jamie Thompson<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Hospitality, Hotel Management and Tourism, Texas A&M University, USA | <sup>2</sup>Edge Hotel School, University of Essex, UK | <sup>3</sup>The Business School, Edinburgh Napier University, UK

**Correspondence:** Babak Taheri ([b.taheri.260@gmail.com](mailto:b.taheri.260@gmail.com))

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## ABSTRACT

This research investigates the integration of social responsibility into Iranian ski tourism events and its positive affect transfer among employees and sport tourists. Study 1 comprised interviews with 30 employees of ski resorts and found that workers' understanding and expectation of social responsibility of the ski resorts extended beyond benefits to local communities. Study 2 comprised a survey with 710 sport tourists of ski events and found that when the event includes social responsibility that benefits local communities, it positively moderates the relationship between satisfaction and ongoing loyalty and emotional investment of sport tourists in these events. These results suggest the incorporation of social responsibility practices into ski events can transfer positive affects into desirable loyalty and emotional outcomes among sport tourists, yet employees seek more ambitious social responsibility efforts.

## 1 | Introduction

While ski events can bring multiple benefits to ski resorts and event sponsors, there is increasing attention directed toward the social responsibility of such events (Jäger and Fifka 2022; Kang and Matsuoka 2023). Through the lens of affect transfer theory, our research explores the perceived social responsibility of ski events among ski tourists and employees to assess event outcomes. The context of our research is ski events in Iran where skiing was banned until 1988. With excellent snow conditions and some of the highest altitude resorts in the world, Iran's ski resorts are now experiencing growth (Tehran Times 2022).

Sport tourism events involve “sport-based travel away from the home environment for a limited time, where sport is characterized by unique rulesets, competition related to physical prowess, and a playful nature” (Hinch and Higham 2001, 49). Sport events are important to tourism, as they enhance destination

image and provide economic benefits (Gandhi-Arora and Shaw 2002), including supporting local business and providing hospitality revenues (Thompson et al. 2022). Increasingly, social responsibility, sustainability efforts (Wells et al. 2016), and the involvement of different stakeholder groups (i.e., local, employees, and the business community) (Hinch and Holt 2017) are vital for sport tourism destinations.

Despite increasing interest in social responsibility (Habitzreuter and Koenigstorfer 2023; Jäger and Fifka 2022), the process of positive affect transfer from these social responsibility efforts among sport tourists and employees is not well understood (François et al. 2019; Aragonés-Jericó et al. 2023). Further, there has been little research on the impact of sport tourism events among employees (De Lucia et al. 2020; Edwards 2016). This is particularly concerning as worker recruitment within sport tourism is challenging and associated with high demands, fatigue, and precarity—highlighting

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the importance of considering the values, beliefs, and drivers of this key stakeholder group (Hinch and Cameron 2020; Sheptak and Menaker 2020).

Our research aim is twofold. First, we explore with ski resort employees key themes of satisfaction, transfer of emotions, and social responsibility in events to better understand how social responsibility efforts are viewed by this stakeholder group. Second, we propose and test an integrative conceptual model with sport tourists, linking the relationships among tourist satisfaction, perceived social responsibility in events, event loyalty intention, affective event identification, and fan event attachment.

## 2 | Literature Review

### 2.1 | Affect Transfer Theory in Sport and Tourism

Affect transfer is the process in which affect or low-level emotion about an entity (such as a local community or charity) transfers to another entity (such as a sport event) through association (Gwinner 1997). In marketing literature, affect transfer was used to examine the transfer of positive affect from advertisements to brands (Machleit and Wilson 1988) and from a core brand to a brand extension (Aaker and Keller 1990). In tourism research, affect transfer of positive associations has been shown to occur from major sporting events to sponsors (Cook et al. 2023) and vice versa (Grohs et al. 2004). Sport event-sponsor affect transfer studies examined fan attachment (Scheinbaum et al. 2022; Scheinbaum and Lacey 2015) and event-sponsor fit (Scheinbaum and Lacey 2013) in professional cycling events and sport, music, and book events (Scheinbaum et al. 2019). Affect transfer theory was used to demonstrate that the positive image and affect related to social responsibility of a cycling event can be transferred to its corporate sponsors (Scheinbaum and Lacey 2015). These studies focused on the occurrence of transfer of associations between events and sponsors but did not examine the process of affect transfer, namely the influence of positive affect related to social responsibility on other relationships such as between satisfaction, loyalty intention, and emotional connection outcomes.

Literature on affect transfer theory is focused on the context of frequently recurring, utilitarian services such as grocery self-checkouts (Blinda et al. 2019), banking (Pérez and Del Bosque 2015), and virtual assistants (Singh 2021). These studies show that the positive emotions that form toward a brand, such as through exposure to advertising or word-of-mouth, can transfer to positive feelings of satisfaction (Blinda et al. 2019; Pérez and Del Bosque 2015; Singh 2021). In other words, an individual's affect toward a brand is formed first, which then leads to satisfaction with the frequently recurring, utilitarian brand (Blinda et al. 2019; Pérez and Del Bosque 2015; Singh 2021).

Yet, tourism experiences such as sport events differ from these utilitarian, frequently recurring services in at least two key ways, which suggests that the process of affect transfer may also differ. First, sport events are hedonic experiences (Hightower

Jr. et al. 2002; Kempf 1999). That is, sport events are dramatic performances in which the spectators observe competition and consume the experience for affective gratification (Brown et al. 2016; Kempf 1999). Consequently, sport events are evaluated from a mostly experiential perspective rather than just their utility (Babin et al. 1994). Second, sport tourism events are not typically frequently recurring activities. With frequently recurring activities, consumers first form an attitude toward the activity before embarking on the activity and forming a habit (Ji and Wood 2007). In contrast, sport tourism events generally do not occur frequently enough to form habits. Thus, we suggest that these key differences warrant further investigation into the process of affect transfer in the context of hedonic and infrequent sport tourism events.

### 2.2 | Sport Tourism Events and Social Responsibility

Social responsibility encompasses actions that promote pro-social behavior, including contributing to community welfare, safeguarding the environment, and advancing broader societal interests (Benabou and Tirole 2010). While engaging in socially responsible initiatives may entail financial or temporal costs for individuals and organizations (Wickert et al. 2016), such efforts are associated with a range of beneficial outcomes. Specifically, the adoption of socially responsible practices has been shown to facilitate the development of organizational identity, enhance corporate image, increase customer satisfaction, and support the fulfillment and well-being of various stakeholders (Crane and Glozer 2016; Ghanbarpour et al. 2023).

In contrast, sport tourism events are hedonic experiences that are meant to be consumed for maximal gratification by attendees (Hightower Jr. et al. 2002; Kempf 1999). The literature has recognized that these experiences can have a positive influence on prospective tourists' intentions to visit a destination (Rojas-Méndez et al. 2019) and allow tourists to feel close and connected to an event and its locations (Larsen and Bærenholdt 2019; Taheri and Thompson 2020; Thompson et al. 2022). By integrating research on socially responsible prosocial behavior with hedonic gratifying sporting experiences, we can build understanding for how these combine to construct the overall stakeholder experience and the associated transferring effects.

Table 1 illustrates how studies have identified the benefits of socially responsible sport tourism and tourist behavioral outcomes (Gibson et al. 2012; Walker et al. 2013). For example, when event organizers commit to socially responsible practices, this has benefits for all stakeholders (Martins et al. 2022; Walker et al. 2013; Yfantidou et al. 2017). Yet, sport tourism has often been criticized for outcomes that are not socially responsible, such as increasing traffic, pollution, crime, and over-tourism (Martins et al. 2022; Schnitzer et al. 2021). Thus, studies have discussed concerns that tourists and employees often have a disregard for sustainable tourism. Our research fills a gap in understanding by testing and exploring the roles of satisfaction and social responsibility together among ski tourists and employees to assess event outcomes for these stakeholders. We build on previous snowsport event research (Taheri and Thompson 2020) by

**TABLE 1** | Summary studies of social responsibility in sport tourism.

Source	Key findings
Gibson et al. 2012	Findings point to the benefit of local sport tourism and its compatibility with economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
Hinch and Holt 2017	Residents expressed slightly stronger place identity than runners. Runners identified more with the activity of running and connected with the place through dependence and experience.
Martins et al. 2022	Event organizers should actively promote sustainable transport methods by integrating image and branding of the event into public transport promotions.
Walker et al. 2013	Tourists' familiarity with Win in Africa program and perceptions of FIFA as socially responsible have a positive effect on event image and WoM intentions.
Yfantidou et al. 2017	Companies show a great degree of interest in policies such as using green products, saving energy, recycling, landscape restoration, and use of local products.

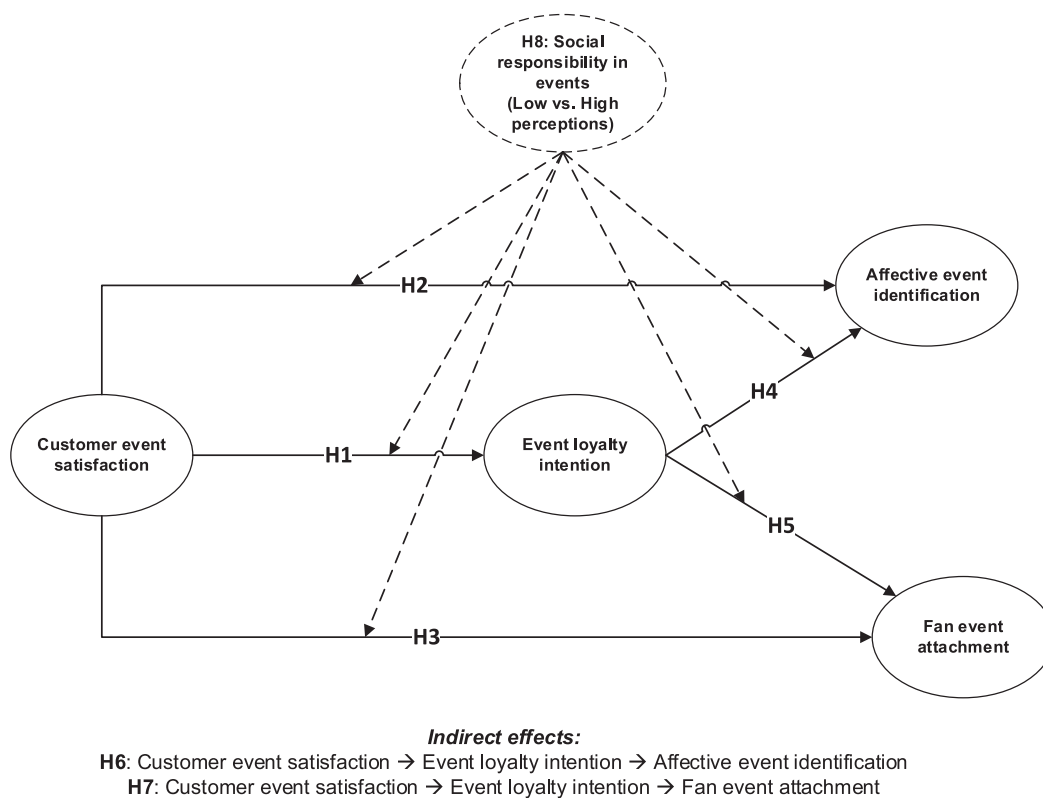
exploring social responsibility as a means to enhance the positive outcomes of ski tourism.

### 3 | Conceptual Model

Informed by affect transfer theory, we propose a conceptual model that assesses the moderation effect of perceived social responsibility of ski events on the relationship between customer event satisfaction and event loyalty intention. Specifically, our conceptual model (see Figure 1) starts with customer satisfaction of the ski event, which then transfers to positive loyalty intention (intention to revisit the event and to engage in positive word-of-mouth). The relationship between customer event satisfaction and event loyalty intention is strengthened when perceptions of social responsibility are high. Affect transfer occurs through the positive associations of high perceptions of social responsibility enhancing the relationship between event satisfaction and loyalty intention. Further, when customers make an attitudinal investment (i.e., loyalty intention) in the event, this then transfers to emotional investment in the event through affective event identification and fan event attachment, which are both affect-based measures (Gwinner 1997).

#### 3.1 | Customer Event Satisfaction and Event Loyalty Intention

Customer event satisfaction occurs when the event has perceived quality, fulfills customers' expectations of the event, and evokes positive emotional experiences (Biscaia et al. 2012). Customer

**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual model: Moderating effect of CSR in events on event loyalty intention and the development of emotional investment in the event.

event satisfaction is recognized as a prerequisite for the development of desired customer attitudes, such as intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth and revisit intention (Assaker et al. 2011). Further, the effect of satisfaction on attitudes such as intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth increases as satisfaction increases (Bayón 2007).

Loyalty intention is the intention to engage in positive behaviors toward a product or service due to past experiences (Zeithaml et al. 1996) but stops short of actual behaviors. In an event tourism context, loyalty intention encompasses the intention of saying positive things about the event, the intention of encouraging others to participate in future events by the same organizers, and the intention to visit future events by the same organizers (Jin et al. 2022). Loyalty intention encompasses the first three phases of Oliver's (1999) four-phase loyalty framework. The first phase is cognition, based on recent experience-based information, which is considered shallow loyalty (Oliver 1999). The second phase is affect, which is an attitude that reflects a commitment to the brand, although still subject to switching behavior (Oliver 1999). The third phase is conation that reflects a motivation to revisit the event, although the anticipated action may still be unrealized (Oliver 1999). In our study, event loyalty intention does not include the fourth phase of Oliver's (1999) framework, action, which refers to loyalty behavior. Event loyalty intention refers to the *intention* of engaging in loyalty behavior after experiencing the event and can be viewed as an attitude or as tourists' psychological commitment to the event (Taheri and Shaker 2025) and does not include *actual* loyalty behavior (Liao et al. 2014; Oliver 1999). The relationship between satisfaction and loyalty intention is well established in marketing and sport literature (Huang et al. 2015; Zeithaml et al. 1996). Thus, we hypothesize:

**H1.** *Customer event satisfaction positively influences event loyalty intention.*

### 3.2 | Customer Event Satisfaction, Affective Event Identification and Fan Event Attachment

Affective event identification is defined as a customer's positive feelings about an event that meets their important self-definitional needs such as identity similarity (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Lin et al. 2011) and is considered an essential part of a customer's long-term relationship with an event (Hung 2014). Customers with affective identification about an event have a sense of belongingness with key aspects of the event and prefer the event over other similar events. Satisfaction leads to identification with a brand due to satisfied customers fulfilling one of their self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). In other words, customers who are satisfied with the experience at the event will be more likely to identify positively with the event (Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday 2008).

Fan event attachment is defined as a customer's psychological connection to a particular event (Prayag et al. 2021) and, like affective event identification, is an affect-based measure (Gwinner 1997) and part of a customer's long-term relationship

with an event (Hung 2014). Customers with fan attachment support and follow coverage of the event (Scheinbaum and Lacey 2015) and are emotionally involved with the event, but unlike affective identification, this involvement can occur without identification with the event (Prayag et al. 2021). Previous research found that satisfaction positively influences place attachment in the context of festivals (Lee et al. 2012) and marketing models often found that customer satisfaction is an antecedent of brand attachment (Orth et al. 2010). In a study about event programs and activities, those with high involvement were found to be more likely to be satisfied (Lee and Beeler 2009). Satisfaction was found to have a positive influence on place attachment at the London 2012 Summer Olympic Games (Brown et al. 2016). Thus, for customers to affectively identify with the event or to feel attachment to the event, the event must first be satisfactory to them. We propose the following hypotheses:

**H2.** *Customer event satisfaction positively influences affective event identification.*

**H3.** *Customer event satisfaction positively influences fan event attachment.*

### 3.3 | Event Loyalty Intention, Affective Event Identification and Fan Event Attachment

Recent studies have shown that loyalty comprises both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty, that attitudinal loyalty drives behavioral loyalty, and that deep psychological attachment with customers is needed to cultivate true customer loyalty (Bourdeau 2005; Saini and Singh 2020). Attitudinal loyalty is defined as customers' psychological commitment to the brand while behavioral loyalty is defined as customers' continuous purchases and extended purchase intention of the brand (Taheri and Shaker 2025). Our construct of event loyalty intention is considered attitudinal loyalty.

Our construct of affective event identification is considered part of behavioral loyalty. Behavioral loyalty is conceptualized by Bourdeau (2005) as comprising continuous purchases and extended purchase intention that includes the following items: (1) preference for the chosen product or service over those of other similar products or services, (2) positive image of the product or service, and (3) identification with the product or service. These same items are included in our construct of affective event identification.

We test the role of event loyalty intention as a precursor to an enduring relationship between customers and events (Lacey et al. 2015). The sequence of event loyalty intention occurring prior to affective event identification and fan event attachment is consistent with previous studies indicating that attitude (Kabiraj and Shanmugan 2011), commitment (Davis-Sramek et al. 2009), and attachment (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett 2001) are antecedents of behavioral loyalty. Our hypothesized sequence is also consistent with research on brand loyalty of tourist destinations indicating that attitudinal loyalty enhances tourists' feelings about places (Liu et al. 2020) through the feeling-as-information perspective that suggests

that feelings convey relevant information (Schwarz and Clore 1996). For example, pleasant feelings are viewed as evidence of liking, satisfaction, and happiness while unpleasant feelings are evidence of disliking, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness (Schwarz and Clore 1996). These feelings, in addition to cognitive processing, are used as a source of information to form judgments and are retrieved from memory in the same way as other types of information (Liu et al. 2020). In the context of ski events, this means that tourists' positive affect that is embedded in event loyalty intention as a source of information will anticipate having positive emotions of being involved with the event, including positive identification with the event and positive attachment to the event.

To tease out the relationship between loyalty intention and an emotional connection with the event, our hypotheses examine the prospect that customers' emotional investment in the event occurs after they have already made an attitudinal commitment to the event (in the form of loyalty intention). This sequence is consistent with affect transfer theory (Pérez and Del Bosque 2015; Singh 2021; Zeithaml et al. 1996) as studies of fans of sports teams found that emotional attachment (i.e., identification and attachment) to a sports team occurs through experience with the team and associated loyalty intention (Crawford 2003; Dwyer et al. 2015), that is, attachment occurs after the customer has an attitude of loyalty toward the team. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H4.** *Event loyalty intention positively influences affective event identification.*

**H5.** *Event loyalty intention positively influences fan event attachment.*

### 3.4 | Mediating Effect of Event Loyalty Intention

Selected studies have found relationships between satisfaction, loyalty intention, attachment, and affective identification in the context of sports teams (e.g., Kwon et al. 2005). Fans become attached to their teams through loyalty, meaning that each time they see their team play, prospective fans begin to foster a sense of obligation to support their team (Pimentel and Reynolds 2004). Being a loyal fan of a team or event means a sense of commitment in attending associated events and spreading word-of-mouth to promote the source of an individual's loyalty (Obiegbu et al. 2019). Through prolonged loyalty over a period of time, individuals begin to form an emotional connection (Crawford 2003; Dwyer et al. 2015), such that satisfactory experiences lead to an emotional connection (Biscaia et al. 2012).

For small scale ski events that are not broadcast by media, we explore whether this emotional connection could occur at one ski tourism event, as ski events generally take place over a longer duration (e.g., over several days). Over the course of the ski event, we suggest that sport tourists who are satisfied with the event develop an intention to revisit prior to making an emotional connection. This sequence is consistent with literature that found attitude (i.e., loyalty intention) is an antecedent of affect (Smith and Kirby 2000); thus, we propose that customers identify with a sport event or become attached to it after they

have direct exposure and are satisfied with it, which is amplified by their loyalty intention (Obiegbu et al. 2019).

**H6.** *Event loyalty intention positively mediates the relationship between customer event satisfaction and affective event identification.*

**H7.** *Event loyalty intention positively mediates the relationship between customer event satisfaction and fan event attachment.*

### 3.5 | Moderating Effect of Perceived Social Responsibility in Events

Social responsibility literature indicates that when a company displays social responsibility and when a customer values this behavior, the relationship between the customer and the company will strengthen (Lacey et al. 2015). While multiple studies examined social responsibility as an independent variable (e.g., Scheinbaum and Lacey 2015), only a few investigated social responsibility as a moderator variable. For example, Lacey et al. (2015) found that, as a moderator, social responsibility enhances relationship quality and intensifies customers' willingness to engage in positive word-of-mouth for an NBA team (Lacey et al. 2015). Social responsibility serves as a relationship motivator in which the repurchase intention of newspaper readers is higher due to positive social responsibility (Upamannu et al. 2015). Consistent with our perspective that customer event satisfaction leads to loyalty intention, we anticipate that when the event displays social responsibility, it enhances customer interest in revisiting and engaging in positive word-of-mouth. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H8.** *High perceived social responsibility in events positively moderates the relationship between event satisfaction and event loyalty intention, such that the relationship is stronger when perceptions of social responsibility in events is high.*

## 4 | Methodology

This research uses data from sport tourists and employees and a parallel convergent mixed-methods approach (Creswell and Clark 2018) at ski events at two Iranian ski resorts within a 4-month period in winter. Given the lower numbers of ski resort employees relative to sport tourists, this necessitated a qualitative method (30 semi-structured interviews) among employees and quantitative method (710 questionnaires) for tourists. Such mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods also provides superior understanding into the phenomena of the study as we "obtain different but complementary data on the same topic" (Morse 1991, 122) to best appreciate the research aim.

### 4.1 | Qualitative Strand: Staff View

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 local employees at two Iranian ski resorts who were working at the ski events (see Table 2). Purposive sampling was employed as it allows researchers to use their judgment and understanding of the topic to select informants likely to enable

**TABLE 2** | Interviewees profile.

Interviewees (anonymized)	Gender	Age
N1	Female	64
N2	Male	48
N3	Male	51
N4	Female	28
N5	Male	52
N6	Male	61
N7	Male	26
N8	Male	38
N9	Male	53
N10	Female	42
N11	Male	38
N12	Male	60
N13	Male	23
N14	Female	26
N15	Male	42
N16	Male	53
N17	Male	29
N18	Male	51
N19	Male	57
N20	Female	32
N21	Female	55
N22	Male	28
N23	Male	30
N24	Female	22
N25	Male	43
N26	Male	25
N27	Female	58
N28	Male	40
N29	Female	51
N30	Male	33

them to respond to their research questions and to meet their objectives (Creswell and Clark 2018). Interviews were transcribed and the interview questions addressed the key themes of satisfaction, transfer of emotions (affect transfer theory), and social responsibility. The following questions served as a sample guide for the semi-structured interviews: (1) Can you describe your experience working at the recent ski event?; (2) What aspects of the event did you find most satisfying as a staff member?; (3) To what extent do you think the resort or event organizers understand and apply social responsibility principles?; (4) What kind of training or support have you received

(or would like to receive) regarding sustainability or social responsibility?; (5) How do the ski resort or event organizers communicate their commitment to social responsibility to staff and guests?; (6) In your opinion, how could communication around social responsibility be improved for tourists and employees?; (7) Do you think tourists or staff develop emotional connections to events that include socially responsible activities? Why or why not?; (8) Can you describe any moments during the event where you felt emotionally connected to the resort's values or actions?; (9) How do you feel about the way ski events affect the local environment?; (10) How do these environmental issues influence your satisfaction or pride in working at the resort?; (11) What environmental impacts have you observed during ski events?; (12) If you had the chance to advise the management team, what actions would you suggest to make the events more socially and environmentally responsible?

Abductive thematic analysis was employed, with exploratory coding, informed by key themes of satisfaction, social responsibility, and affect transfer theory (Thompson 2022). Each researcher went back and forth from the data, constantly looking for systematic areas of similarity and/or difference, which were subsequently resolved through further debate (Wells et al. 2016). Findings of coded interview transcripts were communicated between the researchers; improving the validity, integrity, and consistency of the analysis (Wells et al. 2016). Consistently, several themes highlighting social responsibility related concepts emerged, which are discussed further below: social responsibility understanding; messaging; and negative environmental influences.

#### 4.1.1 | Social Responsibility Understanding

Primarily, ski event employees were concerned that the resorts did not have the requisite knowledge of social responsibility in order to run these events sustainably. Different perspectives and understanding of social responsibility are not uncommon in contexts where larger organizations are operating with local community employees (Ertuna et al. 2022). Yet, our sampled employees were particularly critical of the organizational perspective of social responsibility:

I really think we should first understand within the ski events what social responsibility means. I studied social responsibility and sustainability courses at university. I also find that social responsibility from textbooks and papers are totally different from reality in sport. They are several obstacles such as ministry's understanding of sustainability, budget constraints, staff attitude, and understanding toward sustainability. If we understand these factors, we may be able to act more sustainable here (N3).

There are a lot of sustainability and green movement activities from different companies in sport places at (these events). I assume these companies understand what they are doing. But, when you look at it in reality they do different or maybe they do not even understand all these green things (N9).

However, participants did not entirely place the fault of social responsibility understanding on their employer and the ski resort operator. In fact, participants called for training and support so they could be a more sustainable operation:

Our understanding of social responsibility in sport and ski resorts is very limited. I think we need to invest more on training to better understand this concept (N30).

This theme illustrates a cognizant understanding on behalf of employees, recognizing the knowledge gap in terms of sustainability and social responsibility. The interest from employees to take an active role to fill this knowledge gap demonstrates the value they place on social responsibility.

#### 4.1.2 | Messaging

The lack of confidence in the resort's understanding of social responsibility may be due to a lack of effective communication (Ettinger et al. 2021) as participants perceived that there were significant issues with the confusing nature of social responsibility messaging:

I have seen some advertisements and messages from companies and sponsors that do sustainable sport events. I find these messages often unclear and confusing. I think they need to work on their strategies (N16).

Anything from the sustainability side should be clearly communicated to customers from event companies ... No message is better than a confusing one, I think. I think in Iran we have just started understanding these things and a lot can be done (N19).

Critique of confusing messages was coupled with complaints of a lack of comprehensive information on social responsibility:

Some companies used messages to tell customers and skiers about the environment. However, I am not sure if this is good enough (N28).

Farmaki (2022) warns of social responsibility messaging by tourism operators that serve self-interested agendas and may be off-putting. Participant N28 expressed concern that the focus was on environmental factors when there were a much wider range of social issues at the ski resort linked to the local community. Thus, our findings show a need for organizational reflection on the type and frequency of social responsibility messaging.

#### 4.1.3 | Place Negative Environmental Influences

Employees expressed annoyance at the environmental damage done to the natural environment due to the ski events:

I think people won't believe how much [these ski events] damage the environment with littering and rubbish left before closing the day for skiing! (N27).

Ski resorts are great for sport and activities; we all know about this! But, it destroys the natural environment. This is something we talk less about (N19).

Accordingly, many participants discussed the need for intervention to proactively make a change and stop environmental degradation:

I am an ecology student. I know how much damage [these sport events] can do to our environment. I think not just us, but government should do something here. Of course, we want to have the ski resort, but we need to follow all green movement things here! (N17).

Such environmental damage from tourist litter and disregard for the environment is a major concern of employees, and marketing efforts are required in order to reverse the attitudes of tourists (Bahja and Hancer 2021).

### 4.2 | Quantitative Strand: Tourists' View

#### 4.2.1 | Sample and Procedure

Data were collected via face-to-face and paper-and-pencil method from tourists at two Iranian ski resorts where competitive ski events were held. All the events in which the sampling occurred featured notices and stalls by the local community, offering wellness education, reusable items that reduce waste, and advice to visitors on how to maximize their sustainable behavior at the resort. During the data collection period, multiple snow sport events were held at the ski resort, many of which were linked to corporate sponsorships. These events offered tourists the opportunity to attend, spectate, or actively participate. Sponsors hosted dedicated areas where they disseminated information related to sustainability practices and wellness education, both about their own companies and the ski resort itself. These sponsorship-linked activities served as a platform to communicate CSR efforts, enabling sponsors to project a socially responsible image. Such initiatives are recognized for their potential to enhance CSR perceptions among consumers by fostering transparency, consistency, and ethical alignment (Pappu and Cornwell 2014; Taheri and Thompson 2020).

A total of 710 useful responses were collected from tourists. Participants received a small food token as an incentive. Using the back-translation method, the English survey items were translated into Farsi. Two local academic native Farsi speakers checked the questionnaire. To overcome the possibility of Common Method Variance (CMV) issues, we followed several steps (Podsakoff et al. 2003). First, dependent and independent constructs were placed independently within the questionnaire. Second, Harman's 1-factor assessment was performed on constructs (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The Eigenvalue unrotated exploratory factor analysis identified five factors, describing 61.54% of the total variance. Here, the greatest percentage of variance

described by 1 factor was 19.21%. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin was 0.73 ( $> 0.5$ ). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Hair et al. 2010). Following the recommendations of Liang et al. (2007), a common method factor was also employed. The results determine the average independently described variance of the indicators was 0.61, while the average method-based variance was 0.013 (46:1). Most factor loadings were nonsignificant; thus, we conclude that CMV is not a concern.

#### 4.2.2 | Measures

Measures were adapted from the extant literature and used a 7-point Likert scale. The 2-item fan event attachment construct was adapted from Scheinbaum and Lacey (2015). The customer event satisfaction construct (3-item) was adapted from Bettencourt (1997) and Bitner and Hubbert (1994). The 5-item affective event identification construct was borrowed from Lin et al. (2011). The event loyalty intention construct (4-item) was adapted from Ziehl et al.'s (1996) behavioral intention scale. The perceived social responsibility in events construct (3-item) was adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (2004) and Taheri and Thompson (2020). These items included: 'The event involved with the local communities'; 'Local companies benefit from the event'; and 'The event puts charities into its event activities'. For the social responsibility in events construct, means of social responsibility in events items were analyzed, and customers' perceptions of social responsibility in events was calculated based on the new mean scale in one low '0–4' and two high '4–7' sub-groups.

### 4.3 | Quantitative Results and Discussion

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied as the technique of analysis, which does not require normal distribution. In this study, we examined multivariate normality assessment by assessing kurtosis and skewness for all measurement items (see Table 3). The results showed that some items have skewness and kurtoses beyond the obligatory threshold of  $-3$  and  $+3$  (Hair et al. 2010). Using SmartPLS 4 software, we tested both measurement and structural models.

#### 4.3.1 | Measurement Model

Regarding the reliability and convergent validity of measures, the loadings (indicator reliability), Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) (internal consistency),  $\rho_{\text{AVE}}$ , and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (convergent validity) values surpassed 0.7, 0.7, 0.7, 0.7 and 0.5, correspondingly (Hair et al. 2017), verifying the reliability and validity of the constructs. Henseler et al.'s (2015) heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) method was employed. If the HTMT value is less than 0.85, discriminant validity must be documented between constructs. In practice, HTMT values for all constructs ranged from 0.31 to 0.70. Following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommendation, Table 4 demonstrates that the square root of the AVE of all the measures was larger than cross correlations, with no correlation achieving the 0.7 cut-off point.

#### 4.3.2 | Structural Model and Key Findings

Prior to testing the hypotheses, effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residuals (SRMR) were calculated (Hair et al. 2010; Henseler et al. 2015). Following the recommendations of Khalilzadeh and Tasci (2017), Cohen's effect size ( $f^2$ ) indicates 0.01 for small, 0.06 for medium, and 0.14 for large effects for SEM. In practice,  $f^2$  effect sizes were significant for the direct paths. The majority of direct paths show a medium and large effect size. We also perform the blindfolding procedure ( $Q^2$ ). All  $Q^2$  values are  $> 0$ . Thus,  $Q^2$  values for endogenous variables show appropriate predictive relevance. The SRMR value was 0.067, below the suggested value (0.08). NFI value was  $0.96 > 0.9$  (Henseler et al. 2015).

The model explains 41% event loyalty intention, 37% of affective event identification, and 48% of fan event attachment. Customer event satisfaction was found to have a positive direct link with event loyalty intention (H1:  $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $t = 9.72$ ;  $f^2 = 0.26$ ), affective event identification (H2:  $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $t = 14.57$ ;  $f^2 = 0.30$ ), and fan event attachment (H3:  $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $t = 42.01$ ;  $f^2 = 0.12$ ). Event loyalty intention had a direct positive relationship with affective event identification (H4:  $\beta = 0.43$ ,  $t = 9.11$ ;  $f^2 = 0.18$ ) and fan event attachment (H5:  $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $t = 19.03$ ;  $f^2 = 0.04$ ).

#### 4.3.3 | Indirect Effects

Following Williams and MacKinnon (2008), the product coefficients method was employed to evaluate the significance of indirect effects, applying bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs). A 95% confidence interval (CI) of parameter estimates based on 5000 resamples was conducted. The findings demonstrated the indirect effect of customer event satisfaction through event loyalty intention on affective event identification (H6: indirect effect = 0.21;  $t = 17.19$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; CI = [0.15, 0.25]). As the direct paths were significant, the results showed that event loyalty intention mediates the impact of customer event satisfaction on affective event identification. Finally, the findings suggest the indirect effect of customer event satisfaction on fan event attachment through event loyalty intention (H7: indirect effect = 0.35;  $t = 13.23$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; CI = [0.28, 0.42]). As the direct effect was significant, the results showed that event loyalty intention mediates the impact of customer event satisfaction on fan event attachment.

#### 4.3.4 | Assessment of Multi-Group Analysis and Moderation Analysis

PLS-based multi-group analysis (MGM) was employed to assess whether differences between L- social responsibility in events and H- social responsibility in events groups were significant. Henseler et al. (2015) suggested the use of Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) three-step procedure: (1) Configural invariance, (2) Compositional invariance, and (3) Scalar invariance (equality of composite means and variances). The examination of differences in loadings between groups for all items within their respected scales showed that the alterations between the factorial loads of both L- social

**TABLE 3** | Assessment of the measurement model.

Items	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis	Loading*	CR	AVE	$\alpha$	rho_ρ
Fan events attachment					0.84	0.52	0.80	0.81
FEA1. I am a strong supporter of this event	5.65	0.35	1.76	0.71				
FEA2. I enjoy following coverage of the event	5.76	0.69	2.04	0.78				
Customer event satisfaction					0.77	0.61	0.78	0.78
CES1. All in all I am very satisfied with this event	5.11	3.65	3.01	0.77				
CES2. The visit to this event meets my expectations of an ideal visit to this type of events	6.23	2.85	2.01	0.73				
CES3. The performance of this event has fulfilled my expectations	5.53	3.77	1.76	0.80				
Affective event identification					0.79	0.59	0.80	0.88
AEI1. I have strong identification with the event when talking to others about it	5.48	2.76	1.73	0.79				
AEI2. I prefer the product or service of the event when comparing it with that of other similar events	5.89	3.54	0.56	0.72				
AEI3. I am positive about the image of the event	6.03	2.11	1.38	0.71				
AEI4. I identify with the employees' service attitude of the event	5.76	3.21	1.52	0.74				
AEI5. I identify with the different concept of the event	5.88	1.56	3.23	0.77				
Event loyalty intention					0.82	0.65	0.80	0.81
BI1. I would recommend this event to a friend or family	6.39	4.03	1.56	0.73				
BI2. I would say positive things about this event experience to others	4.69	2.45	0.76	0.84				
BI3. I would like to visit this event again	5.61	2.65	0.26	0.81				
BI4. I will visit this event again next year	4.98	4.89	1.70	0.71				

Note: \*3.29 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**TABLE 4** | Correlation matrix.

Constructs	1	2	3	4
Fan events attachment	<b>0.72</b>			
Customer event satisfaction	0.45	<b>0.78</b>		
Affective event identification	0.18	0.23	<b>0.76</b>	
Event loyalty intention	0.27	0.41	0.38	<b>0.80</b>

Note: Square root of AVE is displayed on the diagonal of the matrix in boldface.

responsibility in events and H- social responsibility in events groups were not significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Table 5 confirms the compositional and scalar invariance ensuring 'full measurement invariance.'

Tables 6 and 7 demonstrate CR, AVE, loading values,  $\alpha$  and rho\_ρ. The results exhibit the convergent validity of the measurement model for the sub-groups (Hair et al. 2017). For HTMT, high values ranged from 0.13 to 0.62 for H- social responsibility in events, and L-social responsibility in events ranged between

**TABLE 5** | Findings of invariance measurement testing permutation.

Composite	c-value (0 = 1)	95% CI	Permutation p-value	Compositional invariance?
Fan events attachment	0.99	[0.99, 1.00]	0.24	Yes
Customer event satisfaction	0.97	[0.96, 1.00]	0.17	Yes
Affective event identification	0.99	[0.99, 1.00]	0.13	Yes
Event loyalty intention	0.99	[0.97, 1.00]	0.17	Yes

Composite	Variance difference	95% CI	Permutation p-value	Equal variance?
Fan events attachment	−0.02	[−0.12, 0.12]	0.11	Yes
Customer event satisfaction	−0.09	[−0.17, 0.17]	0.23	Yes
Affective event identification	−0.04	[−0.02, 0.21]	0.62	Yes
Event loyalty intention	−0.03	[−0.05, 0.17]	0.66	Yes

Composite	Mean difference	95% CI	Permutation p-value	Equal mean value?
Fan events attachment	0.00	[0.04, 0.03]	0.38	Yes
Customer event satisfaction	−0.00	[−0.04, 0.03]	0.54	Yes
Affective event identification	−0.00	[−0.04, 0.04]	0.35	Yes
Event loyalty intention	0.01	[−0.12, 0.13]	0.42	Yes

0.11 and 0.66, noticeably lower than the threshold value (0.85) (Henseler et al. 2015). Hence, discriminant validity was determined. Table 6 also shows  $R^2$  values for L- social responsibility in events and H-social responsibility in events groups. Table 7 reveals the parameter estimates for the hypothesized paths for sub-groups and the probability that there was a difference in the parameters between the two groups.

Two nonparametric multi-method MGA methods were applied to signify the differences between paths in the model: bootstrap-based MGA and the Permutation Test (Thompson et al. 2022). Both techniques use a  $p$ -value of differences between path coefficients  $<0.05$ , which indicates significant differences between path coefficients across two sub-groups. The findings of a multi-method MGA confirmed that there are significant distinctions between L-social responsibility in events and H- social responsibility in events groups for all direct paths, supporting H8.

Complementing the MGA, Table 8 summarizes the moderation analysis results using the product-indicator approach within the PLS-SEM framework (Hair et al. 2017). All interaction terms between the moderator (social responsibility) and the focal relationships were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Together, these results robustly demonstrate that social responsibility not only differentiates group responses but also plays a critical moderating role in strengthening the transfer of positive affect and attachment in event settings.

#### 4.3.5 | Quantitative Discussion

The findings support all hypothesized relationships. When customers are satisfied with an event, they intend to engage in positive

word-of-mouth and visit the event again (H1), consistent with previous studies (Huang et al. 2015; Zeithaml et al. 1996). Our study suggests that customer event satisfaction influences affective event identification (H2). Findings suggest that in the context of ski events that are hedonic and infrequent purchases, customers need to be satisfied with their attendance at the event before investing in affective identification. Similarly, our study indicates that customer event satisfaction influences fan event attachment (H3), which is consistent with Lee et al. (2012) in the context of festivals, another example of infrequent and hedonic purchases. Together, support for H2 and H3 indicates that satisfaction of an event is necessary for affective responses such as affective event identification and fan event attachment.

Support for H4 and H5 suggests that affective event identification and fan event attachment are influenced by positive event loyalty intention (intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth and the event), consistent with studies indicating that emotional attachment to a sports team occurs after customers make an attitudinal investment in the team (Crawford 2003; Dwyer et al. 2015). Our results confirm that the same sequence of attitudinal investment leading to emotional attachment at one ski event mirrors that which occurs with repeated experiences with a sports team.

Support for H6 and H7 indicates that loyalty intention partially mediates the relationship between satisfaction and affective event identification and fan event attachment, suggesting that satisfaction influences affective event identification and fan event attachment, either directly or through loyalty intention. These results indicate that the process of forming an emotional connection to an event occurs after forming a loyalty intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth and to

**TABLE 6** | Assessment findings of the measurement model for the L-social responsibility in events perceptions and H-social responsibility in events perceptions.

Construct	Rang loadings***		CR		AVE		$\alpha$		rho_ρ		R <sup>2</sup>	
	L-CSR	H-CSR	L-CSR	H-CSR	L-CSR	H-CSR	L-CSR	H-CSR	L-CSR	H-CSR	L-CSR	H-CSR
	[0.72, 0.81]	[0.60, 0.80]	0.72	0.70	0.54	0.54	0.71	0.70	0.72	0.74	0.40	0.45
Fan event attachment												
Customer event satisfaction	[0.75, 0.80]	[0.62, 0.70]	0.85	0.84	0.51	0.52	0.80	0.81	0.80	0.81		
Affective event identification	[0.70, 0.84]	[0.72, 0.83]	0.78	0.73	0.64	0.55	0.73	0.78	0.75	0.77	0.29	0.34
Event loyalty intention	[0.64, 0.75]	[0.77, 0.83]	0.87	0.74	0.60	0.56	0.80	0.73	0.81	0.73	0.33	0.38

Note: \*\*\*3.29 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**TABLE 7** | Social responsibility in events groups comparison test results.

Paths	Path coefficient		Path coefficient- L-CSR		Path coefficient differences		p-value Henseler's MGA		p-value permutation test		Result
	H-CSR	CI (H-CSR)	L-CSR	CI (L-CSR)							
Customer event satisfaction → Event loyalty intention	0.42***	[0.37, 0.47]	0.25***	[0.17, 0.33]	0.17	0.02	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	H-CSR > L-CSR
Customer event satisfaction → Affective event identification	0.44***	[0.39, 0.51]	0.28***	[0.20, 0.41]	0.16	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	H-CSR > L-CSR
Customer event satisfaction → Fan event attachment	0.55***	[0.48, 0.57]	0.41**	[0.32, 0.48]	0.14	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	H-CSR > L-CSR
Event loyalty intention → Affective event identification	0.37***	[0.28, 0.47]	0.23***	[0.17, 0.28]	0.14	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	H-CSR > L-CSR
Event loyalty intention → Fan event attachment	0.28**	[0.19, 0.33]	0.16**	[0.10, 0.23]	0.12	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	H-CSR > L-CSR

Note: \*1.96 ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\*2.58 ( $p < 0.01$ ); \*\*\*3.29 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**TABLE 8** | Summary of moderation analysis results.

Path	Moderator	Path coefficient	t-value	p	Significance
Customer event satisfaction → Event loyalty intention	Social responsibility in events	0.35	11.23	<0.001	Significant
Customer event satisfaction → Affective event identification	Social responsibility in events	0.32	12.71	<0.001	Significant
Customer event satisfaction → Fan event attachment	Social responsibility in events	0.43	16.02	<0.001	Significant
Event loyalty intention → Affective event identification	Social responsibility in events	0.30	8.05	<0.001	Significant
Event loyalty intention → Fan event attachment	Social responsibility in events	0.25	7.29	<0.001	Significant

revisit the event, consistent with Crawford (2003) and Dwyer et al. (2015).

Support for H8 indicates that the presence of perceived social responsibility in a ski event enhances the relationship between event satisfaction and event loyalty intention. This moderating effect was substantiated through both multigroup analysis and the PLS-SEM product-indicator approach (see Tables 7 and 8). This finding is consistent with previous studies concluding that social responsibility is a moderator that enhances the relationship between customer loyalty and repurchase intention (Upamannyu et al. 2015) and intensifies positive word-of-mouth (Lacey et al. 2015). Customers appear to appreciate the social responsibility efforts of a sport event such that perceptions of high social responsibility in events intensify loyalty intention, which in turn helps to achieve positive emotional connections (of affective event identification and fan event attachment).

## 5 | Discussion of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The skiing industry has a dual-emphasis within the sustainable travel conversation as it is critiqued for a lack of social, economic, and environmental sensitivity yet is one of the industries at greatest risk of climate change and growing anti-tourism sentiments among local communities (Taheri and Thompson 2020). While our paper gathers responses from ski resort visitors on their perceptions of sustainable integration, we also amplify the voices of ski resort staff and answer calls for managerial implications that embed employees' concerns for social responsibility into sport tourism events' long-term strategy (Jäger and Fifka 2022).

Our quantitative results from a survey of 710 sport tourists reveal the significant role of social responsibility in enhancing their loyalty, identification, and attachment to the ski resort. However, this is simply measured as the tourists' perceptions (high vs. low) of social responsibility initiatives at the resort. In contrast, when asked open questions about social responsibility, resort workers commented on the lack of sustainable knowledge, insufficient messaging, and negative environmental damage. Thus, when combined together our findings indicate that extant socially responsible initiatives at the resort such as sustainable stalls and marketing may be tokenistic and tailored to meeting tourists' short-term

interaction with the resort and are insufficiently perceived by those who live and work at the resort. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are expanded upon below.

### 5.1 | Theoretical Implications

Our research builds on affect transfer theory by making three theoretical contributions. First, our context of infrequent and hedonic services advances affect transfer theory beyond the context of utilitarian and recurring services such as banking (Pérez and Del Bosque 2015) and virtual assistants (Singh 2021) and indicates that emotional connection transfers between customer and brand occur after satisfaction for ski events rather than before satisfaction for utilitarian and recurring services. With frequently recurring services, customers will have knowledge of them and form an attitude or emotional connection toward them before using the service (Ji and Wood 2007). However, with infrequent and small sport tourism events (in contrast to mega events), there is not the opportunity for customers to form such an attitude or emotional connection. However, because these small sport tourism events are hedonic experiences (Brown et al. 2016; Hightower Jr. et al. 2002; Kempf 1999) that are evaluated from an experiential perspective, the emotional connection occurs after the event.

Second, our research extends existing models of consumer attachment by examining the link between attitudinal loyalty and affective event identification. Attitudinal loyalty, conceptualized in our study as event loyalty intention, is distinct from behavioral loyalty, conceptualized in our study as affective event identification. We show that event loyalty intention is a precursor to an enduring relationship between customers and events (Lacey et al. 2015), consistent with previous studies indicating that attitude (Kabiraj and Shanmugan 2011), commitment (Davis-Sramek et al. 2009), and attachment (Rundle-Thiele and Bennett 2001) are antecedents of behavioral loyalty. Our study indicates that emotional attachment (i.e., identification and attachment) to a sports team occurs through experience with the team and associated loyalty intention (Crawford 2003; Dwyer et al. 2015) such that attachment occurs after the customer has an attitude of loyalty toward the team.

Third, our qualitative research finds that event employees felt that there was a lack of social responsibility practices, policies,

and messaging in place at the events. This is despite there being active social responsibility stalls, marketing, and actions put in place by the event organizers. We find that the lack of social responsibility provision acts as a barrier to affect transfer. That is, employees' concern about the resorts' knowledge of sustainability and weak social responsibility messaging means they became social responsibility skeptics (Nguyen et al. 2023). Consequently, when questioned, employees were reluctant to discuss the positive affect of the social responsibility measures currently being put in place by the resort. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to explore sustainable barriers that inhibit positive affect transfer. Our findings suggest that ski employees feel a sense of generativity; that is, if ski resorts made a greater effort to be preserved for future generations, positive feelings from employees would transfer to satisfactory emotions toward the ski resort and its events as a whole (Shiel et al. 2020) yet currently social responsibility efforts are not sufficient to drive such positive affect transfer.

## 5.2 | Practical Implications

This research demonstrates the implications of incorporating community benefits into sporting events; that is, customers are more motivated to engage in positive word-of-mouth, visit the event again, and are more willing to support the event and to identify with it when there is a strong element of social responsibility. Thus, ski events should continue to build on their sustainable offerings such as information stalls and free reusable items, since these social responsibility practices appear to enhance positive consumer outcomes. Ski events may also consider integrating social responsibility messaging into their communication with stakeholders. Such communications should be inclusive, authentic, and link to the core values of the ski resort and its events (Farmaki 2022). Clearer messaging in this form is desired by employees and would increase awareness among ski tourists (Ettinger et al. 2021; Goffi et al. 2019).

Previous studies have revealed that when employees perceive that an organization is making an effort on social responsibility initiatives, workers will contribute (Hericher et al. 2023). However, our findings reveal that for employees to feel the positive effect of social responsibility, there must be much greater efforts made beyond tokenistic offerings. Employees at ski events expressed concerns for social responsibility training for stakeholders, that tourists were degrading the natural environment, and that the ski resorts were not acting with sufficient concern for sustainability. We echo the call for further sustainable sport initiatives for local community benefit to ensure employee buy-in on social responsibility initiatives (De Lucia et al. 2020; Gibson et al. 2012; Hericher et al. 2023; Hinch and Holt 2017).

Overall, the rationale for further social responsibility initiatives seems evident as employees desire greater attention paid to the environment and social responsibility results in positive loyalty outcomes for consumers. However, it is unclear whether sport tourists desire deep and meaningful sustainable policies or whether it may be the case, as in other studies (Hinch and Holt 2017), that ski tourists have a short-term view on sustainability within the location they visit and are content with tokenistic sustainable offerings (i.e., free reusable items) that satisfy

immediate needs without sacrificing the sport's experiential attributes (Miragaia and Martins 2015).

## 5.3 | Limitations and Future Research

Similar to any other piece of research, our study is not without limitations. First, we only focused on two Iranian ski resorts. Future studies could collect data from other ski resorts in the Middle East or Western contexts (i.e., the Alps in Europe) in order to test similarities and differences between these resorts. Further, we only interviewed ski resort employees in our study. Future studies could interview tourists in order to gain greater insight into our conceptual model. Moving forward, studies may consider how contextual variables (e.g., green values) influence such a conceptual model.

Finally, we adopted a cross-sectional research design, meaning we only captured a snapshot of participants' perceptions. This approach was deemed most appropriate as it allowed collection of data during a ski tourism event where socially responsible initiatives were actively taking place. However, our results are somewhat limited by not undertaking a longitudinal methodology, which might have been able to capture a more dynamic process of affect transfer and how attachment was formed over time. Future research should consider this avenue for research, seeking how ski events and socially responsible initiatives can form long-term perceptions toward a resort.

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### Disclosure

The authors have nothing to report.

### Ethics Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was received from one of the authors.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements and participant privacy considerations.

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